

REVITALIZING THE MEN'S MINISTRY AT FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH
ESTABLISHING A
NEW IDENTITY OF CHRISTIAN MANHOOD

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Advisor: Dr. Kevin Miller

Craig Buster Gaddy Sr.

Drew University
Madison, New Jersey

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Abstract

REVITALIZING THE MEN'S MINISTRY AT FRIENDSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH
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Craig B. Gaddy Sr.

Friendship Baptist Church, Brooklyn, New York

The purpose of this dissertation is to address the methods and practices of men's ministries that have led to the decline and lack of interest by African American men at the Friendship Baptist Church and the immediate vicinity of Brooklyn, New York. This concern is not limited to the Friendship Baptist Church but gives the impression of being more of a cultural issue. The historical impact of faith within the black church and its community has become depleted and this presentation will offer concepts and possibilities to consider.

This project originated from observing men's ministries within four diverse churches; the Greater Free Gift Baptist church of Bedford Stuyvesant Brooklyn, the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, the Southern Baptist Church of Harlem, New York and the Friendship Baptist Church of Bedford Stuyvesant Brooklyn. The focus groups consisted of men of the Friendship Baptist church, the Grace United Methodist church of

St. Albans New York, Serendipity rehabilitation center, and the Blew Smoke cigar lounge of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, New York.

Studying the practices through local, state and nationwide fellowships interacting with numerous churches throughout the Baptist denomination over a forty five year period reveals a systemic framework that has possibly run its glorious course. A lingering pattern amongst men ministries remains fragmented and unchanged, patterns of inconsistency, lack of ownership, menial participation and limited expectation from men's ministries has become the norm. Studying possible alternatives to re-energize the existing men's ministry with the intent to revitalize the faith and trust of black men of the Friendship Baptist church and its community is the anticipated hope.

This project will explore the historic dilemma of the black church beginning in 1963 to identify the details that may have caused black men to no longer identify with the black church. Secondly, the project will take into account the failed motives, practices and traditions found in men's ministries that they have become oblivious to, which has led to the disconnect within the church, affecting the relationship between the church and the black men of the church community. In conclusion, the anticipated hope is to produce a men's ministry rooted in Christ, considering the model established by Christ, offering a clear and concise view as to the possibilities of energizing and revitalizing a men's ministry.

DEDICATION

To my baby brother Eric,
my guardian angel in heaven.

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INTRODUCTION

*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*¹

Traditional ministries have a pattern of focusing on yearly celebrations such as men's day, seasonal retreats and fundraisers which recreate a temporary stimulus, yet has no sustaining qualities and continue to be the acceptable norm. The completing of these desired tasks such as retreats, annual men's day, monthly meetings or getting the gathering over with appears to be the consensus among most men including the four diverse focus groups, and this is where the concern lies.

The question to wrestle with in attempting to first re-energize with a goal towards a fully revitalized men's ministry at Friendship Baptist is; "Is it possible?" The biblical encounter comes from the discourse between Jesus and His disciples upon hearing the parable of the camel passing through the eye of a needle in Mark 10:25—27 (KJV) where "Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." This universal proclamation "for with God all things are possible" by Jesus offers the spiritual component that produces physical effects.

The objective of this project is not to resuscitate a men's ministry to be placed on life support or to offer another short-term stimulus, but to offer a life-giving reality that sustains men even when their faith has been shaken.

¹ Santayana, George. *The life of reason*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998. 284

The pre-existing misnomer concerning black men and the black church can be traced back to the largest platform for the black church in American history, which took place at the March on Washington in 1963. The March on Washington portrayed the potential of the Black church from a national perspective and displayed their unity and strength for the entire world to see. Considering the masses gathered without the internet or social media, cell phones, fax machines or any twenty-first-century conveniences, yet they were mobilized to “tackle tough challenges”² in preparation to thrive.

The March on Washington led to the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the identity of the black church would be solidified as a force that brings about change; and a black man, a black preacher leading the black church was at the helm.

The black church did not capitalize from this centrifugal force but chose to internalize their objectives. In the place of a continued development of an infrastructure to sustain the ideals, goals, and dreams of the black community; the building of ministries, churches and the perfecting of religiosity took precedence.

The question becomes, were they to believe the government would make good on bringing about racial equality, equal employment, and desegregation as a constitutional obligation for the sake of upholding the law on its own? Perhaps it was never taken into consideration that they were standing before a government one hundred years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation that never fulfilled its anticipated goals. Were they waiting for the government to do for them what they had previously accomplished in this very act, and were fully capable of doing themselves?

² Heifetz, Ronald A., Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

Did the March on Washington lead to the misrepresentation of the black church? Did we walk away from the beast of racism on a multitude of levels including employment, housing, segregation and hate crimes because there was a March and the Civil Rights Bill that followed, believing this would immobilize the mighty beast?

The failure to understand the full intent of the March on Washington is what has led or misled the black church and, in particular the black man, in their purpose and need of the black church. The question is, was the March on Washington a singular event or was it an inaugural moment the black church missed? The purpose of addressing the black church dilemma is to understand the problems, resistance and broken relationship black men have toward the black church, and the possible misread of the March on Washington by the black church.

The March on Washington was to mobilize the masses, a call to action to serve as the invocation of a continued list of events, not the benediction of a successful moment. To support the theory, the keynote address by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. clearly brings the cause into perspective, but fifty-three years later it has become a monumental piece of the modern day problem between black men and the black church, and the church's inability to make good on its promise.

The March in cooperation with the speech portrayed strength, courage, and determination, but did the church renege in the eyes of black men? From this premeditated ministries of individualized gratification within ministries surfaced. Episodic themes, workshops, seminars and conventions would follow, and black men would conform to these seasonal patterns. The only consistency and unity within men's ministries lie in their inconsistency. This continuous pattern of seasonal events pacified

our religious palate until we developed an appetite for the taste of feeling unified or religious, and this is one of the many specifics to be addressed as to why black men find little if no significance or purpose in the black church.

By addressing the March on Washington as a starting point and the black church's confession of its known failures makes the black church more transparent, this is where the first steps to rebuilding an honest relationship with black men begins. In viewing the possibilities of why men are reluctant to engage the black church, is to reflect on Dr. King's speech and its place within the modern day black church, the black community and among black men. Dr. King stated;

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.³

To support this, thirty years following the March on Washington, the Million Man March sponsored by the Nation of Islam took place on October 16, 1995. This "call to action" reached out to all able-bodied African-American men to come together for brotherhood, unity and the restructuring of the black community. This mass confessional addressed the brokenness within the black communities across America with a gathering of an estimated one million men representing various states in America, and they listened to one man declare the state of Black America. There was an expectation to make good

³ King, Martin Luther, Jr. "I Have a Dream." Speech, Washington, DC, August 28, 1963. American Rhetoric. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>.

on their duty and responsibility to the black community and for the betterment of themselves. Optimism surfaced, a calm between religions and ethnicities immediately followed, but shortly afterward the normalcies of life removed the euphoric moment of the Million Man March, which reduced the Million Man March to an event that did not provide the cultural shift that was expected by those who attended or the communities they represented.

As a result of this, the question is, was this event designed for the individual gratification of Minister Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam? Was this a strategic move to reveal, expose or exploit the continued weakness of the Christian church of the 1960's? Or was it for brokering power on a national level to coronate a sole representative of black men and their families against the political, social, racial and economic powers; or all of the aforementioned with a marketing appeal for future recruiting purposes?

The importance of this is due to the percentage of Christian men that attended the Million Man March. Robert Joseph Taylor and Karen D. Lincoln reported in their journal that 59% of the attendees were Christian men, 52% Protestant and 7% Catholic.⁴

The conflict here lies in the present state of the black church and how the men of the Friendship Baptist Church and community were willing to gravitate toward something other. We are now fifty-three years removed from the March on Washington, twenty-one years removed from the Million Man March, and fourteen months has passed since the twentieth anniversary of the Million Man March entitled "Justice or Else," and black men continue to exist in a cultural state of emergency.

⁴ Taylor, Robert Joseph, and Karen D. Lincoln. "The Million Man March: Portraits and Attitudes." 1995.

In Mark Batterson's book "In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day" he flushes out the biblical narrative that leads to Benaiah becoming King David's chief guard. The event is captured in 2nd Samuel the twenty-third chapter verses twenty and twenty-one where Benaiah's credentials are requested. Benaiah makes reference to three incidents, but it is what he does in the face of a lion that causes him to be selected above the other more qualified men.

Batterson writes "Out of the corner of his eye, Benaiah sees something crawling... their vision is probably obscured by the falling snow and frozen breath, but there is a moment Benaiah and the lion lock eyes".⁵ Batterson reveals the normal encounter with men and lions are the same, lion gives chase, and the man runs, but this story is different. Benaiah makes a decision that he cannot run, but he must eliminate the threat, he follows by giving chase, and the lion slips on the loose ground and falls into a cave. Benaiah looks into the cave and sees the lion clawing to get out, and Benaiah walks away from the cave as expected. Unbeknownst to the reader, Benaiah is counting his steps and soon turns around and runs towards the cave and leaps into the cave.

A battle ensues with roars, scraping of Benaiah's spear, and loud grunts followed by absolute silence. Shortly afterward, clawing sounds are heard, and two hands reach the top of the cave, and it is Benaiah, scarred, bruised and exhausted, but he killed the beast that threatened him.

The lion fell out of harm's way which immobilized it, but this outcome was not acceptable by Benaiah's standards, the eradication of this threat was Benaiah's plan from first sight, or he could face this same lion, this same threat again in the future. This is where the argument begins if the threats that were present in 1963 were eradicated in the

⁵ Batterson, Mark. In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day. Multnomah Books, 2006.

60's and the Civil Rights Act were fully exhausted (solidified), there would have been no need for the "Million Man March" in 1995 neither the "Justice or Else" march of 2015. The lion continues to return greater than it had previously, and men continue to wrestle with the racial, social, political and economic ills today just as they did in 1963.

The rationale to energize the men's ministry at the Friendship Baptist Church is crucial. Based on these historical events there remains an urgency for the fundamental needs of black men that must be addressed by the church that men may have a sense of self, faith and a better awareness of the importance of God's activity. The presence of Christian men both Catholic and Protestant in attendance at the Million Man March and the twentieth anniversary clearly reveals the need black men share towards changing their current conditions, along with their willingness to participate and be identified in non-Christian forums to make a difference.

The statistics following both marches sponsored by the Nation of Islam revealed the Nation of Islam itself shares similar inconsistencies and short term stimuli among black men as well. The marches confirm that the needs and desires of black men cause them to gravitate towards a singular goal and the means by which to get there become irrelevant, but the sustainability of the means is where an effective ministry is needed.

With this, faith, movements, ideologies or religion becomes a conduit by which to endure, overcome and accomplish the desired goal that must maintain its savor between these concerns. This makes the condition of black men and their willingness to bring about a change the focus point, and their belief in it provides the strength and parameters by which to bring about the desired change.

CHAPTER I

LEADERSHIP

The crisis in black leadership can be remedied only if we candidly confront its existence... it is neither a matter of a new Messiah figure emerging nor of another organization appearing on the scene. Rather it is a matter of grasping the structural and institutional processes that have disfigured, deformed, and devastated black America such that the resources for nurturing collective and critical consciousness, moral commitment, and courageous engagement are vastly underdeveloped.⁶

Dr. Cornell West addresses the concern of black leadership from a national, state and local level in reference to leadership and particularly black leadership. The angle from which he makes his statement incorporates black leadership from a panoramic view. Dr. West highlights the crisis in black leadership which has shaped the existing generations discontent regarding the continuous problems that plague the black community. West explores the timeline and change of methods from the Civil Rights Movement of Dr. King of the 50's and 60's to the likes of Rev. Jesse Jackson in the 80's, and 90's mentioning the problem of Jackson's televisual style being guilty of "resisting grass—roots organizing with no accountability." Dr. West writes regarding Jackson, "His brilliance, energy, and charisma sustain his public visibility—but at the expense of

⁶ West, Cornel. Race matters. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 69.

programmatic follow through.” Which this style West says is “exhausting its progressive potential.”

Dr. West warns, the failure of this style of leadership creates a vacuum for figures with narrow visions found in the black religious leadership of Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton; referring to their brand of leadership as sensationalist practices. West believes this type of leadership “reinforces the fragmentation of U.S. progressive efforts that could reverse this deplorable plight”.⁷

The concerns addressed by Dr. West are an indictment of black leadership both political and religious. In the eyes of the black community and mainly in the eyes of black men West believes “The crisis of black leadership contributes to political cynicism among black people; it encourages the idea that we cannot really make a difference in changing our society.”⁸ The lack of power and the inability to make a difference works against the nature of black men. Positioned to have no effect on the national or societal level is where the pushback from black men surfaces in their view against a black leadership which does not exclude the black church.

Dr. James Cone gives clarity of the black perspectives view of the black church where he writes; “The decade of the 1960’s was a great moment in the history of the black church. This was one of the healthiest periods for the black church and black theology. Without prophetic self-criticism, churches became self-serving institutions for their ministers, officers, and members.”⁹

⁷ West, Cornel. 68.

⁸ West, Cornel. 68.

⁹ Cone, James H. For my people: Black theology and the Black church. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984. 112.

Dr. Cone reflects on the radical theology within black churches rooted in its prophetic voice. The liberationist passion Cone explains were “Calling them back to their liberating nineteenth—century heritage by attacking racism and affirming black identity extending back to Africa.”

Dr. Cone identifies the strength of the black church, and its relation to black identity and holds the prophetic voice of the church as it stands against racism as the two essential tenets of the black church’s identity. Cone addresses the disconnect in black leadership writing “Reaction to white racism consumed too much of the mental energies that should have been directed to black churches in an effort to have them make Jesus’ liberating gospel their primary concern.”¹⁰

Dr. Cornell West previously mentioned the problems of programmatic follow through within black leadership in its failed attempt to represent the black community.

Dr. Cone believes too much of our time and attention remained on writing protest documents to people “as we should have known, were not going to disinherit themselves of their privileges in order to relieve the suffering of the black poor.”¹¹

The acceptance of the previous misreads within the black leadership culture gives an in-depth understanding of the church’s reputation. The energy and strength of what gives the black church power become one dimensional in a failed attempt without realizing the historical power that lies in programmatic follow-through. The programming West mentioned is what sustains the idea and offers a workable infrastructure that strengthens and sustains its participants toward having their needs met. The programming does not place all the eggs in one basket; although Dr. Cone states he

¹⁰ Cone, James H. 112.

¹¹ Cone, James H. 113.

is “Not convinced that the major black denominational church are ready for renewal.”

Yet, Dr. Cone leaves room regarding committed transcending pastors both black and white writing “they seemed determined to build more human church structures that serve the community. They are feeding the hungry, holding workshops on economics and politics as well as black church history and theology, building alternative schools for black children, and working at many other creative projects of freedom”.¹²

The church finds its identity and disposition by the local programs that benefit and enhance its community. The visible, tangible and beneficial programming sustains the community making a consistent contribution towards change in addition to the broader campaigns against the injustices that befall them. If there is no activity on the local level, supported by the local black church in the black community as Dr. West stated this affirms that we cannot make a difference, and the question becomes why should people bother?

Dr. Cone’s theological contributions are precise in defining the complications within black leadership and its relation to the black community. Keeping the tension between the black church, black community, and black theology Dr. Cone’s theory would fall under what Dr. Bruce McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary calls the warnings of one-dimensional theology and extreme dogmas. Dr. McCormack writes;

“Contextual theology” in many circles today, however, is taken to mean a theology for a particular group (such as a nation, ethnic group, gender, or denomination), which gives rise to a particular danger: theology becomes ideology—the Christian message becomes subverted/perverted in order to meet the perceived needs and self-chose goals of a particular group.

¹² Cone, James H. 114

How can we identify when/where ideological tendencies are at work and when they are not? “At the root of all ideological distortion lies a direct identification of Christian revelation with someone creaturely reality, so that revelation becomes directly available for human manipulation and control.”¹³

Dr. McCormack takes an ontological approach to the realities and warnings related to theologies and dogmas. McCormack focuses on the nature of revelation in one’s view of revelation being critical to the ultimate direction one chooses to take when practicing theology. McCormack views the findings of the doctrine of revelation “Is resistant to this kind of domestication of the divine.”¹⁴

This reveals the personal ideologies, theology or dogmas of Louis Farrakhan, Al Sharpton and James Cone as practices that borderline the manipulation of theology for a particular cause. Each is offering its own importance yet has the potential to lose focus on the programmatic needs of the very people they represent. McCormack urges that keeping the nature of such theologies and dogmas ever so present will maintain a level of stability towards a sustainable end.

Leadership style according to Franz Shurmann’s introduction for “To Die for the People” in reference to the revolutionary movement adds, “Only those who are by, through and from a community can serve the great family of humankind. To go out, one must go deep, to go deep, one must go out.”¹⁵

This speaks of the familiarity and understanding one has of their people, this type of leadership from within and amongst one's counterparts produces the continuous necessities of the people through shared conviction and purpose. The shared experiences

¹³ McCormack, Bruce. Princeton Theological Seminary, class lecture. 2009.

¹⁴ McCormack, Bruce.

¹⁵ Newton, Huey P. To die for the people; the writings of Huey P. Newton. New York: Random House, 1972.

and goal are detrimental and are deeply rooted when their experiences unite the leader and the people or when their destinies are tied together.

Dr. West mentions this disposition as the role of activists who have made a difference by bringing pressure to specific issues. Dr. West adds “without such activists there can be no progressive politics.”¹⁶ Huey Newton stated “there are three ways one can learn; through study, observation and experience. Since the Black community is composed basically of activist, observation of or participation in activity are the principle ways the community learns.”¹⁷

Franz Shurmann witnessed and spoke of a style of leadership that moved contrary to the existing models. The demonstration of the Black Panther Party for self—defense displayed a concerted brand of leadership style with multiple known figures equal in authority, loyalty, and passion.

The ideology of the Panther Party was birthed out of the failed efforts of the Civil Rights Movement. Their failure to follow through on its original platform against racism and the oppressive American nature caused the Black Panther Party to believe in the plight of Mao Tse—tung’s rediscovery that “revolution is a process and not a conclusion... This is so because new forms of oppression keep on arising”.¹⁸

In revisiting Batterson’s novel, had the threat of racism and oppression been eliminated in the 60’s during the Civil Rights Movement, it would not continue to resurface in the present. Newton mentions the programmatic strength of the Party referencing the work of the Chinese Communist party against Japanese and Juomintang

¹⁶ West, Cornel. *Race matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 56.

¹⁷ Newton, Huey P. *To die for the people; the writings of Huey P. Newton*. New York: Random House, 1972. 15.

¹⁸ Newton, Huey P. xiv.

oppressors writing “in reality it involved hard work day after day: planting crops, educating adults and children, organizing disaster relief, tending the sick, and talking with people.”¹⁹

These principles are the core ideologies of the Black Panther Party, functioning as an independent group, their methods incorporated with the earlier Civil Rights movement offered a greater return for black people. Newton’s writings and Schurmann’s introduction are included due to the attention the party received by black men and the increasing male membership that followed and continues to view the Black Panther Party as heroic to iconic status. The Black Panther Party’s demonstration of leadership was a cohesive bond of people and leadership beginning in 1966, until the strategic dismantling in 1969 by the FBI.

This displays the extreme ideology or dogma in which Dr. Bruce McCormack speaks of but presents qualities or services mentioned by Dr. Cornell West regarding the programmatic that would have provided the connective tissue absent from the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s.

Islam has proven itself to be a viable religious alternative to black Christian churches, especially for many black males, who have experienced difficulty with normative social and economic adjustments... the attraction of Islamic movements to black males may be due to several reasons, among them the legacy of the militant and radical black nationalist Malcolm X has been a profound influence on these young men.... Another reason is that the Muslims project a more macho image among black men.²⁰

¹⁹ Newton, Huey P. xx.

²⁰ Lincoln, C Eric., Mamiya, Lawrence H. *The Black Church in the American Experience*, Durham, NC. Duke University Press; 1990.

Eric C. Lincoln and Lawrence M. Mamiya shed light on this comparative in their writing “The Black Church in the African-American Experience.” Their point is supported in their statement writing “The Quran advocates self—defense while the Christian Bible counsels turning the other cheek. The *lex talionis*, ‘an eye for an eye, a life for a life,’ has a persuasive appeal to the oppressed whose cheeks are weary inordinate abuse.”²¹

This measure according to the Quran may be considered an extreme dogma or theologically contextual to fit the means of a desired group or culture according to Dr. Bruce McCormack, but through the lens of the African-American male, this offers something the bible refutes. Lincoln and Mamiya prove the demonstration by its male members has produced self-pride and spiritual strength that supported by their religious ideology and from their God. The use of Matthew 5:38 “Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

This contrast in philosophies compares the strength of one discipline and the weakness of the other. The question becomes: are the submissive characteristics of Christianity in opposition of the identity of what Christian manhood should be? The point Lincoln and Mamiya makes incorporates one’s take on the protection of the family, home, and self; but is something wrong with this from a modern perspective?

Lincoln writes how the black community became vulnerable to the Islamic message particularly of Malcolm X and his disposition toward desegregation. Malcolm believed “the struggle for civil rights and integration were meaningless if the integrity

²¹ Lincoln, C Eric., Mamiya, Lawrence H. *The Black Church in the American Experience*, Durham, NC. Duke University Press; 1990, 391.

and independence of black selfhood were drowned in a sea of whiteness.” This radical statement was supported by the Islamic community in what Dr. West labeled programmatic. Lincoln writes “Finally, many black men have been attracted to Islamic alternative because the Muslims have been very active in working in prisons and on the streets where they are, a ministry which is not pronounced in most black churches.”²²

The philosophical programmatic of Islam are the internal support system that continues to sustain the beliefs and membership of its followers, and as a result, makes an impact on the black community and sheds light on the vulnerable areas of the black church. The numerous sects within Islam from the traditional Sunni, the nationalist and radical take of the Nation of Islam finds the means of filling the missing needs of its people and continues to make an impressionable impact on black men.

The shared information reveals various methods of leadership from political to religious and the cultural interconnections between them. The interlocking systems that sustain each theological or political perspectives or dogma offer valuable properties with the potential to impact the lives of black men. The one-dimensional concept or what John Dewey describes in “Experience and Education” as the “either or” disposition or philosophy writes; “Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposite. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of either—or, by which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities.”²³

The extremes utilized by each group without an understanding of the significance of other ideologies reveal the disconnect within the black political structure or the inability to develop or sustain a black cultural reality. Observing the success,

²² Lincoln, Eric C., Mamiya, Lawrence H. 391.

²³ Dewey, John. Experience and Education, New York, NY, Touchstone; 1934. 25.

dysfunctions and deficiencies of previous strategies from a myriad of related concerns propose a possible working hypothesis if the considerations of alternative means to bring about a broader goal are carefully implemented.

Within the Black Church

The focus groups at Friendship, Serendipity, Grace and Blew Smoke believed the black church has lacked or avoids the discussion of social, political, personal issues, mainly the ills associated with racism, and taking on the solutions necessary to bring about change. Admittedly over the past forty years in men's ministries in which I have served, the church and its men continue to gently redirect or use divertive language regarding race, inequality and the multiple levels of discrimination as if it has become religiously acceptable. The Black churches inability to address, or its acceptability, of these societal atrocities shows weakness, which is a fear black men struggle with on a daily basis. The correlation of humility associated with one's Christianity in exchange for facing tough challenges has led to the black church's reputation as being weak, afraid, and disconnected. The definition of manhood by the black church becomes a confusing and contradictive abstract by its guilt of omission regarding race and the disposition of black men.

The working narrative of God, Christ and Christianity viewed through the lens of the black church is a God that sustains, keeps, and strengthens as we wait on God to do God's work. Select texts such as "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD," (Psalms 27:14) along with, "Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it," (Psalms 37:34) stands as the interpretive language of choice

by the black church. However, this is nothing more than pre-emancipation rhetoric in what Walter Bruggeman calls “irrelevant transcendence,”²⁴ where God is only engaged beyond the physical reality and is clueless to the labors and reality of black men.

This conflicts with the nature of men as protector and defender, disabling men from bringing about change when needed or necessary in fear of compromising their faith. For men, in general, this presents a natural challenge be it by black men or other.

The pinnacle of racial classism in America surfaced with the arrest of Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr., on July 10, 2009. The Washington Post reported Dr. Gates returning home from China finding his front door lock was jammed, he and his driver were able to open the door, but a neighbor called the police believing it was a break-in. After the police arrived, “Sgt. Crowley went into the house, Gates showed his Harvard identification card and his driver's license, which included his address. According to police, Gates then became angry and followed Crowley outside. He was arrested on a charge of disorderly conduct, which was later dropped.”²⁵ The arrest of Dr. Gates among other accounts known, unknown, public and private are lived out by black men on a daily basis without valid resolvable means other than “racial profiling” or the “black is always guilty” has become the acceptable norm. This imbalance of justice or misuse of power and entitlement is a haunting reality for black men.

Dr. Gates serves as the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University, but in a split second was reduced to a criminal or seen as guilty by a non-black neighbor and officer because he is a black man, is problematic. This assumption of criminality

²⁴ Bruggeman, Walter. *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*. Fortress Press, 2013. P.3

²⁵ Thompson, Krissah. “Arrest of Harvard's Henry Louis Gates Jr. was avoidable,” *The Washington Post*, 30, June 2010.

along with the deaths of unarmed black men at the hands of police officers are a haunting reality that black men deal with daily, but this is not a part of the religious conversation taking place on a continuous basis. To digress from this dark reality, President Barack Obama's citizenship was questioned for eight years, although birthed by a white woman in America, his name was also assumed to be Islamic without any regard to his Kenyan heritage. It was assumed he was "intellectually ineligible because he is black" which is the larger narrative that consumes the thought of black men. Donald Trump, a business school graduate, announces "President Barack Obama (the standing president of the United States of America for two terms) was born in the United States, period." Donald Trump believes his statement "Mr. Obama was born in the United States, period" authorizes the President's citizenship only when he announces it, which proves my previous point.

The four focus groups believed that it is problematic if Donald Trump, a less educated man, who desired to obtain the very position Obama held, felt he had the right to question the sitting president on his citizenship and Obama's citizenship would only be accepted upon his (Trump's) confirmation. How does society believe black men of lesser accomplishments than Obama feel in the presence of others who claim a sense of entitlement or a belief they are superior because we are black? The multiple layers of systemic racism and its intricacies on a global and local level are ever present, and the black church's sin of omission towards this is where the fear lies for the men of Friendship, Serendipity, Grace and Blew Smoke. Many within the focus groups continue to believe the Bible is the underlying infrastructure that upholds racism and oppression, and yet they are members of the black church.

Bro. Workman stated, “A white ex-con still feels superior to a well-educated black man, and society treats him that way also.” An arousing affirmation met this statement by the brothers of two focus groups and allowing the conversation to take its course increased the comfort level between the brothers in a new way. Taking this thought from amongst the brothers was the game changer. The relationship between the Bible the church as viewed by the men of Friendship and the men within the community has led to the understanding of their apprehension and hesitation towards the church.

Unless this is concern is entertained, reviewed, and engaged, the men’s ministry of Friendship will continue not only to be ineffective but unproductive.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. (Mark 1:10—13)

Mark's Gospel records the perfect model of developing a men's ministry rooted in Jesus Christ. Mark's opening chapter references the actions of Jesus producing what could be the most practical means to develop and sustain a men's ministry.

Mark not only reveals the model of developing a men's ministry but sheds light on the preparation of the minister/layperson ensuring the continuity of the ministry being developed. Beginning at Mark 1:9 (KJV) there's consecration, authorization, and preparation that precede Jesus' mission and ministry, after this the demonstration takes place at sea of Galilee. This narrative displays the importance of developed leadership from a foundational perspective which is essential for the sake of the ministry.

Before assembling the twelve Jesus receives his confirmation as to who He is. Jesus knows God's voice would confirm his title, role & disposition and his identity. In ministry, one must first know oneself before entering into the development and leadership of others. Jesus receives his divine confirmation and immediately he is prepared as he is driven into the wilderness. This introduces the undertaking of one's

accountability to God, who will then prepare those he has called in anticipation for what is to come. The theological study reveals that Jesus was prepared by God being tested of Satan. This evidence of being prepared is confirmed in Mark 1:13b reporting “the angels ministered unto him.” It is here in 13b that God provides Jesus with spiritual help to endure the spiritual, physical, and psychological temptations of the agitator Satan.

Clifton Black shares additional information regarding the preparation associated with God’s work for God’s people similar to Jesus’ forty day encounter. He connects their experiences writing “Both Moses and Elijah also endured a trial lasting forty days on Horeb, the Lord’s mount (Exod 34:28; I Kgs 19:8 cf. Mark 9:2-4): Elijah, too, was attended by angels (I Kgs 19:5,7 see also Ps 91:11-13).²⁶

This ministry model of thought, spoken of by Jesus in John 10:15, referring to his love in the Greek context of ‘agapao,’ is the sacrificial love that reveals the compassion leadership must have towards the people God wants to be lead. Or it acknowledges the absence of such compassion and sacrificial love toward humanity which reveals a deeper issue.

The discovery of self exposes what is possibly missing in providing a leadership willing to make a sacrifice on behalf of the very people one leads. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Polonius says to his son Laertes “This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.”²⁷

A leader of men must first be true to self, or they subconsciously negate the essence of God’s being. Being established in denominational traditions, ideologies and theology makes it difficult to observe the needed change from a perspective contrary to

²⁶ Black, C., Clifton. Mark, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011. 62.

²⁷ Shakespeare, William, and Cyrus Hoy. Hamlet. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. Print

one's experiences of the past. The length of time in developing one's place in this world through the lens of one's traditional faith can be irreparable both spiritually and psychologically. Therefore it is safe to ask in plain terms, "Can you teach an old dog new tricks?" If willing to make the sacrifice, yes. Mark 8:34 records "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (KJV).

The missional leader says Roxburgh and Romanuk, "take the Incarnation of Jesus with the utmost seriousness—in the Incarnation, we discern that God is always found in what appears to be the most godforsaken places—the most inauspicious of locations, people and situations. God seems to be present where there is little or no expectations."²⁸

Being confirmed by faith takes several decades in the African American context; the meshing of culture, religion, and denominationalism within one's faith take years to develop and find one's philosophical voice. The constant struggles with self and cultural identity, the disposition within the community, not to mention one's true religious bent does not always fit God's expectations but may fit the ministry model. As a result, leaders never come to terms with this daily juggling act, and it continues to present internal conflicts that play out at the expense of the congregation and community.

This causes leaders to center on one's natural talent and skill sets, making sure to avoid ministerial weaknesses creating an imbalanced comfort zone resulting in self—gratifying and self—validating ministries with little or no impact on the broader community other than the community of one. Ill prepared leadership, having developed no practical skills, normally developed in educational institutions; provide structural

²⁸ Roxburgh, Alan J, Romanuk, Fred. *The Missional Leader, Equipping your Church to Reach a Changing World*. San Francisco, CA; Josey-Bass, 2006. 17.

formulas that govern the ministry outside of the word of God. Being unprepared or ill prepared they run the risk of incubating and reproducing ineffective men's ministries resulting with underdeveloped and ineffective men.

The Presentation

Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. (Mark 1:16, 17)

The model of creating a men's ministry is found in the example Jesus sets in Mark 1:16a. Jesus goes to the Sea of Galilee, the first thing Jesus does in developing a men's ministry is he goes where men work and interact, this is where the outreach begins. In addition to this, it is safe to assume Jesus' attire was not off-putting as these strange men comfortably received him.

Dr. James Perkins wrote; "To help break down any barriers that might keep men from relating on a man-to-man basis, the pastor should dress casually, ... in this way... they are gathered together as men on equal footing with similar needs, desires, goals and problems."²⁹ To begin, the attire Jesus wears at this moment remains questionable, but in his address to Simon and Andrew, his presence and presentation can be viewed as completely relevant to both men. The show of commonality and humility displayed at that moment shows the attention to detail Jesus considers before interacting with unfamiliar men. Unfortunately, leadership sometimes takes pride in being differentiated among the people they serve; this presents more of a deterrent by men in the twenty-first century.

²⁹ Perkins, James C., and Jean Alicia. Elster. Building up Zion's walls: ministry for empowering the African American family. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999. 7

The prejudices of attire are justified by the flamboyant and hyper sacred display of ministry garb worn in and outside of the church and the institutions of faith, all for the sake of being identified or categorized separately.

Establishing or arriving at a ministerial level has its meaning, purpose, and importance, but not at the risk of alienating oneself before the people to be served. The extreme measure to display title, status or rank within the body of Christ with attire has its place, but the community or setting of ministry is not the platform for such expressions. Barton describes the disciples dropping their nets, their lifeline, their source of identity and employment under the definition of repentance where he says, “repentance involves casting off conventional responsibilities, that trust in the gospel implies worldly insecurity, that discipleship to Jesus carries a price.”³⁰

Barton frames this as repentance, placing a greater demand on the obedience by anyone that claims to follow Jesus. This gives support to the significance of such a small matter as attire and presentation, yet Jesus found comfort appearing as one in solidarity with the men he led. Although attire is a minor thing, the mishandling of such can have major consequences.

Upon meeting the District Chief Alfred Hindowa Demby of Bo, Sierra Leone, West Africa in 1996 following the civil war with Liberia, Chief Demby described his escape from certain capture and execution stating “because I dress like the men around me, they didn’t know me from any other man, my people know me, and I know them so why make distinctions, it saved my life so it must work.”³¹

³⁰ Barton, Stephen C. *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 23-67.

³¹ Demby, Alfred. Interview with Craig Gaddy. Personal interview. Bo, Sierra Leone, West Africa, June 2006.

As a result of not wearing his status, he was able to share the story. Although he was shot in the back during the raid he was not pursued by his attackers because they were in search for the normal attire of district chiefs. Likewise upon meeting the Paramount Chief Kolon of Sierra Leone, he believed in normal appearance with the exception to ceremonial celebrations. He says “The people know who I am and that’s all that matters. Respect and honor is given to me because of who and what I am, that’s it.”³²

A ministry leader understands the importance of non-verbal communication by experience or having learned it academically. The importance and advancement of the ministry are placed before the personal impression or appearance of the ministry leader. Dress codes and style maintain its value and importance while communicating a particular message to the environment being engaged. Dress codes are maintained in the corporate world, upheld in religious institutions, and have a geographic identity by the local community, the dress code whether utilized or not maintains its importance and meaning.

“And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.”

The inability to differentiate Jesus from his disciples proves his attention to detail. The consistency Jesus exemplifies with his cultural attire from the beginning of his ministry to the betrayal at Gethsemane is. The humility displayed by God manifest in Jesus, being seen and identified as one with his disciples yet being God confirms the massive humility God shares for the sake of humanity, yet God is not obligated but free

³² Demby, Alfred. Interview with Craig Gaddy. Personal interview. Bo, Sierra Leone, West Africa, June 2006.

in his being for the sake of humanity, God maintains a cultural identity to gain humanity. Ministers, laypersons, and leaders cannot find it beneath them if God demonstrated its importance in his divine earthly example.

Secondly, Jesus went where they were, “Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee,” taking this example by Jesus takes the ministry leader to the places men gather such as lounges, detail shops, barbershops, fishing docks, mechanic shops and the likes that offer an atmosphere that attracts and solidifies men. Men agree and have witnessed the number of men that frequent these places, having received their services yet remain in conversation or fellowship for hours; at the barbershop they remain, the car has been repaired, washed or detailed but they remain and so on. The climate established by the men keeps their attention and sustains their interests, and although the space has met its needs, the climate within the space causes them to remain present and engaged.

Jesus creates the climate by meeting men where they are located and on their terms to gain their trust, particularly in places where the synagogue was not located. In Mark 1 Jesus displays the importance of dialogue, language, acceptance, compatibility, and commonality that sets the tone before traveling to the synagogue.

Creating the social climate first has immeasurable benefits; making it easier to adjust to the institutional setting by the climate being set by the ministry leader outside of the institutional setting. Interacting with the ministry leader before or in exchange for meeting at an institution makes whatever worship style or customs easier to digest when a commonality and connection has been previously made with the ministry leader.

If the climate were to change or introduce an element that challenged the manhood or masculinity of these men, the men would automatically take offense, resist,

disappear or engage this as a threat. In the same setting, if the climate is magnetic and offers a stimulus that supports their interests, men are known to take these interests to other places and create their climate within that space. This has proven itself beneficial in numerous ways if the ministry is willing to go out of its comfort zones.

Offering Hope

The final move by Jesus in this narrative occurs when Jesus challenges them, using familiar language as a conduit to appeal to their adventurous nature. Jesus says “Come ye after me,” the adventure, “and I will make you to become (*ginomai*) fishers,” they are already professional fishermen, but Jesus uses relative language, “fishers of men” this is unheard of but adds more adventure to the recruiting appeal. Black portrays them as professional fishers in a “setting where poverty was prevalent. James and John’s precipitate departure from their business would jeopardize their family’s livelihood and risk dissolution of the household.”³³

The adventure bookended by familiar verbiage caught their attention. The Greek definition of becoming “*ginomai*” means to come into existence, to begin to be was a bold, adventurous statement by Jesus. This language was exciting and adventurous and to become fishers of men, how is this possible? However, without recourse, these men were willing to take on an adventure without details.

Dr. Covington stated “women crave for details; men crave for adventure without details. Women desire a prescribed destination; men enjoy the journey. In this most

³³ Black, C., Clifton. Mark, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011. 70.

churches try to reach men the way they reach women, but they're significantly different creatures."³⁴

Mark 1 records an adventure without details. The twelve are gathered, follow Jesus, and the adventure begins. Offering men something authentic which they have never seen or heard has its challenges, but Walter Bruggeman offers something unique in the prophetic imagination. Bruggeman rights;

“The task of prophetic imagination and ministry is to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there. Hope, on the one hand, is an absurdity too embarrassing to speak about, for it flies in the face of all those claims we have been told were facts.”³⁵

Bruggeman sheds light on what Jesus' presence, appeal, and a statement offered the disciples through the lens of their life experience as a residence in a vassal state of what Clifton Black described as “a setting of poverty in an institution in which ancient Mediterranean economy was embedded.”³⁶ To follow Jesus was a journey rooted in hope; something their minds only imagined, a revisit of their storied past of the Mosaic era of liberation became a present day reality. The immediate response by the twelve indicates there was nothing to lose but everything to gain. This is hope's natural response because it only has meaning and purpose for those that are hopeless.

Hope according to Bruggeman, will have you question what has governed and controlled you. Hope gives you the courage to envision the impossible and to see the invisible, and hope provides the impetus that keeps one in search of what may never be

³⁴ Covington, Larry. Interview with Craig Gaddy, Personal Interview. Burlington, NC: February 2017.

³⁵ Bruggeman, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001. 65.

³⁶ Black, C., Clifton. 70.

found. Hope will keep a man fighting a battle he may never win and waiting for what will never come to pass, but hope does not allow him to give up.

Reframing Jesus as a Man's Man

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:52)

The journey of men's ministry must provide the complete development of a Christian man. Most churches, when dealing with men are only one dimensional and find themselves making half men and as a result, half families. The scripture addresses the two areas Jesus developed in which are knowledge and flesh, and as a result of being fully developed in these two areas, Jesus increased in favor with God and with men.

Developing or ministering to men must include four key ingredients if they are to be modeled after Christ. These ingredients stimulate the mind of men when offering to help (1) their physical health, (2) enhance their intellectual disposition, (3) broaden their social circles and (4) strengthen their spirituality; and this is when the church or ministry becomes complete. Without which, the ministry continues to be present with no effect.

The conflict with the church's appeal for men is the continuous development of the spiritual man failing to consider the physical man. The physical man includes the physical reality encountered by men that is connected to his health and wellness. The journey in developing the man in mind and body are revealed in the analysis of Barbara Solomon, faculty member of the school of Social Work at the University of Southern California, where she writes regarding the relationship between practitioner and clients:

“those roles performed by practitioners that provide maximum opportunity for clients to experience their own effectiveness as they participate in the helping process. Power and control are energizing magnets, drawing the

client into the redefinition of his own self—worth, competence, and ability to affect his social and physical worlds.”³⁷

Solomon continues with the idea that “empowerment leads to the client's perception of their own intrinsic and extrinsic value, adding the client’s motivation will cause them to utilize their resource and skill to achieve self—determined goals.”³⁸

The development of the man empowers him to understand himself as having control, a sense of belonging in the physical reality through wisdom, being enlightened by his knowledge of himself in God’s plan which strengthens the spiritual faith of men. The faith and spirit of a man has physical dividends, and does not remain in the religious sector but must be a part of his reality.

The Imago Dei

The scripture also references the physical body of Jesus as being developed as he grew in stature. This portion has yet to be flushed out, theologically it can be either growing up in reference to the timeline of the scripture written by Mark or a description of his physique.

Men wrestle with the image of God; black men, in particular, are unfamiliar with the theological debate of Jesus as portrayed by television, pictures and the internet. Luke 2:52 concludes with the increased “in favor with God and man,” this speaks of Jesus being accepted by God and man, making him a man’s man. Men want to see Jesus as greater, stronger and wiser than what they are. Something visible to be accomplished a goal to be attained both in body and soul. However, black men do not see themselves in the portrayed Jesus physically or spiritually.

³⁷ Solomon, Barbara, B. *Black Empowerment, social work in oppressed communities*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1976. 342.

³⁸ Solomon, Barbara, B.

Upon attending a funeral service for Bro. Simmons of the St. John the Divine Roman Catholic Church in Brooklyn, there were a few items present that were unfamiliar to me according to my working knowledge of the Roman Catholic Church tradition. The main thing was the large mural of a black Jesus, following the service inquiry was made regarding the black Jesus. Father Gene Sheridan replied, “Jesus should reflect the community he is to connect with, people need to see themselves in Jesus.” The question was asked, “the bishop approved this?”³⁹ His reply was “Sure, whatever it takes for people to identify with Jesus is permissible; we also have a baptismal pool for the Protestant converts.” Full submersion for Protestants as demonstrated in the baptismal narrative found in Mark 1 is the method of choice upon converting to the Catholic Church. This being permissible by the Catholic Church reveals the understanding to remove the standardized protocols for the sake of gaining the soul of the believer.

Dr. Johnny Youngblood of the Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church of Brooklyn, NY stated “Black men don’t see themselves in Jesus, and that’s where the problem with their conversion comes into play. Why does Jesus have to look otherwise to be something attained by black men, that’s a cultural problem.”

The Jesus model has been portrayed as small in stature, passive, docile and weak; this visual take on the actual Jesus conflicts with the Jesus of scripture that walked by the Sea of Galilee and said to Simon, follow me. Dr. Covington operates the largest community recreational facility in Burlington stated “the problem with men’s ministries and the church is they’re using the techniques used to recruit women to recruit men. Too much attention is being paid to the spiritual, and the nurturing which has led to the feminization of Christ, and the feminization of men.” For black men and new converts,

³⁹ Sheridan, Eugene. Interview by Craig Gaddy. Personal Interview, March 2012.

this is challenging. The concern is not focused on the personal preference of men or their lifestyle, but how Jesus is being portrayed. Research reveals how Jesus was repackaged, revamped and modified which presents new questions and conversations.

Too much detail has been given to the spiritual without considering the physical. The spiritual portion has been exhausted, processed, repackaged and feminized, concluding in a Jesus model that's questionable by men.

The Feminization of the Church

A stigma that plagues the black church is its reputation for being too feminine or emasculating to men, in particular, black men. David Murrow writes “There’s a widespread agreement amongst the religious and the irreligious alike—that genuine Christianity is, at its core, a soft, nurturing faith. To be like Christ means always loving, always caring, always compassionate, and always gentle. Jesus does not judge people; he hugs them”⁴⁰

Murrow discloses the feminization of the church to take place as early as the Victorian era. He writes it was a marketing strategy of the Catholic Church to gain the interest of the women that attended their churches. He writes “Pre-Victorian Christians were much more familiar with God as the Lion of Judah.” He continues with the best-known sermon of the 18th century “Sinners in the hands of an angry God.” However, this did not connect with the female audience of 75 percent.⁴¹ Murrow adds, “They replaced him with the Lamb of God, a warm, comforting deity.”

This presentation causes the resisters within the container to repel this ideology as a threat to their manhood. This has become the reputation of the church and mainly the

⁴⁰ Murrow, David. *Why Men hate going to church*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc. 2011.

⁴¹ Murrow, David.

black church which also hosts up to 70 percent of women, and men over the age of 25 occupy 10 to 15 percent.

This philosophy or hypothesis in the eyes of the unchurched man and the men returning to the church is where the tension lies. Murrow adds, “Too often sissy fellows have paraded themselves as representatives of Christianity’s crowning work and characteristic, while the men of full-blood have quietly dropped off from such company.”⁴²

Trigger words, feminine language and the association of the Christian identity connected to this thought creates a problem. Black men struggle to maintain their masculinity at all costs. This is a primary concern amongst black men, and it must be respected as such. The container has its fears and challenging their masculinity is public enemy number one. Their masculinity and desire for respect go hand in hand. This internalized reality is defended and protected at all times and can be the only thing men have; even in the absence of self-respect, they want to be respected by others. Whatever the illusion of respect or the identity it maintains on their manhood, men will risk life and limb to be respected as men.

Men garnish or dress their containers to reflect what kind of man they wish to be identified and respected as, from the corporate world to the local criminal; men present themselves in the many ways they wish to be respected. In addition to this the use of body language, speech and approach are essential in maintaining this identity, and it creates a safe place for them, for whatever safe may be for them. Anything that challenges this becomes a threat and the black church on a national level has crossed this threshold.

⁴² Murrow, David.

If this move by the church was industrial, finding its most profitable market as Murrow believes, were men written off because they were seen as not being profitable? Were men written off because the faith makes more money and receives more volunteerism from women? This gives room for further discussion, but within the visible reality of televangelism and the imbalanced percentage between men and women, this would suggest that religion can be stylized for financial gain, and the deliverance and salvation of humanity becomes reduced to a subtopic.

Within the Baptist denominations I serve, this presents a serious question for the men of Friendship and the men of Grace United Methodist.

Luke 15:4 - 6 (KJV) reads “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

This narrative in Matthew 18:11 begin with Jesus saying “For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” The attention is given to the one that was lost and the shepherd’s responsibility of finding it. The emphasis is drawn from Luke 15:4b “and go after that which was lost, until he finds it?” Today the men are the lost sheep, and it is possible we have created systems designed around the present attendees of women with no regard to men, causing the development and recruiting of men as optional or not considered at all?

To add insult to injury, Murrow writes: “these days, it’s fairly common for pastors to describe a devout male as being totally in love with Jesus.” Or imploring a crowd of

guys to “fall deeply in love with the Savior.” “Inviting Christian men to get close enough to reach up and kiss his (Jesus’) face.”⁴³

This causes the absolute rejection of the Christian faith in the eyes of most men. This is not to promote a patristic faith or to replace what’s present with overtones of chauvinism, antifeminism or bigotry, but the idea is to regain focus of the purpose of Christ and the church in reaching out to the wayward, the prodigals, and the lost sheep. This is wrestled with by the four focus groups and continues to be a subject matter that is struggled with. Yet in a bizarre way, could the feminization of the church be running its course in the black church due to the female population wanting black men present, not only in the church but their lives and in their children’s lives? But has the wedge been driven too deep between black men and the black church to regain their respect and their presence?

The black church has acknowledged the decrease of men amidst an increasing population of women and their children, but the mistake being made is the use of methods that have attracted, and sustained women are being used to attract and recruit men, and this why these models fail to sustain and stimulate men.

By Any Means

“We declare our right on this earth, to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being, in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence, by any means necessary.”⁴⁴

This phrase coined by the French intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre in his play *Dirty Hands*, became popular through Malcolm X in his first nationalist speech before the

⁴³ Murrow, David.

⁴⁴ X, Malcolm. Lecture, New York, NY. June 24, 1964.

Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964 following his days with the Nation of Islam. The attempt to bring about a change for social justice in America was substantial to his religious convictions. Leadership is challenged when religious, political or bureaucratic rules conflict between allegiance and necessity, but here religious leadership takes on a different image.

The need to meet one's demands that affect the cultural, religious and economic situation of people will not hide behind religious or political guidelines but are willing to utilize any means necessary to meet the said demands. Leadership willing to make this type of sacrifice has remained obscured in the backdrop of the black community, and this sacrifice among black men becomes saturated with excuses of personal and financial responsibilities. The religious leader in the black community, however, cannot afford this luxury of omission, but must gather the resources needed and revisit one's calling to make any possible contribution to the body of Christ which they have been called to serve.

David Ausburger presents an alternative means to the pastoral leadership paradigm offering nontraditional methods that are essential in productive leadership.

“Pastoral counseling has barely begun to think about the contribution it can offer from its standpoint at the conjunction of psychology, psychotherapy, theology, philosophy, ethics, sociology and anthropology. No other field stands at the conjoint boundaries of eight great disciplines.”⁴⁵

Psychological practices and outside resources are said to negate the ability of God and overlooked the purpose of the church. George Nedumaruthumchalil writes how, on the other side of the spectrum, a shared concept is held in the profession of psychology as

⁴⁵ Ausburger, David, *The Cross-Cultural Counselor*, Philadelphia, PA. Westminster Press; 1986, 19.

he records in his article, “Spirituality and religion have been purposefully left out of clinical training, practice, and research. Several influences contributed to this inattention, including the deliberate separation of secular and sacred domains; concerns about therapist's influence, and the schism between science and faith.”⁴⁶

This is where the sacrificial component enters the framework if Jesus said in John 10:15 “As the Father knoweth me, even so, know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”(KJV) The question to self is where does this place the convictions, beliefs, traditions and denominational obligation of the minister/layperson when their ministry arrives at a sacrificial impasse? In response to this the words of Gamaliel surfaces in his reply to the objection of this new faith recorded in Acts 38b, 39 “for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (KJV) (Give it a chance).

The failed or incomplete data from the past provides the opportunity to engage additional concepts incorporating relative sciences required to bring about an alternative, resulting in the enhancement of the lives of the Brothers of Friendship Baptist Church and community of Brooklyn New York.

Restructuring the approach, objectives and religious obligation to energize a men’s ministry becomes secondary in the place of making a difference in the lives of men. Black men are receptive when observed and engaged naturally, not utilized as a tool to fulfill a ministry concept neither are they to be nurtured. The primary objective here focuses on the mobilization and sustainability of black men at Friendship and within the Friendship community.

⁴⁶ Nedumaruthumchalil, George. The role of Religion and Spirituality in Marriage and Family Therapy, Iona College, 2009, 20.

The Container Concept

Incorporating sociological, psychological and experiential means driven from a biblical foundation will offer new ideas whether successful or not, but will reveal something other. Dr. A. Son's reference to Dr. Murray Bowen's work in the practice of Systems Theory is what illuminated the approach for this aspect of the project. The phrase "You must dehumanize them first,"⁴⁷ was the most riveting words to hear when dealing with anyone from a ministerial perspective. The pastoral rule book goes out the window, and standardized practices such as empathy and hopeful nurturing are no longer sufferable according to Systems Theory of Family Systems. Using this theory introduces the thought of understanding their situations by focusing on them as individual "containers," to gain a precise knowledge of why the contents (thoughts, ideologies, fears, concerns) within the container are present, and this presents the guidelines to interact with the men. Understanding the brothers as individual containers demand certain precautions in which the ministry leaders may not have considered in the developmental stages of their ministry. Guiding men as containers is to know they are always in the process of development, which can be a lifetime experience as they continue to exemplify what has been placed in them. Their existing state can stem from past or present experiences or the lack thereof; in addition, these experiences can be modified by family, sociological, economic, cultural and geographic settings. "The container concept structures the experience of the 'I' and hence provides the person with some kind of identity."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Son, Audrey. Princeton Theological Seminary, class lecture. 2012.

⁴⁸ Rosenbaum, Bent., Garfield, D. Containers, Mental Space, and Psychodynamics, 1996

Each container has its own identity, including the ministry leader. The container is to be individualized, knowing it has been shaped by what's within the container, yet how the container responds to what's outside the container does not confirm what the container actually is. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky share in their book "Adaptive Leadership" explaining how loyalties play a significant part as to how the contents of the container engage the world around it. The three loyalties mentioned are Colleagues, Community, and Ancestors. In prioritizing these loyalties, they begin with "There are multiple players within each of these loyalty categories. And not all loyalties are equal, of course. Some you honor above others when your loyalties come into conflict."⁴⁹

This thought process is realistic as well as pragmatic when the intention is to benefit the men as individuals in the place of fulfilling a ministry requirement from an external or disassociated perspective. Understanding this concept enables the ministry leader to a chapter in the process that begins with discovery not recreating or fulfilling a prefabricated model or ministry. To understand and identify men as individuals is to identify them not only by what's being released from them as containers by way of verbiage, language, body language, involvement, lack of participation, hostility, the level of comfortability and where they may have originated from and why?

This is where the discipline of non-violent communication comes into play. Dr. Debra Hunsinger stated "non-violent communication guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of habitual, automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based firmly on an awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling, and wanting."

⁴⁹ Heifetz, Ronald A., Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

The loyalties of the ministry and participants of the ministry are always interacting and re-triangulating, but the facilitating minister must always be aware of their personal loyalties as not to permit them to inhibit what God has prepared for the lives of the containers, or participants within the ministry.

In the process of identifying the contents being revealed by the container or person, it is wise to consider what continues to be contained within the container. The container reveals its contents by the external levels of comfort or acceptability it finds within the setting, although not all has been revealed, small increment's surface as the level of comfort or compatibility increases. Marshall writes "When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt, and needed rather than on diagnosing and judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion."⁵⁰

This brings the conversation into play if during the developmental or strategic stages of the ministries if the containers were taken into consideration or prioritized, is it possible ministries for men would be more sustainable? The women's ministry made reference to their ministries being more in-depth, long-term objectives based on their interests being made visible or taken into consideration by the ministry.

The items contained by the sisters are visible in their ministries and play a part in their micro-ministry development stage, incorporating their interests, concerns, ambitions and fears. Ministries for the sisters are more identifiable by sharing their commonalities which make it possible to reveal their experiences both positive and negative. This is where the dialogue begins and sets the platform for building a sustainable ministry.

⁵⁰ Rosenberg, Marshall B. *Non-violent communication: a language of life: create your life, your relationships & your world in harmony with your values.* Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer, 2003.

Sister Sheila Davis, the chair lady of Church Women United of Greater New York, with a local membership of 3000 plus women from multiple denominational backgrounds and ethnicities says, “Sisters believe they must make their reservations known or it will go unnoticed. We have no shame in revealing our intentions and needs, but I’ll quickly assess this to being a maternal instinct which stems from rearing our households to raising our children.”⁵¹ Not speaking up is where she believes the crime to oneself lies, not in the humiliation associated with speaking up. Saying something is better than not saying anything at all, Davis says “If you don’t say anything to address it, you can’t say anything about it.”⁵²

This pattern of confrontation, highlighting or presentation by women revisits the Civil Rights movement accounts in their protests, sit-ins, and local marches. Sis. Davis says, “Women have always been front liners and are always willing to sacrifice their lives all for the sake of family, which is the community.”⁵³

Sis. Davis concludes, “Knowing this we remain in need of black men to be present in the church and lives of our members and we welcome this move. There is such a deep-seeded dislike of the church by men, and it seems impossible to reverse, but something has to be done, and we are more than willing to help if necessary.”⁵⁴

In review, there remains a concern in the brokenness and disconnect between black men and the black church, the urgency and the human impossibility that stands before the current systems of power, the recurring failures, miscues and misinterpretation

⁵¹ Davis, Sheila. Personal interview. 27 November 2016.

⁵² Davis, Sheila.

⁵³ Davis, Sheila.

⁵⁴ Davis, Sheila.

of God and faith in the black church, and the need to engage, re-energize toward revitalizing a men's movement and men in general.

CHAPTER III

THE PROJECT: DESIGNING THE MINISTRY

The research has taken into account the needs, cares, desires and fears men have and will be the key ingredients used as the impetus to fuel the ministry model. Previous men's ministries were industrialized with little personal development or consideration to the long-term effects of the individual man. The ministry's focus was predicated on corporate or collective goals modeled after pre-fabricated men's ministries tailored to meet the specific social, cultural and spiritual objectives of the ministry leader or their superior.

Ineffective Men's Ministries

Reviewing the common practices of men's ministries and preparing a new outlook for this group of men opened new doors, introduced new readings and non-traditional philosophies were introduced. If this were going to work, the fear of Einstein's warning came to mind; "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."⁵⁵ From this discovery, everything in regards to ministering to men was taken into account, and it began with what's effective, progressive and what remains ineffective.

Ineffective men's ministries are the expected norm with seasonal, periodic, always short-term stimuli and one dimensional. They fail to take into account the

⁵⁵ Howes, Ryan. Psychology Today.com, The Definition of Insanity is..., Sussex Publishers, LLC, 2017.

complexities associated with black manhood and the realities that are unmentioned in spiritual conversations. Yearly fellowships, goals, and mantras are not sufficient enough while black men balance the nuances of life on a daily basis. In exchange of leading them where the ministry wants them to arrive, which is not absolute, but to consider leading them to where God wants them to be as God has created them to be, is the direction of this project.

Bro. Workman of Friendship pointed out, “ineffective men’s ministries continue to focus on meeting goals and listing their accomplishments, and anything less than what is expected is noted as a failure.”⁵⁶ Workman believes the accomplishments can be seen in the process, anything that adds to the ministry or group is a notable accomplishment even if it is one new brother it is more than when we started. Goals are needed to exceed the normal limits and breach comfort zones but being consumed with goals can have damaging effects. Failing to acknowledge the beauty of the process can send a sign of being unappreciative of the contributions and sacrifices that were made.

Showing more passion concerning headcounts and bragging rights has become a standard practice in men’s ministries, or the attention given to the brothers in need of the ministry, or the lives that have been influenced or changed by the ministry is where the focus should lie.

Ministries that focus on the success of the prosperous and the churched men turn more men away than one might imagine, and this divisive flaw has overall effects that are not reversible. If age is the topic and generational issues are taking center stage, men that are not familiar with the events relative to this generation will become overlooked if not feel disrespected.

⁵⁶ Workman, Steven. Personal interview. 2016.

A Men's Ministry or the Ministry of a Man

Men's ministry is designed for men; plural not singular. Understanding the tenets of men's ministry must be revisited and redefined as something else if it does not fulfill the definition of being a men's ministry. The misuse of this idiom "men's ministry" camouflages the genuine meaning of what men's ministry should be. Men's ministries are normally bible based, and ministry is driven to meet the expectation or goals of the ministry leader. The question becomes, what if the goal fails to meet the expectation of the ministry leader, does this mean the ministry has failed? Moreover, if it does meet the need of the ministry leader, how and who measures its success? Is it successful by the leader or the men within the ministry?

When the ministry is defined and measured by the objectives of a single leader it cannot be a men's ministry particularly if the men (plural) are in a sheep to shepherd relationship. If the leader's requirements are to be fulfilled and their expectations met, this indicates the men are only participants in the grand design of a single person. Therefore this failed reproduction of men's ministry fits the norm; from a secular and religious reality and gives the reason why men are no longer attracted to this ministry model?

This does not discount all leadership styles provided by one man since it has shown productive signs, but if leadership is developmental for the benefit of the men something in addition to the existing programs should be available or entertained.

Respecting the men as individuals with contents being contained by psychological discipline or sociological parameters will guide the research using an empirical analysis approach. Initiating a new set of questions, goals, and ideas, using broad alternative

methods and resources will highlight a holistic approach to the overall development of the select men of Friendship and community.

The new principles will shape the working theory in hope towards creating a new direction; working the history and thoughts of the brothers into the framework of the ministry before initiating the ministry suggests a different expected outcome. This is not an attempt to be unique, but it is to anticipate something other, which will bring about a thorough and sustainable ministry.

The container concept acknowledges the manner of assembling, conversation, shared interests, likes, dislikes, pains, weaknesses, and fears along with testimonials. This gives room to proceed with their concerns as a part of the original plan setting a productive foundation to build upon where the men are at the center of the ministry, not the leader.

A level of comfort must be found within the movement of the whole, the pushing and nudging replace the traditional leadership style of following a single individual. From a biblical perspective, a tradition of leaders came from amongst their people to lead them, from Joseph to Moses, and from Joshua to David and from David to Jesus, it is from amongst their tribes and their communities by which deliverance would come.

Reading the Room

The most important yet overlooked reality in going out to create a climate to engage black men in religious dialogue begins with establishing the alpha male amongst them. This simple, primitive, yet realistic title exists in every setting where men gather and must be respected if a climate of communication is to be established. In every social

setting be it human or animal, this hierarchy of respectability exists which commands and demands respect.

The sociological lifelines of those gathered are dependent upon the maintaining of this order, and if breached it can have disastrous effects. In each of the settings from bars, mechanic shops, fishing trips and sporting events, whenever a Christian or minister arrives the social structure gets disturbed and the pre-existing balance in communication, body language, and the level of excitement shifts. Being unaware of this or not caring is problematic and this is where the ministry leader or representative becomes the problem.

Having dominance or control in every setting reveals underlying psychological symptoms that should be addressed, and highlights an area of one's ministry or work that needs a touch of humility. Respect is not demanded but earned; Cornel West states "Humility is the fruit of inner and wise maturity. To be humble is to be so sure of one's self and one's mission that one can forgo calling excessive attention to one's self and status."⁵⁷ Dr. West's comment reveals the importance humility plays in the interaction with others, and in ministry, humility is a primary characteristic. There is a preexisting thought by non-Christians towards ministry leaders in which David Cone speaks of in his book "For My People." He writes "The church will never become an instrument of liberation as long as its leaders enslave the ones they are supposed to serve. Black church persons must rise up and claim the right to fashion church structures that are human and liberating."⁵⁸ This profound statement by Dr. Cone is what men are looking for, liberation. Men are in search of a place, space or philosophy that liberates them and leads to liberation, yet anything that's contrary to this gives the hint of one being corralled into

⁵⁷ West, Cornel. *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993

⁵⁸ Cone, James H. *For my people: Black theology and the Black church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984.

an enslaved situation, and unfortunately the leader and church can fall under this description.

The overall problem with the alpha male leadership goes back to the Civil Rights Era and the death of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The Civil Rights Movement suffered a devastating loss at the death of Dr. King, and the movement became fragmented as a result. Ministries and political parties were shattered at the loss of their leader. This is a part of Black history not only in America but encountered in Ghana and Sierra Leone to name two out of many; knowing this, we have come to the time for things to change, and for black men, it must start with the black church.

Language leading to the Discovery of Approach

The church location has its religious connotations which bare its prejudices; this led the committee to consider the use of inclusive language to offset the stigma of the church setting. Meetings outside the church at Serendipity men's group home in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, NY; the home of Pastor Alpher Sylvester of the Grace United Methodist Church in St. Albans, New York, and the Blew Smoke Cigar Lounge in Clinton Hills Brooklyn, NY were organized. The failure in language was quickly discovered by the dynamics of the men gathered. The Men at Serendipity ranged between ex-offenders, men in recovery and rehabilitation, and others as an alternative to prison. Their language varied from the men of Grace United, as did the language at Blew Smoke.

The use of selective language was not the connective tissue varying by acquaintance, culture, age, situation and location. At Pastor Sylvester's home, it differed by culture, mainly Caribbean, which proved a singular choice of inclusive language was

not absolute. Each group found their comfort levels within the group, and each group's particular setting served its purpose of comfort and familiarity.

This being the case, language had to be modified for one group and kept transparent for others; at Blew Smoke Cigar Lounge a different use of language from the other two was used. Language and its dialects could not produce a concrete link or meaning to the multiethnic varieties and dynamics represented by each group. Being respectful of the container concept, the discovery process surfaced pointing to observing their existing flow of conversation, and the comfort level they have established amongst themselves.

Being mindful of my presence within their setting had its own preconceptions, as to how to engage the conversation was considered a 'One pitch, one swing' situation offering no margin of error. After listening to their multiple topics, interests and passionate expressions, I chimed in respecting them and their space with a comfortable show of transparency and commonality.

Selecting a ministry of familiarity or passion incorporates past experiences and guides the educational process. Engaging black men in their element with success takes note from John Dewey's disposition regarding experience and education. Utilizing both, one's personal experience and education to bring about a single means has proven itself beneficial in a multiple of settings.

Having experienced growing up in the New York City Housing authority and incarceration at a young age taught me the important lessons of conformity and assimilation while camouflaging your fears. Learning without experience would have been preferable but that was not my reality. Observing the mistakes and consequences of

others in the housing projects prepared me for what was would come in the prison system. Two points surface in reflection, respect and fear. Respecting them because I have no knowledge of what they've gone through and fearing the consequences of not knowing. These points are transferrable and continue to serve well in the ministry to and for black men. The passion to help black men stemmed from these experiences, my education supported this passion and both play vital roles in my profession. Addressing men having experience both learned and personal experiences allow for maneuverability to guide and develop productive relationships and ministries.

The Brotherhood Ideology

The weakened cycle of black leadership can have a different effect when placed under the structure of the family setting. When men function under the family setting each man is connected to the father, as in all families each brother's role is differentiated by age, lineup, character, strengths and weaknesses. Each brother plays a significant part in the family dynamic yet each brother is different. The DNA of each brother comes from the same parent, but their characteristics are uniquely different. These brothers are a unified force, although there is an alpha male amongst the brothers, in the presence of the father, the alpha brother triangulates into his secondary place. If something happens or threatens any of the brothers within the family, the entire Brotherhood responds to engage any threat or disruption to the family system. Any threat to the family structure can affect the family's position within the geographic setting and existence.

The Nation of Islam exemplifies a style of brotherhood that has potential, although under the surface it shows areas in need of modification. Upon large services, the young members must march in perfect time for long periods in single lines. They pay

close attention to the command of one voice while turning left, right and coming to a complete halt. They give a loud response when questioned by the drill sergeant, and this exercise is repeated until the satisfaction of the drill sergeant is met, and he releases them.

This constant display by the Nation in the black community was an attraction and drew curiosity, upon inquiry Bro. Abdul Hafeez Muhammad replied,

“The brothers marching have two primary components attached to it, the first is they are to understand the importance of being on one accord as their marching will eventually sound like one set of feet marching. Secondly, they march looking at the back of the head of the brother in front of them, their only concern is to keep an eye on the brother in front of them because they are secure in knowing another brother has their back.”

Through this, a philosophy and allegiance to the whole, is embedded in their minds working as a single unit strengthened as a brotherhood and spiritual family. This exercise is supported by their theology and both work towards maintaining the faith and family.

Introducing the brotherhood idea in place of the men’s ministry idiom was a solution well received. The Brotherhood model removed the standard hierarchy that stands between men and leadership and indoctrinates the social importance the brother has within the family model.

The brotherhood empowers each man as they are connected to the larger body of brothers. Strength is found in being connected to one another as brothers are connected in Christ through his sacrificial demonstration for all. It is empowering to know there are brothers who know your weaknesses, are willing to stand by you, with you and for you.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one

another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1, 2. KJV). Maintaining the balance and health of the Brotherhood becomes the dominant narrative in the life of the brother because it gives him something in return. When the Brotherhood has been a blessing, it is wise to keep the brotherhood healthy and functional that one may always benefit from the Brotherhood.

As a result of this, a sense of loyalty develops within the brotherhood modeling the family setting, whether one has experienced it or not the family idea becomes the chance to build a new setting without the faults and weaknesses associated with traditional men's ministry styles and families.

The idea of coming together in solidarity and brotherhood addressed the ever changing men's day themes and scriptures in exchange for something concrete and absolute that would represent the men for years to come. One scripture was selected from a narrative, and the scripture provided the theme claiming the identity of the brothers, and from this, their departing salutation came forth.

This idea was carried from the new Disciple classes which open with an introductory statement from the pastor and the passion of being responsible for one other. At the end of the lesson, it answers the question God raised to Cain in Genesis 1:9 "Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper (KJV)? The pastoral reply was "I am my brother's keeper," and the men selected this as their mantra.

Unify to Energize

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Psalms 133:1

Upon establishing the loyalties associated with brotherhood, unifying the brothers towards long and short term objectives, breaking the brothers into sub—groups based on interests, needs, desires and goals gave each group the freedom to pursue their independent ideas while maintaining their connection to the movement of the larger body. In families, each member has their own future to consider but maintains a sound connection to the family. Upon developing their own family in the third generation, maintaining a sound connection to the larger family remains a priority in the black community.

Being unified on multiple levels allow for quick movements, adjustments, and modification if and when needed to maintain the stability of the family or brotherhood. Communication came as a need to maintain the stability of the brotherhood. Home and cell phone numbers were exchanged; emails fax, work numbers, and spouse numbers were given to the administrator. The list continued with employment information, company names and locations, primary and secondary schools in which our children and grandchildren attended were all added to the database.

Having this information available caused additional resources to surface; a brother working for UPS stated, “I know the company that makes the ties and gloves, we can get a discount, I deliver all their stock they would be delighted to help us out.”⁵⁹ From this, a multiple of services was shared and information given for the benefit of the Brotherhood in their personal lives.

Meeting times were then suggested; the monthly meetings were sporadic, hardly attended or remembered. Upon sharing the progress of the brothers with Dr. Covington stated “Monthly meetings? Nah, brother, men need to meet weekly. It’s a part of our

⁵⁹ Stevens, Chris. (UPS driver) In discussion with Craig Gaddy. November 2016.

makeup, we're programmable, we have certain days for everything, and we do the same things on the same days every week." Suggesting Friday evening meetings from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm was well received by all but one brother with a conflict in his schedule.

Building on this development of unity, the suggestion of a physical presentation was placed before the brothers. Something simple and easy that would showcase their unity as brothers and highlight their manhood to not only confirm their identity but serve as an advertising piece for visiting men, the men of the community, and the men that do not participate. Participating with the usher board on select Sundays were suggested. To support this, informing the brothers of the benefits of wearing a black or navy suit with a tie three times a month saves a fortune on buying multiple church attire to fit every and any occasion. One or two shirts and a black pair of shoes are all that's required. This was an economic breakthrough for most of the Brotherhood, admitting the pricey clothes associated with the church were an unmentioned reason many of the brothers had a conflict with attending church.

The men quickly chose their Sundays and prepared to usher three Sundays a month. Within the meeting, newest convert Bro. Cusaw stated, "we should all wear black suits or blue suits one or the other, ties or bow ties, one or the other with the same pocket square, and always wear polished black shoes, period." Cusaw understood the power of unity witnessed by his community work dealing with local gangs and the pride they share in bearing their colors, Cusaw stated: "no one should know one of us from the other if they look at us from the neck down, with the exception of body mass and height."

Mobilization

Unification and communication produce execution, or it is just a wasted conversation. The focus and timing of the men ushering incorporated a supportive community unforeseen by prior research. Unknowingly the brothers were communicating using all their resources to assure that every brother would have their uniforms by the select Sunday. One of the young brothers was unable to have a suit by the expected Sunday due to his parent's financial situation; the men pooled their resources and raised the money to fully cloth brother Omari without making mention of it. Upon inquiring about their generosity, the statement was yelled: "I am my brother's keeper, Period."

Additional preparation surrounding the upcoming Sunday were made, in addition to the standard posting of ushers on Sundays the men wanted to look at any weak spots or security breaches. Placing men in strategic places were added to the normal floor placement, and rehearsals were added to participate in the Sunday morning march. With this, the brothers who served in the military stepped up to give instructions on marching, and the rehearsals followed the men's meetings twice a month.

The men chose to meet one hour prior to the worship service for briefing, attendance, and uniform checks. The church took notice as the men took charge of the building. The concentration was on ushering which takes place in the sanctuary, but the men were outside opening cab doors, holding up umbrellas, and helping the women in the building in addition to securing the sanctuary.

There are three things you must do with men as a pastor or ministry leader, Men must be affirmed, and there must be an adventure to keep them engaged ministry. Upon

making the morning announcements in worship, the men were publically acknowledged, and the congregation received them with applause followed by personal compliments and thanks. This was a first for the brothers of Friendship with additional supportive comments confirming the admiration of their efforts and the sense of worth felt in response.

Debriefing immediately followed and identified the difference between being energized and revitalized was discussed in detail, which we agree would be determined in a matter of time. The energy of the brothers was present and the effort and time they put forward were returned to them two-fold by the congregation, mainly the women but the elder men as well. The brothers were briefed that this moment was an opening celebration of something new and they should not get used to being celebrated because this is our ongoing area of responsibility.

In retrospect, if someone stopped admiring the job you are doing as a father, will you stop being a good father? Alternatively, if your boss stopped acknowledging the job you do will you resign, I do not think so. There are things we are created to do and to take care of our women and children, the elderly and our people are the things we do. It is a component of being a man, not a real man but a man. There is no either or in this; you are either a man or you are not. That being said the question was raised: now who's still with a brother? Whether out of shame or fear of being alienated, they all responded with a loud "I am my brother's keeper."

CHAPTER IV

WHAT WE LEARNED

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? Ezekiel 37:1—3a.

God intentionally put the prophet Ezekiel in this desert valley for a reason, Ezekiel was God's mouthpiece set in the presence of a dead situation, but the beauty here is that the answer asked the question. This is confirmed by Ezekiel's response when he replies to a God who is talking to him in the valley of death. O Lord GOD, thou knowest.

If ministry finds us in dead places, dead churches, dead positions, dead relationships and the list continues, is it possible we have been strategically placed there for a reason? In addition to being there when we ask the Lord why are we in certain situations, is it possible we are unknowingly questioning the answer?

Language

Dr. Miller asked, "how do you approach this process because at some point you have to take this on the road."⁶⁰ Miller disproves the use of language because it has cultural, linguistic and dialectic differences; words can have multiple definitions or can be interpreted differently which has been proven culturally, socially, and geographically;

⁶⁰ Miller, Kevin. Drew University, committee meeting. November 2016.

without overlooking how language or vocabulary continues to be modified from generation to generation. Language is not cookie cutter, but along with temperament, mood, and psyche can be purposefully modified. Language is not absolute but is a vital part of the whole in the process to establish a line of communication pertinent to maintaining a men's ministry. The language used in philosophy and theology combined must produce an atmosphere of universal respect.

Approach

Innate qualities, personality, familiarity with conditions and skill were necessary for the approach when encountering men. Engaging with black men from a religious perspective has its negative preconceptions, whether it is from personal experience, the media, or their observations of a local church, the negative expectations are always there. Natural qualities are at their best in unfamiliar territory. Learned, instructional and technical practices have their methodological strengths, but natural qualities and personality have an indescribable way to maintain the homeostasis of a situation when engaging black men. This is not factual because of the person representing the ministry; it is factual because of the person they are in dialogue with. Technical strategies are designed to produce an anticipated outcome or response, but these results vary by location, social setting, and culture. As with language, the technical approach cannot rival personal qualities.

Personal qualities or talents have a way of guiding the temperament of the discourse can naturally intensify and back off upon touching certain areas within the conversation. The learned process has its qualities but cannot fully navigate a situation particularly when the conditions change.

Is it possible to think why Jesus sought fisherman rather than the learned priests, rabbis, members of the Sanhedrin, scribes or Pharisees? Consider this, who could better handle the changing of natural conditions such as combined seas, continental air mass, barber poles, blocking highs, properly reading broken clouds, navigating through dense fog, sustaining popcorn convection storms, and without any modern equipment or education in meteorology. They never surrendered to the conditions they were confronted with? Is it possible this is why Jesus questioned them in Mark 4:40, and he said unto them, why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? A stretch is to assume Jesus was questioning them on their natural talent and skill in addition to their comfort in having him present with them. Never the less, would not these fishermen be familiar with changing weather patterns and storm conditions?

Men with natural talent and the skill will maximize their resources to find a way to arrive at a safe destination, with the acceptance of any place that is safe. In contrast, men with technical expertise prescribe with a destination that is final; but is it to assume any destination other than what has been prescribed is unacceptable or unsuccessful? According to the found narratives in Mark 4:35-41 and Matthew 22-34 arriving safely, wherever that might be, come to be the focus when embarking on a new journey.

Heifetz speaks of this as the ability to modify the DNA; this adaptation is described as such “it creates DNA arrangements that give the species’ the ability to flourish in new ways and more challenging environments. Successful adaptations enable a living system to take the best from its history into the future.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Heifetz, Ronald A., Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009. 14.

Dr. Miller adds “In order for this to work, it is essential to the revitalization of the ministry. There must be someone that has these abilities because it’s not always the pastor.” Shared responsibility is where the strength lies within the men’s ministry. Language and approach are critical but the person engaging the ministry moment has a crucial responsibility. This is a temperamental position with a minute margin for error, but from within the character and personality of one’s natural gifts and faith, flaws and mistakes in judgment can retrieve any given situation when in the hands of select persons who are naturally gifted. Heifetz calls it being responsible when letting others assume some of the responsibilities, where he writes;

“Being Responsible” in this was is a virtue, to be sure. But when you are leading adaptive change, you cannot shoulder all the work yourself. You need to give pieces of it back to the appropriate people, allies who will share the burden, members of the group who should own part of the problem.”⁶²

Revisiting a previous statement in a men’s ministry, if no one has taken the model of the ministry to heart or has embraced the ministry as provided by the leader or minister, it is safe to assume it is a ministry of one. A ministry for the men, with the men in mind, will engage the men to assume the responsibility of the ministry resulting in their participation in the operation of the ministry as they see themselves within the ministry being provided.

This is in no way is to discount the benefits of being learned, skilled or methodical. Methods, programs, and information have derived from those who have interpreted the process in which they accomplish successful models of ministry. With this,

⁶² Heifetz, Ronald A., Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009. 197.

what differentiates the two concepts is faith which cannot be learned or bestowed but must come from within. Like a talent, character or personality you either have it, or you do not, and if you do not obtain it, the suggestion is to find someone that does.

The Discovery begins by being aware of one's whole self; imperfections, frailties, weaknesses and fears, allowing room for a comfortable dialogue in new territory. As a result, in four diverse focus groups, the homeostasis within each group remained secure, productive and manageable. This is what is referred to as "leading from within the group," once this positioning is established a level of trust is gained and the room to lead from amongst them becomes possible.

In this part of the discovery process, one must be made aware of his/her ability to fit in and not appearing as a threat. Mr. Cody, an accountant for the Atlantic City gaming commission, and I met in Houston Texas at his relative's home. Upon entering the yard, I was introduced to everyone as Craig, Michael's brother. I took a seat at a picnic table and listened; I did not say much, I just listened and laughed at the humorous stories they shared. I was comfortable amongst them because I identified with their stories as another man, and the underlining reality was that we were just a group of men having a conversation.

As the crowd thinned out, Mr. Cody asked, "Are you a minister of something?" I answered "yes why?" He said, "Whether you know it or not you have a way of not disturbing the nucleus, most ministers have an intentional way of making things quite strange; in my profession, we call it non-violent communication, what do you call it?" I told him "fear, fear of disturbing the existing norm." Mr. Cody said "non-violent communication in the corporate world is 55% body language, 38% is how you say what

you say, and 7% is what you're saying. That's how I made it in this business as a black man for so many years."

The take back from this is fear can be a safe guide, but the practice of observing the pattern of language the passions, along with being transparent and respectful of the pre-existing space created, and understanding men as individual containers are crucial to successfully engaging and connecting with a new group of black men.

Discovering a single code of language whether it is cultural or inclusive are not essential towards being received by men; men were receptive based on the combination of approach, patience, and respect. There were intentional overtones in maintaining the harmony within each group. Avoiding particular subject matters, religious catch phrases and trigger words of any form must remain at the forefront especially when talking to black men. When certain areas are breached with black men, the disconnect becomes impossible to reconnect.

Once the climate has been established and adjusted the space becomes secondary; space will be identified by the climate, not the climate identified by the space. The space provides the setting for flushing out the cares, fears, and concerns of the brothers; to gain knowledge, to bond, and to fellowship lays the groundwork to execute the plans of the intended ministry.

Safe Environment

In 2009 a concept was initiated to have a shorter morning service, offering a high-octane worship experience with a Pentecostals twist and a structured fifteen-minute sermon. The service became known as the Straight 40 which took place at 10:10 am and was referred to as "Just Jesus straight up, no chaser." This forty minute experience

removed all the trappings of the traditional morning worship service. There were forty reasons that informed them as to what this new service was all about, and in forty minutes there was worship, word, and prayer. This was appealing to quite a few locals and attracted many others that just wanted to do church and depart, by 10:50 am worship was over, and the 11:00 am worship began. There were no dress codes. The preaching took place from the floor removing the distance between preacher and people to what has been referred to as “the deity problem.” The announcements were made before the service started and the offering was taken at the back of the church as they departed. The most challenging part to convey to the elders of the church was how would the invitation to discipleship take place if not done in the traditional manner?

The tradition was for all persons to wait for the opening of the doors of the church which followed the sermon. The Baptist Church Manual states regarding joining a church “while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches, therefore, have a candidate come before them, make their statement, give their “experience,” and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members.”⁶³

An attempt to restructure this part of the Baptist process created deep resistance from the official board. This was looked upon as sacrilegious, and several unproductive meetings followed. With continued dialogue with the official board, considering the present state of the church and its need to build its membership in the backdrop of gentrification, along with the absence of millennials and their own family members, the question was where they able to offer a better solution to build a membership? The use of Jesus’ disposition against the established Judaic institution was proof of the importance

⁶³ Hiscox, Edward T. The Hiscox standard Baptist manual. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1965. 22.

of salvation over religious traditionalism, rites, and creeds. Incorporating this theme in Bible study, Sunday school lessons and sermons shed light on the importance of the need of salvation over standardized religious protocols.

With all the stigmas removed, the environment was set and the climate that was created attracting both men and women proving the removal of the traditional format or order of service can have an overall effect on the space. Since 2012 the additional worship service was dissolved due to the members desire to move the 11:00 am worship service up to 10:00 am following the successful summer schedule of that year.

The re-imagining of the space and reinventing the ministry are essential because of what both the space and ministry represents. They represent traditionalism, customs, codes, protocols, stigmas, expectations, and in more cases than expected it represented pain, anger, frustration, failure, marginalization, institutionalized religion and all of its problems.

Reimagining the space to provide something other than what it has in the past and reinventing the ministry to be prepared to deal with men from different walks, disciplines, experiences, cultures and backgrounds can be a perfect starting point. Dealing with men from where you stand in ministry but on their terms will produce something unexpected, a welcomed change.

John Dewey in his book *Experience and Education* shared a similar concern dealing with the breakdown of the educational system's inability to effectively gain the attention and relate to youth regarding traditional versus progressive education. Dewey writes "the traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and from

outside.”⁶⁴ The concept is not to eliminate the existing traditions but to give balance and attention to the ways in which the church operates towards men. To omit the need for the Christological development of men encourages an imbalance sociologically and domestically which will only create a greater distance between black men and the black church. Dewey sheds light on the problems of traditionalism and its failure to engage the progressive reality, but how traditionalists find comfort with its fragmented outcome. The importance of including Dewey’s writings are due to the time in which Dewey addresses this learning issue which is at the earliest stages of developing ones learning which will become a traditional or the expected norm for learning. Information and education given and taught without considering its effectiveness or ineffectiveness toward the individual man are what has led to the existing state of the black church. The black church should consider Dewey’s thought within the modern framework in addressing the decline of interest, participation, and presence of black men in the black church.

A Thin Space

In the summer of 2015 the concept of a “Thin Place” was a component of a course taking place in Wales, UK. The decline of local churches and its cultural acceptance in Wales were the focus point of the course. As the need and impact of the Church in Wales became increasingly thin, the task was to find the significance of church. To discover how a culture rooted in faith allowed the closing, repurposing, and abandonment of the local church to happen and what could or should have been done to avoid such an event.

Although the state of the church was dire, could the black church, being in a thin place, still offer something more, a place that gives life, a place that restores the soul and removes one from their reality, whatever that may look like? Mason writes “A thin place

⁶⁴ Dewey, John. Experience and education. New York: Macmillan, 1938.

to the Celtic mind is a spot where the two worlds, this world and that of the divine rubbed dangerously close together. They include but were not limited to springs, groves, river crossings, high places and lowly valleys.” Mason continues to say “They also attract those who are in pain or seeking relief from life-threatening conditions.”

Upon climbing the mountainsides for over eighty miles in five days with little dialogue, our destinations were never announced, and the purpose of walking and climbing so far was never included in the dinner conversation. Mark 1 came to mind as the twelve followed Jesus with no information. My question was “what’s with all this climbing; I didn’t sign up for this.” I wondered what was Dr. Mason trying to accomplish and why did he bring us along for such a treacherous journey? Somewhere after the fiftieth mile, I began to contemplate if this was not about his goals, thoughts or ambitions. It is possible it has nothing to do with him at all. On the very last night at dinner, he asked, what did you learn about yourselves during this trip and did you find a thin place? I immediately understood the purpose of the course, the walk and the climbing with his single question; it was about developing a knowledge of self, not him as the leader. He led us in places to discover ourselves, to find and create thin places between this world and the divinity within us.

“Thin places fuel the imagination, foster risk—taking, feed the spirit, and foment human transformation. They have the ability to alter our way of thinking, transform our character, and renew our souls.”⁶⁵

The black church for black men lies in a thin place and takes up a smaller space in their lives, mainly men that are unchurched. In understanding the need for this place or

⁶⁵ Vande Kappelle Robert. *Into thin places: one man's search for the center*. Eugene, Or.: Resource Publications, 2011.

space, the need is to offer life and the restorative elements that lift one's reality from their shoulders that one may be restored with life. For black men, the black church must continue to inspire the impossibilities of life, renew the mind to believe it, and prepare for its manifestation.

Creating the Space

Why don't black men go to church? Because they have already been, and Tony has not been back.⁶⁶

The outside theory of the church for men lies in its conformity. The care and attention are given to those in attendance, and upon participating or joining, the concept of assimilation is what is required. This, as mentioned by Dr. Miller, "is where the problems surface for black men; meeting the expectations of the institution not the development of the man misses the mark of the church."⁶⁷

Dr. Darrell Guder referred to as the refusal of a spiritual transfusion. The resistance to new blood causes the old blood to lose its potency and sustainable qualities needed to live; as a result, it kills anything that comes into the body and eventually kills the body. Dr. Guder stated, "don't think of new members coming into the church as a sense of recruiting them, see them as to whom The Lord is sending, see it as Jesus fulfilling his promise that he would build his church."⁶⁸

This is a game changer, the of new men, brothers or young boys upon attending or joining the church are seen as to whom God has entrusted the church to, and holds responsible for their spiritual and physical development and journey. Seeing this any

⁶⁶ Kinjufu, Jawanza. *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries*. African American Images, Chicago, IL; 2006, 96.

⁶⁷ Miller, Kevin. Committee meeting, November 2017.

⁶⁸ Guder, Darrell. *Missional Theology*, Princeton, NJ; 2011.

other way repudiates God's will and purpose of the church. The question upon new faces, new interests, and new members should be "why did The Lord send them here," not why are they here?

Of all the churches in the community or the churches they've previously attended, did The Lord send them here for a reason? New life not only anticipates new things in new areas and settings, but they also experience things the existing discipleship has easily forgotten, and that's the joy they had when they came into a new church or accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Many have forgotten that liberating feeling but new blood has a way of helping us revisit our conversion experience.

Respect ~~is~~ *masso'*

"Men have a desire to be great and respected. Men want their lives to be significant. They want to make a contribution. They want their lives to mean something to society."⁶⁹

Respect according to the Merriam Webster dictionary is defined as "high or special regard." If to whom God is sending is considered an act of God, they should be held in high or special regard. They represent the activity of God amongst us. Respect is a small thing to give, there are many things we respect that are undeserving, but we respect it for one reason or another. As in Mark 4 before Jesus called the twelve, they were nameless fishermen with characteristic we may not respect, but we can give them respect for what they were to become particularly in the presence of divine possibilities.

The greater the condition, the greater manifestation the Lord will bring about and the good news is we will bear witness to the Lords activity. Everyone is familiar with someone who has a shattered past, but the good news is we are making reference to their

⁶⁹ Kunjufu, Jawanza. 152.

past, not their present state. If this is a reality, when does the process begin? It begins somewhere, perhaps sitting in a pew in a local church unfit, unchurched and uninformed but the Lord has sent them, and all it takes to set them on their journey is the offering of respect. In Cornell West's epilog he surrounds respect with a multitude of qualities and gifts, but respect holds each of them in tension, he writes,

“We are at a crucial crossroad in the history of this nation—and we either hang together by combating these forces that divide and degrade us or we hang separately. Do we have the intelligence, humor, imagination, courage, tolerance, love respect, and will to meet the challenge? Time will tell. None of us alone can save the nation or the world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.”⁷⁰

Respect is a small offering to give in hope to gain the trust of another, black men in America live their lives in demand of something they should be given. According to the scriptures (II Chronicles 19:17) respect means “a lifting up,” although respect from its biblical description references the lack of respect God has for persons, why is there such attention given by black men in their demand and search for respect? Respect is thought to be a cultural problem or omitted because it's only a concern amongst African American men. In the larger context, the African American man is denied overall respect and must fight for it or feels he must deserve it from others in every changing social setting when other cultures have it freely offered to them upon approach.

Respect or the lack thereof cannot be understood unless it is a part of one's life story. This reality in the context of the church has its difficulties also, with the hurdles black men encounter in the world and have to overcome, the church should be the single

⁷⁰ West, Cornel. *Race matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 121.

most trusted place that a black man can enter into and receive the one thing that's denied him in the outside world, and that's respect. Not for who or what he is, but because he is.

This shared reality is not solely an American thing, but it is a universal matter of the oppression of a people and a culture fueled by complexion. Paulo Freire addresses this through the lens of the Brazilian experience in the dehumanization of culture. Freire carefully places this under the umbrella of oppression and the demand of liberation by the oppressed to whom liberation has been taken away. He writes;

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it.⁷¹

Freire offers a thought in which the church should take into consideration. Should the church understand the suffering endured by black men? Does the church not function within an oppressive society and worship a Lord and Savior that was born in an oppressive society? If anyone were to understand the need for liberation, it must be the black church. Unless the church has forgotten its weary past its purpose is to restore, to lift and give a sense of freedom that has been taken away and to offer them the respect they continue to be denied.

Freire further discusses the travesty that belies those that have been liberated from oppression as the very ones who become oppressors themselves. The thought of having arrived or overcome does not entitle anyone to become what they have been delivered or liberated from. This bizarre reality has become a recurring theme in the black church and

⁷¹ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*. Penguin Books, 2017.

continues to lie in the undercurrent of the Church surface. When righteousness takes a condescending view of the world, the spirit of thanksgiving has been replaced with entitlement or one who deserves.

This arrogance or ignorance becomes problematic because it only works as it is imparted onto others. However, the black church must always be mindful of the salvific nature of God and remain in a spirit of testimonial thanksgiving, or as God demonstrated to the very people of God after the prophet Malachi, God can simply distance himself which is death in itself.

In revisiting the black churches pre—emancipation era, the local praise house sufficed as the spiritual center of the slave community. The praise house or local church provided whatever was denied them and temporarily relieved them of whatever they endured. In the field, plantation house or working in town, they were chattel, or less than, and personal property, but in the praise house, they were deacons, preachers, deaconess, trustees, and ushers. The praise house provided them with the dignity and respect they were denied of, and there was no knowledge as to what the others present had encountered since their last meeting.

“It was not known if they suffered family members being sold, killed, raped, used for breeding purposes and you know the rest. Since this was unknown, the offering of respect was readily available because of what was unknown. This humble beginning should always be remembered by the black church, or we cease to exist as the house of God that was intended for our people.”⁷²

The identity of the black church is rooted in respect of others, most importantly their own. When respect is no longer a prerequisite of the black church, the church has

⁷² Campbell, Emory. *The history of the Praise House*, St. Helena, SC; 1996.

lost its birthright and fails to revisit its dark past, and this has caused the church for many black men to be irrelevant.

CHAPTER V

IF NOT US, WHO? IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

This quote coined by Hillel the Elder and rephrased by John F. Kennedy, Mikhail Gorbachev, John Lewis, and as recent as Emma Watson in her fight for universal gender equality, continue to raise the same question, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

The timeline associated with each rephrasing of Hillel’s quote reveals the continued need for each generation to tackle the tough challenges that lie before them that they may thrive. Looking at the state of black men in America, there is a sense of urgency that continues to surface over, and over, and over again. Benaiah’s story constantly comes to mind as he tells of his encounter in a pit, with a lion on a snowy day. The realization is, God, placed me here in this generation, in this time, in this church and community for a purpose, what has been revealed, witnessed and felt are not there for the sake of consuming my time on earth, but to be engaged.

If God placed me in a church in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, then it’s through the means of this church that I am to do my part for the greater good. The fact is, I have three children, seven grandchildren and out of them, there are four males. If I do not uphold my part in bringing about a better reality for black men then who? If I do not take action in this day and time for the next generation then, when?

Empowerment

To understand the depth of power one must have an idea as to what powerlessness is comprised of. “Powerlessness of black individuals, groups, and communities arises

through a process whereby valued identities and roles on the one hand and valuable resources on the other are denied—all of which are a prerequisite to the exercise of interpersonal influence and effective social functioning.”⁷³

Theologically Walter Bruggeman adds, “The ancestral narratives attest to the power of YHWH to create new historical possibilities where there is no ground for expectation.”⁷⁴ The African American experience in America cannot be described, but the possibilities are still there, and it is through the black church that men will be energized, find restoration, empowerment, and be revitalized to control their own destinies. From the Declaration of Independence declaring “We hold these truths to be self—evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”⁷⁵ To the Emancipation Proclamations that states;

That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, (January 1, 1863) all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.⁷⁶

In light of the interpretation and execution of these documents, justice must be obtained and pursued by other means to advance the state of black men. The church must

⁷³ Solomon, Barbara Bryant. *Black empowerment: social work in oppressed communities*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, 12.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, Walter. *The practice of prophetic imagination: preaching an emancipating word*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, 27.

⁷⁵ Declaration of independence." Reading, Washington , D.C.

⁷⁶ "Emancipation Proclamation." Letter, 1863.

begin to empower men through self—identity, self—worth, biblical exploration, personal dialogue, character development, unity and a sense of independence.

The empowerment of men is not given or bestowed; it is to be experienced. African American men are not to be lifelong followers, but to become leaders in their own right, and the church has the power to bring this about.

The most vital element to empower black men which have been overlooked is to assure their connection to the power of God. Connecting them to God will not only energize them, but will sustain them through times of crisis and stabilize their faith when their world has been shaken, and at some point or another, it will. This fact brought life to death in Ezekiel's discourse with God in Ezekiel 37:4,5 "Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live:"

Empowerment evolves from within as it interacts with the environment around it, for men being empowered comes from interacting with other men. As iron sharpens iron, men bring out the best and worst in each other. Soldiers train with soldiers; athletes train with other athletes and men come into their own with other men. Through this fellowship strengths and weaknesses are discovered, natural and learned abilities are discovered, the knowledge of self-surfaces while being in community with men with shared ideas and goals.

Empowerment moves men to take responsibility for their environment; they view themselves as being connected to the larger community as a viable asset that is invested

in their beliefs. With this men become as one, being able to see their importance to the system and take ownership of their share of it.

“Empowerment is not given or bestowed, it’s observed.”⁷⁷

Observing without obstructing, informing, directing, correcting or coercing the brothers has given them space to be decision makers for the good of the brotherhood. Stepping away in support as brothers make decisions has its rewards, even mistakes have their rewards; mistakes reveal risks, and if there is no risk there is no discovery, and without discovery, there is no progress. This space was learned and not innate, certain expectations are always desired but when empowerment is at hand allowing others to do what they do, including when requirements or expectations are not met, whatever the outcome, it produces something beneficial concluding with a win, win situation.

“Seeing life as a leadership lab enables you to try things out, make mistakes, strengthen your skills, and take pleasure in the journey as well as the fruits of your labor.”⁷⁸

Empowerment comes out of the journey, and it is in the journey where men are strengthened. The men of Friendship have taken charge of multiple responsibilities around the church and in the community. Watching the development has become contagious, and others that were not as involved or active have begun to take notice. Family members have commented on the difference certain brothers have displayed in their homes and with their children. This discovery strengthened my ability to be patient and trusting and let the brothers do what they believe is best and just observe.

⁷⁷ Gaddy, Craig. Revitalizing the Men’s Ministry at Friendship Baptist Church, Brooklyn, NY. 2017.

⁷⁸ Heifetz, Ronald A., Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009, 198.

Energizing

“The dismantling begins in the groans and complaints of his people; the energizing begins in the doxologies of the new community.”⁷⁹

Bruggerman makes reference to the Israelites hymns of hope. This hope found in Exodus 15 were the doxology of the Israelites and served as a reminder of their firsthand experience with God. These hymns energized and sustained them as they were in route to an unknown but Promised Land. The call to remember in praise and thanksgiving removes the pressures and pains associated with the journey with a constant focus on whatever is to come.

Understanding the events of the past and the activity of God produced energy that was not given to them but lived out by them. The recalling of the hymn tapped into their history with God, highlighting God’s presence with them and God’s power on behalf of them.

The Akin tribe of Ghanas Sankofa serves as a reminder of the past where it states “se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki. It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.” Grenholm makes a point regarding the African American presence in the Lutheran church writing “Cultural symbols reflect the complex interplay between context and history. This interplay forms our reality about God, Jesus Christ, ethical principles, and morality.”⁸⁰

The ever present history with God through the past of Black men must remain before them as a reminder of God’s presence that delivered and sustained them from

⁷⁹ Brueggemann, Walter. *The practice of prophetic imagination: preaching an emancipating word*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, 115.

⁸⁰ Grenholm, Carl-Henric. *Justification in a post-christian society*. Place of publication not identified: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2015, 159.

where they were to where they are. The energy resonates from this knowledge which can be both painful and thankful being reminded of George Santayana's quote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."⁸¹

The energy that comes from this form of praise in the repetition of hymn or song meets with resistance from black men in their view of praise. Praise for black men whether it is to be thankful, appreciative or in adoration becomes a difficult thing to grasp due to how it shows a sign of weakness or has been displayed as something feminine. The question is, how should you praise God? The humility associated with praise can be an impossible hurdle for black men, and this is one of two weak areas for men, the other being prayer.

The men in the focus group preferred studying the history of the Sankofa before singing a hymn. The research discovered they would sing a love ballad at a karaoke bar, humiliate themselves before friends and strangers before singing a hymn of praise to God that gives them energy. This remains to be an awkward area for the three groups and the men of Friendship. Searching for a way to involve the men of the church in praising God in the doxology, to give them a space to reflect on their past in thanksgiving had its difficulties. If studying the words of Sankofa was inviting there must be a way to incorporate the two, if not by symbolic meaning, by manner.

Discovering the Energy

A field trip to the Ninth Tabernacle Jewish Synagogue in East New York Brooklyn had the answer. Upon invitation, the men from two groups and Friendship attended the Family and Friends day Saturday service. To their surprise, the men navigated the worship service on every level. This was not a chauvinistic situation, but

⁸¹ Santayana, George. *The life of reason*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998. 284

the men represented eighty percent of the worship service. The men led the marches, provided security, directed the chorus, processed with a cultural color guard and sang in the choir.

The service was three and a half hours long, but the men remained engaged and impressed with witnessing black men of all ages worshipping. The worship style was different from the traditional norms of the Baptist church but made the impression needed to energize the men from the three groups.

Debriefing the experience revealed possibilities that were never considered before. The men of Ninth Tabernacle were seen as proud, energetic, engaged, invested and strong, with no manufactured overtones of masculinity. They were completely genuine. In questioning their praise and song, the men mentioned they could hear the baritone and bass of the men as much as they heard the women. This discovery was key to the research and was the impetus needed to engage the men to participate in the doxology at Friendship. In addition, they remembered a particular song about God's strength at Jericho, where the men from the congregation participated and they wanted to sing, but they did not know the words to the song.

Taking this experience as a learning opportunity, the decision was made to select hymns for Sunday with words that were meaningful, relative and displayed God's strength. In addition, it was suggested to have a man lead the congregation in the morning hymn from the floor to engage the men. The words of the song were read before the music accompaniment to familiarize the men with the significance of the song, and certain stanzas were assigned only for the men to sing.

James Weldon Johnson's Negro National Anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was selected; upon reading the words the men began to reply "that's right" and without hesitation, the men began to sing. Upon singing their stanza the men were heard, the men were proud and the men became a part of the doxology, praising God in song.

Next Steps

The men of Friendship have taken over a multitude of responsibilities; the volunteerism rate is unprecedented. The next steps will be the initiation of a Friday evening fifty-minute men's worship service with no religious connotations or overtones. The service will consist of fellowship, word, prayer and the breaking of bread. They have agreed to no dress code, no titles, and it will be called "meeting with the brothers." Room will be allotted for emergencies and participation in community events as a brotherhood.

The expectation of the brothers is to continue to develop their prayer lives. Instructions and lessons will be given to prepare them to maintain a healthy prayer life, to ensure a constant line of communication with God in devotion and prayer. Guiding them in their private prayer life and understanding its importance will prep them for public prayer, where they are not ashamed to talk to God in public because of their familiarity in talking to God. Helping the brothers understand how God uses them as conduits and spokesperson in their walks of life that God may be glorified in them.

As a collective body the men continue to gain strength and support through camaraderie, but beneath the surface attention and detail will continue to focus on the development of each brother. To address the concerns, needs and frustrations that remain hidden or contained, general concepts will be introduced offering the necessary assistance needed to strengthen brothers on an individual level without unnecessary attention.

These housekeeping issues address the needed responsibilities to maintain one's personal homeostasis within the whole to function as a healthy supportive individual. From men's health and wellness to financial consultation on credit repair and retirement planning are on the agenda, the reconciliation with family and loved ones has become a recent topic of discussion are being planned for the coming year.

The Prayer Problem

One of the main frustrations for the brothers is the development of a personal prayer life. Workshops will be given to prepare the men to develop and maintain a healthy prayer life to ensure a constant line of communication with God in devotion and prayer. Prayer for men remains the one dynamic that provides the strength, patience, hope, and trust in God through the simplistic process of prayer, yet it remains a difficult task to undertake. Guiding the men in developing their private prayer life and understanding its significance will prep them to provide prayer for others. Building their knowledge of God and how God uses them as conduits and spokesperson in their walks of life comes through the active prayer life.

The problem with prayer for men comes with the personal routine of prayer; they follow and participate in corporate and congregational prayer, but fail to initiate a personal obligation to prayer. Men continue to mention the difficulties they have with the submission component, the traditional problems and the visual portrayal of prayer in the Christian religious setting.

Prayer between Judaism and Islam are identical in preparation and execution. The frustration lies in the chronological order of each religion's practice of prayer versus the visual display portrayed through Christian artwork. The differentiation between the

Eastern Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the local Protestant Church draws interest regarding the style or change to the mannerisms of prayer.

Jesus being Jewish would pray in the standard Judaic style, also maintaining the traditional customs of prayer, Matthew 5:17-20 (KJV) “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” This assures us that Jesus held the traditions of the synagogue regarding the law, which includes the prayer requirements. The question is if Judaism instituted the act of prayer, the Eastern Orthodox Church came out of Judaism and Islam followed the Christian church by four hundred plus years; the question is why is there such difficulty in identifying or understanding the Christian mannerism of prayer?

The problem comes to the surface when asking men whom they admire when it comes to prayer, the overall answer were the Jews and Muslims. Looking for a systemic answer when Judaism preceded Christianity and Islam followed Christianity, how or where did the variations in prayer take place?

Researching from the Eastern Orthodox Church progressing to the modern day Protestant church and its numerous denominations, one can begin to understand how the traditional prayer manner became diluted, altered, modernized, practical, secularized or mystical over time. Researching the departure from Judaic prayer is more popularly dated back to the ecumenical council of Chalcedon in 451, dividing Eastern and Western Christianity over the nature of Christ and speaking of the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, Jenkins flushes this out and reveals the effects of the divide.

This left the Orthodox in command of the empire and the mainstream church apparatus. Over the next two centuries, many of the traditional centers of Christianity saw themselves as oppressed by the tyrannical rulers of Rome and Constantinople. Already, Christianity was bitterly

divided between Western (European) and Eastern (Asian and African) models. Denominations arising directly from these theological squabbles survive today and have only barely patched up their differences.⁸²

Surprisingly upon using this as a precise timeline, Jenkins sheds light on a matter of greater excitement pertaining to the practice of prayer in the life of black men. This dismisses the initial intent using the continuous schisms of the church to prove how prayer became the multifaceted practice of today.

Through scarcely known by Westerners, the Ethiopian church offers on of the most heroic success stories in Christianity. Not surprisingly given its location, the church drew heavily on Egyptian influence. Through the Middle Ages, the symbolic center of the Christian Kingdom was at the ancient capital of Aksum, long a point of contact with Pharaonic Egypt. An episcopal see was founded here around 340, and this remained the “home of the Ark of the Covenant, Ethiopia’s original New Jerusalem.” The Egyptian connection created a potent monastic tradition that endures to this day.⁸³

Jenkins sums this up stating “The Ethiopian church has many aspects that would surprise a Westerner, including practices that stem from Judaism.” This precedes the schism of 451, and the discovery is found in the continuous practice of the Ethiopian Christians that are likened to Judaism also practiced by the Eastern Orthodox Church reflective in the prayer mannerism of Islam.

This places an authentic understanding as to how prayer has been modified upon each split of the church and the claiming of each denomination to take on their own unique identity differentiated from the former practices of the previous faith. The black men of Friendship Baptist would be more receptive to this information which has cultural and historical roots without the normal modifications to the existing mannerisms of

⁸² Jenkins, Philip. *Next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 22.

⁸³ Jenkins, Philip. 23.

prayer. This removes the Europeanized ideology and influence of prayer which will prayerfully make it easier to introduce, teach, instruct and implement to the men of Friendship.

Unpacking the concept of prayer from the Ethiopian Orthodox church and presenting it as a workable reality for the men of Friendship will be a timely undertaking. The historical evidence is there but, the traditional Baptist protocol will come into question which may introduce multiple denominational inquiries. This may produce both positive and negative results but either way, it will have men reading, thinking, inquiring, questioning and discovering.

Summary

This attempt to energize and revitalize the men's ministry at the Friendship Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York is a single effort to do something, anything other than standing idle. This research has revealed methods and concepts that will present new questions and dialogue to the conversation in developing sustainable men's ministries for black men. This is no attempt to segregate black men from any other culture, but it is to address the problems and concerns black men have with the black Christian church.

“The capacity of blacks to survive tremendous suffering and hardship is well documented. The fact that they should have to endure is intolerable.”⁸⁴ This knowledge of what not only black men, but black families suffer, must be taken into consideration and precede the laying out of the ministry outline, presentation, and execution.

Reflecting on the previous models of men's ministries over the past forty years, one

⁸⁴ Solomon, Barbara Bryant. *Black empowerment: social work in oppressed communities*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, 383.

question challenges all that has been experienced, “What happens when the event is over?” How do black men maintain until the next event, or are they left to reminisce on the past events until the next one?

The steps addressed in this research are simple in design and leaves room for personal modification and adaptation to engage ministry from a different perspective. Accomplishments in exchange for goals will be beneficial for leaders and participants if it’s a ministry for the men and not solely the leader.

The final model for energizing and revitalizing the men at Friendship consisted of men representing every aspect of the black community and experience. There were men that were middle class, college graduates, ex-offenders, former addicts, men in recovery, retirees, college students, educators, and the unemployed were present and engaged in the development of this research. This study confirms seventeen disciplines presented in three phases, the first suggests the development and preparation of the ministry leader to;

- 1) know the history of the church, faith, and ministry you represent,
- 2) develop your leadership philosophy finding your comfort zone and maintaining your confidence,
- 3) familiarize yourself with the stigmas men have with your belief system,
- 4) work on a multiple of approaches,
- 5) consider the use of philosophical, psychological and theological methods,
- 6) and use the container concept when viewing the brothers in your ministry.

The second set of disciplines are based on interacting with the brothers suggesting;

- 7) Read the Room,
- 8) find the alpha male,
- 9) equalize the playing field with the use of “brother,”
- 10) unify them from amongst them, not before them or leading them,
- 11) mobilize them toward simple and small goals.

The third and final set of disciplines combines the leader, men, and the space;

- 12) the actual approach,
- 13) listen to the

language and use contextual language, 14) environment, 15) the thin space, 16) creating the space, 17) respect, and as a result of these energizing, empowering, discovering and revitalizing a ministry for the benefit of its men becomes a possibility.

Conclusion

If not us, who? If not now, when? This quote coined by Hillel the Elder and rephrased by John F. Kennedy, Mikhail Gorbachev, John Lewis, and as recent as Emma Watson in her fight for universal gender equality continue to raise the same question, “If not us, who? If not now, when?”

The timeline associated with each rephrasing of Hillel’s quote reveals the continued need for each generation to tackle the tough challenges that lie before them to find ways in which to thrive. Looking at the state of black men in America, there is a sense of urgency that continues to surface over, and over, and over again. Benaiah’s story constantly comes to mind as he tells of his encounter in a pit, with a lion on a snowy day. The realization is, God placed us here in this generation, in this time, in these religious institutions and community for a purpose. What has been revealed, witnessed and felt are not there for the sake of consuming one’s time on earth, but to be engaged.

If placed in a church in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, then it is through the means of this church to do your part for the greater good. The fact is, I have three children, seven grandchildren and out of them, there are four males. If we do not uphold our part in bringing about a better reality for black men, then who? If action is not taken in this day and time for the next generation, then when? The lion has surfaced again, and it is at this time if he should fall into a pit on a snowy day; it is our responsibility to assure the generations to come that the beast that has surfaced and devoured our black

men and has brought our God to question never surfaces again. Barak Obama sums it up best on February 5, 2008, after being nominated the Democratic presidential candidate on Super Tuesday; “We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. We are the hope of those boys who have so little, who've been told that they cannot have what they dream, that they cannot be what they imagine. Yes, they can.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Obama, Barak. “Acceptance Speech,” New York Times; February 5, 2008.

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