

Men in the Mirror

Orienting Our Lives Toward a
Christ-Centered Masculinity



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Cover images by Rolf Holmquist.

Rolf and his wife Diane lost their daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter to domestic violence in 2012.

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Background and Rationale

In every society males of all ages hear and internalize a variety of messages about the definition and “appropriate” expression of their masculinity. Some of these messages have positive impacts on men’s development and sense of identity, such as exercising patience and empathy toward others. Other internalized messages have destructive implications for the well-being of men and those with whom they are in relationships. Some men learn to view females as objects of sexual desire, or as beings biologically and morally inferior to them. Then there are messages that can have either positive or negative implications. A message about men being in control could mean practicing self-control or could mean trying to control others.

A wide variety of sources communicate mixed messages about masculinity: parents and peers, teachers and mentors, sports and the advertising industry, social mores and faith communities. These messages are often contradictory and confusing for children, teens and young men as they seek to define their masculinity and personal identity. In our society—due largely to the message that it’s not appropriate for men to share private emotions—men have little or no opportunity to critically examine with other men the messages regarding their masculinity.

Contradictory or negative messages can negatively impact a man’s sense of identity and can potentially create problems in men’s interpersonal relationships, whether the relationships are in families and groups or in businesses and faith communities.

Some messages about masculinity may lead to destructive behavior patterns, including domestic and family violence, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and even human trafficking. These are critical issues in every culture—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, education level, religious background or other factors. Although these examples represent an extreme on the continuum of distorted relational skills, every male could benefit from a constructive and objective forum in which to evaluate the underlying messages that impact their relationships.

Over the past 10 years, I have written many articles and educational materials and have taught a number of workshops on ending domestic violence. Most men with whom I have worked have a deep understanding that physical, psychological, sexual and other forms of manipulative, self-centered and/or controlling behaviors directed towards others, especially family, are not acceptable behaviors. But they are unsure how to change those patterns of behavior. Other men have less awareness of the problems of their behaviors towards family members and towards women and children in general. This course provides these men with the opportunity for critical self-reflection with other men who, although they may not engage in any form of domestic violence, still wrestle with issues of identity involving their masculinity.

The prevalence of a distorted male identity and its impact on relational skills is by no means a problem unique to North America. Having worked in Hispanic churches in Central America, I have come to understand the destructive and even deadly consequences of machismo on relationships within Hispanic communities. In parts of Africa and Asia and within some subcultures around the world, the spread and stigma of HIV and AIDS also is shown to have roots in distorted male perceptions about women and girls. Sex trafficking (a form of modern-day slavery) victimizes vulnerable children and women, turning them into products for men to buy and use.

Why Such a Study in the Church?

The church is in a unique position to provide men and boys with an opportunity to critically assess the conflicting messages that define masculinity and to explore what makes a healthy relationship. A common set of values and an ongoing relationship binds together a faith community, making it an ideal space for honest dialog.

Exploring the often conflicting messages about masculinity provides the church with a unique opportunity to reach out to men in a constructive and nonjudgmental manner. This approach can be particularly helpful to men whose actions have been harmful to others, who may already feel judged and shamed by society and themselves. The church has a great opportunity to evangelize men through this approach precisely because it offers an opportunity for developing strong and positive personal and spiritual maturity, accountability and healthy relationship skills.

Beyond the shared values, Christian faith communities also claim allegiance to a central voice of authority—the Holy Bible. The Bible teaches us how to live in relationship with God and each other. And the New Testament invites us to become a disciple of Jesus and to learn how to become more Christ-like in our relationships with God and with all other human beings.

The Author's Perspective

This course is not written by someone who is an expert on masculinity. Rather it is written by a man who has struggled and continues to struggle with the dynamics of personal relationships. I continue to discover the impact of negative messages about masculinity (internalized and reinforced since my childhood) on relationships in my life. It has been my experience that when these messages remain unexamined they continue to direct men's behavior in subconscious ways, and possibly contradict our rational thinking.

As a son and husband, as a father to a son and daughter, and as a pastor and educator, I have come to this issue with a desire to grow in every arena of my relationships. As a pastor and educator I have studied, written about and taught numerous groups over the years about God's will for healthy relationships. Yet I often find myself falling short of what I recognize to be the most healthy dynamics within my own family relationships. I am eternally grateful for the role of grace in relationships.

On some occasions I have had the opportunity to share with other men in small group settings, and that experience has often reinforced my own learning and strengthened my commitment to personal growth. This course provides a context for men to develop trust in each other and to grow deeper in their faith and in Christian discipleship. It encourages males—from teenagers to older adulthood—to minister to each other by listening to their struggles, encouraging one another in Bible study and by praying with each other and covenanting with each other towards personal and interpersonal growth.

This course is grounded in the authority of Scripture and the theological doctrine that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. Although the humanity of Jesus is a model from which both male and female disciples can learn, this course focuses on males and is based on the premise that one's humanity is expressed through one's gender. As men, we can best understand what it means to be a disciple by learning from the humanity of Jesus as he was a man in relationship with other people, who taught about God's will for our interactions with one another. Therefore this course critically examines the many messages that men and boys hear about their masculinity and encourages the centering of their identities on the model of Jesus Christ.

About the Course

Course Objectives

The learner will:

- begin to identify a variety of voices within his own society that have influenced his working definition of masculinity;
- identify within himself the impact the messages about masculinity have on the intimate relationships he has with others (i.e. spouse, children, relatives, friends and coworkers, etc.);
- begin to critically examine the messages our culture communicates about masculinity, and to consider how those messages compare and conflict with our call to be disciples of Jesus Christ;
- define and apply a “hermeneutic of relationship” (identifying the qualities and relational skills that Jesus demonstrated in his relationships with all types of people) to a variety of scripture passages;
- seek to understand the ways that Jesus demonstrated his humanity (masculinity) by examining his relationships and his teachings;
- build an understanding of how Jesus related to other people in a variety of settings and from that understanding, construct a Christ-centered masculinity;
- commit to learn from and apply a Christ-centered masculinity to relationships;
- develop a covenant of accountability with at least one other man in the group and commit to continue dialogue with that person for a period of at least three months after the course has been completed.

Materials

- A Bible for each participant
- A copy of the student pages for each participant
- Paper and pencil for each participant
- Flip chart with newsprint paper and felt-tipped markers, or dry erase board and markers
- A name tag for each participant for each session if participants don't know each other.

Content and Scriptural Overview

Session 1—A First Glance in the Mirror: Naming the Problem

Scripture: Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 7:1–13; Matthew 11:28–30

Focus: Examining the messages about masculinity that our culture communicates

Session 2—Created in the Image of . . .

Scripture: Genesis 1:26–27; Colossians 1:15–20

Focus: Understanding our identity from God's perspective

Session 3—Into the Looking Glass

Scripture: Luke 8:40–56; Matthew 9:18–26

Focus: Examining preconceived notions of male superiority

Session 4—Through A Glass Darkly: Facing the Shadow Self

Scripture: John 8:1–11

Focus: Comparing ourselves to others and justifying ourselves

Session 5—Don't Just Do Something . . . Stand There!

Scripture: John 4:7–30, 39–42; Luke 18:9–14

Focus: Learning to become consciously aware of the full humanity of others

Session 6—Confronting the Darkness in the Mirror: Objectifying Women

Scripture: 2 Samuel 11:2–27

Focus: Acknowledging the sinful tendency of males to sexualize females, especially when they are attractive

Session 7—When Evil Stares Back from the Mirror: Lust and Loathing

Scripture: 2 Samuel 13:1–39

Focus: Confronting the repulsiveness of lust and the responses to relational evil

Session 8—Mirroring Our Fathers and God as Father: Exploring Male Relationships

Scripture: Luke 15:11–32; Matthew 18:21–35; Luke 23:32–43

Focus: Exercising forgiveness in a way that preserves our relationships with others and reflects the One in whose image we are created

Session 9—Keep a Stiff Upper Lip: A Man's Public Image

Scripture: John 2:13–17; Mark 11:15–19; John 11:1–44

Focus: Reflecting on the learned behavior of suppressing our tender feelings and exploring how this puts us out of touch with ourselves and others

Session 10—The Reflection in Your Suit of Armor: Redefining Authority and Greatness

Scripture: Matthew 3:13–17; Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 14:7–14

Focus: Moving from self-centeredness to the servant leadership modeled by Jesus

Session 11—A Sidelong Glance at the Selfish Side of Success

Scripture: Luke 12:13–31; Luke 22:24–30; John 13:3–17

Focus: Contrasting self-worth based on possessions and power with self-worth based on the quality of relationships

Session 12—The Look of Love: Acceptance and Friendship

Scripture: Luke 19:1–10; John 15:12–17; Matthew 28:16–20

Focus: Exploring how friendship and mutuality empower lives and ministry

Session 13—Be the Mirror for Someone Else . . .

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:11–13; John 15:12–17

Focus: Celebrating opportunities for continued growth and reconciliation

Course Overview

This course will look at a variety of passages of Scripture, primarily from the four Gospels, to understand how Jesus engages in relationships.

You will look at the way that Jesus interacts with others to identify relationship skills that we—as his disciples—should apply in our relationships. You will also study some of Jesus' teachings about how to treat others and live fully into the community God intends for us.

Apply a focus on how Jesus engages in relationships with those around him (a hermeneutic of relationship) to the study of this passage by asking the following questions:

- Who are the primary characters in the text?
- What is the relationship that Jesus has with each of the primary characters in the text?
- What are the problems that Jesus confronts in the text?
- What does Jesus communicate about his values of men, women, and children in the text?
- What are the relationship dynamics (both overt behaviors and subtle attitudes) that Jesus teaches in the text?
- What issues or behaviors in our lives or society are similar to what Jesus criticizes in scripture?
- How do the issues revealed in this text apply to the way we live our lives? The way we engage in our relationships?
- How does this text challenge our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ?

Session 1—A First Glance in the Mirror: Naming the Problem

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 7:1-13; Matthew 11:28-30

Focus: Examining the messages about masculinity that our culture communicates

Preparation

- Collect blank name tags and pens, a flip chart, newsprint paper, and felt-tipped markers.
- On a sheet of newsprint, print the course objectives listed in the introduction.
- Make a copy of Student Page 1 for each participant.
- Read over the Bible study options and decide which will fit your time frame.

Gathering (5 minutes)

As the men enter the room, ask them to make a name tag. When most participants have arrived, gather together.

1. Pray together.

Pray the following prayer, or one of your choosing:

Gracious God, we come as men of faith, dependent upon the Lordship of Christ in our lives to help us to grow as disciples. We vow our allegiance and loyalty to you, Lord Jesus. Through love and through your devotion to your disciples you demonstrated what full maturity as a servant of God means. We come to study your Holy Word, bringing with us our society's and our own understandings of what it means to be a man, so that we may learn anew how to walk in your footsteps as true and faithful male servants. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

In 1 Corinthians 13:9-13, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe the way that human beings view their lives.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This course utilizes the metaphor of the mirror to examine the varied and often conflicting messages about masculinity. By studying the life (and humanity) of Jesus Christ—men have a mirror by which to evaluate interpersonal skills and orientation to life. Such an approach leads men deeper into Christian discipleship, encouraging men to embrace a truer expression of Christ-like humanity in their lives.

2. Discuss messages about masculinity.

Ask the men to name the messages about masculinity that they learned while growing up—

adjectives or phrases that indicate what it means to be a man (i.e. strong, decisive, never cry, stoic, faithful, honor, good provider, strong protector, measured by how well you hold your liquor or how many girlfriends or sexual conquests you have, don't back down, take charge of your life/your girlfriend/your family, sow your oats, don't stop until you get what you want, and so forth). List these messages on a sheet of newsprint on the flip chart in front of the class.

These messages create cultural norms and mores about what it means to be a male in relationship to other human beings. Point out that many of these concepts have positives and negatives. For example, protecting the security of one's family is positive, while protecting one's "sense of property or domain" when challenged by a wife or child is negative. Consider the positive and negative impacts of several of the qualities listed by the group.

Discuss how messages regarding masculinity may conflict with one another. Encourage the men to identify how some of the messages have created problems for them in their own relationships. Refer the group to the questions on the student page, and discuss them together.

Keep the list of messages for use in Session 4.

3. Present course objectives, format and mindsets.

Use the messages about masculinity to lead into an overview of the workshop and its objectives. Call the group's attention to the newsprint sheet with the course objectives, and read the list aloud. Ask the course participants to commit to attending three sessions before they decide whether this course is of value to them. Tell the group this curriculum's value comes from group discussions, which may not be evident after attending only one session.

Over the next 13 sessions you will be exploring openly their understanding of masculinity and how definitions of masculinity have impacted personal relationships. Say that for most of us this is a risky and unsettling prospect because it opens us to a position of vulnerability. One of the messages our society teaches us about masculinity is to remain strong, to create barriers that conceal our imperfections and to resist sharing those imperfections with others. This learned response not only creates barriers in our relationships with other people, it creates barriers between us and God. It also keeps us from ever understanding the depth of who we are as unique human beings.

This course creates an encounter between our lives and the Holy; we will see the imperfections of our lives against the transcendent holiness of Jesus Christ. It is natural for us as human beings to fear an encounter with the Holy, especially when doing so reveals our mistakes and flaws as human beings. But this course is not designed to condemn and shame individuals into paralysis, rather it invites us to start with our present context and to embrace the life-giving growth of Jesus Christ by learning from his patterns of relating to other human beings. It extends God's grace to men as an agent of change rather than condemnation as an agent of shame.

Tell participants that this course will allow for as much or as little personal disclosure as one is willing to offer, but, generally speaking, the more participants are willing to share, the more value this course will have in helping each participant create healthy relationships. This works best when there is shared dialogue between individuals and no one dominates the conversation.

4. Study the Bible.

Pick two of the three options listed below to study together, reading the passages and discussing the related material on Student Page 1.

- *Matthew 17:1–8: Encountering the holy*
- *Mark 7:1–13: Invited to embrace the mind of Christ*
- *Matthew 11:28–30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me"*

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure.

Divide the men into pairs and ask each person to take three or four minutes to share a brief introduction of their lives with their partner. This should include at least their name, age, where they grew up, their occupation or profession, their family and any expectations they have of this course. When the men share their stories, they should engage their partner with eye contact and openness.

Point out that the hard work of this course is not done in the sessions, but in applying the lessons. Participants will be redefining and applying that new definition to our relationships, especially with those individuals who we love.

Say, "Allow the teachings of Jesus you have encountered in this course to inform the way you relate to others. And more importantly, meditate and pray over what you have learned, that you may find yourself daily transformed by the image of Jesus Christ, who is both Lord and Savior of our lives.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Summarize the basic points.

Summarize the lesson, using the following talking points:

- We hear and learn a variety of messages that define for us what it means to be a male.
- Some of those messages have positive impacts on our relationships and sense of identity, while other messages have negative impacts. Still other messages can have both positive and negative impacts depending on how we apply them in our lives.
- Generally speaking, men have learned not to share personal feelings and are not afforded the opportunity to reflect together on their struggles with their identities.
- As a male and as the savior of humankind, Christ invites us into a trusting relationship with him, where we can learn without condemnation.

Reiterate the objectives of the course, and the value of pursuing these objectives in a group.

7. Close in prayer.

Invite the men to enter into silent prayer for the person with whom they shared in the self-disclosure activity and for themselves. Then close with a brief prayer asking God's presence with the group as they engage in the study in the coming weeks.

Homework

In preparation for the next session, invite participants to do the following:

Think and pray about Mark 7:1–13 and how your personal list of messages about masculinity dim your understanding of who Christ calls you to be.

Session 1– A First Glance in the Mirror: Naming the Problem

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 7:1-13; Matthew 11:28-30

Focus: Examining the messages about masculinity that our culture communicates

In 1 Corinthians 13:9–13, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe the way that human beings view their lives.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; but then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This course utilizes the metaphor of the mirror to examine the varied and often conflicting messages about masculinity. Studying the life (and humanity) of Jesus Christ gives us a mirror by which to evaluate interpersonal skills. Such an approach leads us deeper into Christian discipleship, encouraging men to embrace a truer expression of Christ-like humanity in our lives.

Messages About Masculinity

From the list compiled by the class, identify a list of the various messages that you adopted or internalized at some point in your life.

- How did they impact you both positively and negatively?

- Which messages still influence your sense of identity today?

Bible Study

- ***Matthew 17:1-8: Encountering the holy***

Read the scripture.

This is a passage which reveals the Transfiguration of our Lord in front of three of his male disciples. It reveals the divinity of the Christ in the man, Jesus; expresses the total affirmation of God in the revelation of Jesus as the Christ; and commands Jesus' disciples to listen to what he says. The disciples are fearful because they recognize they are in the presence of the holiness of God. But Jesus reassures them.

Discuss: What mistakes and imperfections do you fear having exposed?

The course leader will lead a discussion of the relevance of this passage as we begin a study of masculinity. When we encounter the holy we want to remain with it instead of reentering the hectic stresses of this world. But Jesus invites us down the other side of the mountain top experience, for life itself remains ahead. We are called to take what we learn about Jesus into our daily lives.

- ***Mark 7:1–13: Invited to embrace the mind of Christ***

Read the scripture.

It is common for traditions (even religious traditions) to become distorted, perhaps conflicting with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Reflect on this passage and on ways which we—as we seek the mind of Christ—have grown beyond the distorted traditions that limit rather than magnify the potential of all people. (Consider the role of women in leadership positions in the church and/or the changes in racial equality in our society.)

The church has engaged in a code of silence regarding the relationship of husbands to wives and to families. By turning to Christ and his involvement in human relationships, we are able to critique the norms of our society. Look back at the messages that we have heard from our society. Begin the process of critiquing some of those messages.

Discuss: How have some messages about masculinity created unhealthy dynamics in families? Created a counter-productive set of values within a man?

- ***Matthew 11:28–30: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me”***

Read the scripture.

This passage helps to allay any concerns or fears that may still exist about the intentions of the course. Jesus Christ tells us that though his teachings contradict much of what our society defines as a “healthy” definition of masculinity, those teachings are based on the concept of true humanity and are to be trusted by those who are his disciples. The teachings of Christ allow for respect, mutuality, servant leadership, agape love, acceptance and trust to grow in the life of each individual.

Homework

Think and pray about Mark 7:1–13 and how your personal list of messages about masculinity dim your understanding of who Christ calls you to be.

Session 2—Created in the Image of . . .

Scripture: Genesis 1:25-27; Colossians 1:15-20

Focus: Understanding our identity from God’s perspective

Preparation

- On newsprint, print the following cultural messages
 - ◆ Males are uniquely created in the image of God and have been given the authority to make unilateral decisions for themselves, their partners and their families.
 - ◆ You are the man of the house.
 - ◆ Take charge and get what is coming to you.
- Make two copies per participant of “A Covenant of Class Participation,” as well a copy of Student Page 2 for each participant.
- For a good introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, see the Presbyterians Today special edition publication, “What Presbyterians Believe” (June 2011), available at <http://store.pcusa.org/1211611013>.
- Consider making a diagram of the Trinity on newsprint, showing the relationship of all three persons of the Trinity through three intersecting circles in the grid of a triangle.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your own choosing:

Most Loving God, you created us as human beings in your image, with a mind to know you, a heart to love you and a desire to serve you. But we have distorted that reflection by focusing too much on our images and failing to look at you first. Our knowledge is imperfect and our offerings of love are inconsistent and incomplete. Teach us anew, Lord, to grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ that we may see him more in the actions of our lives every day. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

2. Make a covenant.

Distribute two copies of “A Covenant of Class Participation” to each course participant. Invite a volunteer to read the covenant aloud for the group, and discuss any questions that may arise. Ask the men to sign both copies of the covenant, giving one copy to the leader and keeping one copy.

Exploring (40 minutes)

3. Study the Bible.

- *Genesis 1:26–27: Created in the image of . . .*

4. Explore the doctrine of the Trinity—created in the image of God to be in relationship.

5. Study more scripture.

- *Colossians 1:15–20: The image of the invisible God*

Responding (10 minutes)

6. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure.

In groups of three, invite participants to take three minutes each to reflect on a negative message of masculinity that they learned growing up, and to share some of the problems that particular message has created in their lives as adults. (For example, internalizing the message that “men don’t talk about their feelings” sets us up for growing out of touch with our own feelings, and becoming isolated in relationships with others.)

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Summarize the session’s basic points.

Go over the following points, listing on newsprint if desired:

- The Bible teaches us that we are all—male and female—created in the image of God.
- The language of God in Genesis 1:25–27 identifies God in the plural.
- The doctrine of the Trinity defines God as three persons in community with one another.
- As human beings created in the image of God, we have been created to be in community.
- Women, just as men, reflect part of the identity of God. We must be open to how God is working through women in our relationships.
- If we as men think that we alone are created in the image of God, we make idols of our gender.
- By studying Jesus’ relationships shown in the Gospels, we can identify and apply the wisdom of God to our relationships.

8. Close with prayer.

Invite a member of the class to close the session with prayer.

Homework

Ask the men to read Mark 14:3–9 and Luke 7:36–50 and reflect on the materials in the homework section of Student Page 2.

Session 2—Created in the Image of . . .

Scripture: Genesis 1:25-27; Colossians 1:15-20

Focus: Understanding our identity from God’s perspective

Bible Study

- **Genesis 1:26-27: created in the image of . . .**

Read the scripture.

Notice that this passage says “God said, ‘Let us create humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . .’ (vs. 25) So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”

The first point worth noting is that the voice of God in verse 25 is a plural voice: “let *us* make . . . in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.” Why is the creator God identified in the plural? Jewish scholars believe that this text refers to the role of Wisdom as partner with the creator God. (See Proverbs 8, particularly verses 22–31, for Wisdom’s role in creation.) Christian scholars believe that this is a reference to the concept of God as community, as understood in the doctrine of the Trinity. The creation of humanity (both male and female) reveals a broader image and likeness of God rather than just one gender.

Today fundamentalist Christianity teaches that only the male reflects the true image of God. This is what Augustine of the fourth century believed and taught, reinforced by his interpretation of the writings of the Apostle Paul. In fact, Augustine introduced a form of hierarchy into gender relationships, surmising that because males were created in the same gender as Jesus Christ, they are the more godly gender. Conversely, Augustine believed and taught that it was through the female that sin entered the world. He believed that it was the duty of the “more-godly male” to save the woman from her sinful state. This is called dualism and separates males and females in their relationships with Christ by gender alone. Only within the last one hundred years has this doctrinal position been seriously challenged within mainline Christianity.

Only within the last 50 years has our culture (and mainline religions) shown an understanding of women as being created equal in the image of God. Partially because of a disconnection between theology and practical living, many males still make the household’s important decisions unilaterally. . Many men still believe that they are the only gender created in the image of God, and therefore that they have a divinely ordained responsibility to decide what is right for the family.

Think about how this concept plays out in society and identify some ways that this male-dominant orientation damages family relationships. This model can create dysfunctional relationships men live out in family relationships—from men feeling misunderstood and underappreciated at one end of the spectrum to abusive behavior, estrangement and even murder on the other end of the spectrum.

Consider the difference that a fuller understanding of Genesis 1:25–27 has on family relationships, where the male is only part of the image of God, balanced by the female.

- How does this change the way we relate to each other?
- How does this image promote a mutuality of working together, discovering wholeness in each other’s life and perspectives?

The Doctrine of the Trinity: In Relationship

A core doctrine of Christianity is the belief in the Trinity—one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or by role—Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. The doctrine of the Trinity is a complex notion of understanding the

fullness of an infinite God. To make this comprehensible, the Bible distinguishes three different categories, or “persons,” of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- **God as Father** is the source, the creator of everything, eternal and infinite, from whom all creation and life comes. It is God the creator who created the relationship with the first human beings and established the concept of covenant with Abraham, Sarah and their offspring. It is God the creator who sent the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world to provide the world with direction, sustenance and redemption.
- **The Son is Jesus Christ**, God in human form, the one who came to teach and interpret the will of God. Jesus is fully God, but also fully human, and as such is the redeemer of human life who relates intimately with humanity, the one who restores fallen humanity to right relationship with God. Through his life, death and resurrection, he reveals the power of God’s infinite love to restore our lives. As the one who was resurrected from the dead, he opens the door to eternal life for humanity.
- **The Holy Spirit provides the sustaining presence of God** in this life. The Holy Spirit was present at the time of creation with God the Father and God the Son and has always been a partner with God. Jesus told his followers that the Holy Spirit is the Advocate and the Comforter who remains with the church to direct and guide it in life. The Spirit of God intercedes for humanity, as Paul says in his letter to the church at Rome, “with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26), and also helps believers to interpret the will of God in their lives and actions.

The three persons of the Trinity are best illustrated through three intersecting circles in the grid of a triangle. This demonstrates each person’s unique roles, but also—within the overlapping dimensions of their circles—how each person has overlapping roles with the other members of the Trinity. Whatever is done by one of the persons of the Trinity integrates with a part of the other two persons.

If God in Three Persons reflects God as community, and we are created in the image of God, we are then created to be within community. This course emphasizes the relational dimension of God—the notion of God as community.

Reflect on the following:

- How does the Holy Spirit complement and support the work of God the Father and God the Son?
- What principles of relationship do you see in the Trinity that embody the will of God for our lives and our relationships?
- In regard to our relationships, what are the implications of being created in and for community?

Bible Study

- ***Colossians 1:15–20: The Image of the Invisible God***

Read the scripture.

This passage describes Jesus as the Son (the second person of the Trinity) or Redeemer—God in human form. This passage illustrates Jesus being both fully human and fully divine. Because he is fully God, Jesus was present at the beginning of creation and has first place in all things including all human structures of power. Through the fully human Jesus, God reconciled all things through him in his time on the cross.

We look with confidence to Jesus Christ to reveal to humanity the way to salvation—in the eternity and in the here and now. Jesus’ relationships and teachings can help us grow in our discipleship and in working to realize the sovereignty of God’s salvation.

Discuss:

- How does this passage change your understanding of Jesus? Of Jesus’ relationship to the other persons in the Trinity? Of Jesus’ relationship to his disciples?

Homework

Read Mark 14:3–9 and Luke 7:36–50.

In biblical times, hospitality “was the process of ‘receiving’ outsiders and changing them from strangers to guests.”* Hosts were expected to fully welcome a stranger, offering not just protection, but honor. An expression of hospitality made available the host’s self, home and basic resources to provide an atmosphere where stranger/guest and host can get to know each other.

Both of these passages deal with hospitality and self-importance versus honoring another. In both of these passages, the hosts should have offered hospitality to Jesus, but fail to do so. Women who are outsiders offer hospitality to Jesus.

Reflect on the following:

- Why is extending hospitality to another—male or female, family member or stranger—important?
- Compare the behaviors (and attitudes behind the behaviors) of the hosts in each passage with the women in each passage.
- What are the messages that society tells men that inflates their own sense of importance?
- What barriers do we erect between ourselves and those we love that prevent us from showing our true selves and keep us from getting to know others (i.e., being too busy to be interrupted, holding judgmental attitudes or teasing others inappropriately, to name a few)?

To ponder: Simply acknowledging the impact that self-important or male-dominant mindsets have on our lives does not change the behavior. Sharing that understanding and reflecting on it with another person helps us to begin changing our behavior.

**Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, edited by Paul J. Achtemeier (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 408.

A Covenant of Class Participation

Read the covenant of class participation. Sign both copies of the covenant and give one to the course instructor. Keep the other copy of the covenant to refer to as a reminder of the commitment you have made to others and to yourself in this course.

I (print name) _____ covenant to participate actively in each of the sessions of this class. I will be open to hearing the personal reflections of others and will refrain from judging the reflections and personal contributions of each individual in the class.

To the best of my ability I will open my life and my experiences to the teachings of Jesus Christ, trusting that everything shared in the class between course participants will be respected and held in confidence.* *

Signature of Student _____

Course leader _____

* *The only exception to this code of confidentiality would be the disclosure of any information shared that reveals a violation of civil law or reveals a serious physical threat to the well-being of another person, in which case it would be the legal responsibility of the teacher to share such information with civil authorities.

Session 3—Into the Looking Glass

Scripture: Luke 8:40-56; Matthew 9:18-26

Focus: Examining preconceived notions of male superiority

Preparation

- Print the following messages that society teaches about task orientation on newsprint:
 - ◆ “I’m in charge here.”
 - ◆ “Do as I say or get out of my way.”
 - ◆ “My work is more important than that of others” (or even than my relationships with others).
 - ◆ “Don’t bother me now. I’m busy.”
 - ◆ “Just get ‘er done!” (without acknowledging the impact the process has on relationships.)
- Make a copy of Student Page 3 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Merciful God, we have been taught by our culture to claim our authority as men. But we confuse the positive side of that concept with exercising dominance over those with whom we are in relationship. Open our eyes, Lord, to the truth as revealed in the scriptures, especially in the teachings of Christ. May we find our path of learning uncluttered by destructive understandings of masculinity that have made us who we are today. In the name of Christ our Lord, Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Discuss task orientation and handling interruptions.

Point out that many men have internalized society’s message that their work is supremely important—more important than the work of women, and often even more important than their relationships with their families.

Call attention to the other messages posted on newsprint that men hear and the quote in the text box on Student Page 3. Explore them together. Discuss:

- How do these messages conflict with healthy relationships with family members?
- What is “men’s work”? What is “women’s work”?
- What (or whose) work is the most important in your family? What should be the focus in your family?

Anthropologists have widely recognized that there are only two gender-specific tasks (and men can do neither)—childbirth and breast-feeding. It is only cultural norms that assign some tasks to males and others to females. For a man to decide his work is more important than a woman’s work is flawed reasoning and distorts the concept of partnership. Prioritizing work over relationships ignores that God created us to be in community with others.

Look together at the following example from scripture of how Jesus engaged with a major interruption while facing a matter of life and death.

3. Study the Bible.

- **Luke 8:40–56 and Matthew 9:18–26: Jesus, Jairus, the hemorrhaging woman and the child of Jairus**

4. Continue discussing task orientation and handling interruptions.

Point out that men are frequently taught to be task-oriented and to avoid allowing distractions to interrupt our work. Sometimes working on a particular task demands our full attention. For many men, however, we default to focusing on work, rather than mindfully evaluating if relationships need our focus instead.

Call attention to the societal messages you posted. Men hear messages from society that inflate their self-importance and discount the importance of others. Messages like “be in charge” or “take control of the situation” have appropriate contexts, but can be overapplied and harm relationships. To be task oriented at the expense of acknowledging individuals communicates that one’s personal agenda is more important than relationships.

Divide the men into small groups and discuss the following:

- When focused on accomplishing an important task at hand, how often do you fail to take time for interruptions based on issues of importance to our spouses, children or friends?
- How does a default focus on work make our children and other family members feel about your relationship with them? How does it make you feel?
- Can you describe a time when you ignored an interruption by a loved one to finish a task? Could you have found a way to affirm the relationship and accomplish the task?

5. Address our overinflated sense of importance.

In the same small groups of two or three individuals, have the men address this male tendency of an overinflated sense of importance. Assign one of the following passages to each group and ask them to discuss the Mirror Questions on Student Page 3:

- Mark 19:13–15
- Mark 10:13–16
- Matthew 13:24–30
- Matthew 1:40–44
- Luke 5:12–16

If time allows, ask each small group to share with the full group the scripture passage studied and brief answers to the Mirror Questions.

Responding (10 minutes)

6. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure.

In groups of three, take time for each man to share the impact of one negative message about masculinity that he learned growing up, and how it created difficulties for him in his relationships or in his identity as a man. Take about three to four minutes per person for sharing. Try to get men of different generations together for this exercise if the makeup of the class affords that opportunity.

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Summarize the basic points.

- There are only two gender specific tasks—childbirth and breast-feeding. All other behavior and tasks that we perceive to be gender-specific are learned behavior.
- Men tend to have an overinflated sense of the importance of their work. This perception tends to discount the value of interpersonal relationships.
- Jesus repeatedly takes time to address the interruptions that others view as distractions.
- Consistently, Jesus places a much higher value on relationships than on tasks, personal honor or public perception.

8. Pray for one another.

Close the session by dividing the men into groups of two. Invite them to share a particular concern or issue raised from this session. Then encourage the men share those concerns as they pray for each other.

Homework

Ask the men to read Matthew 14:13–23 and reflect on the materials in the homework section of Student Page 3.

Session 3—Into the Looking Glass

Scripture: Luke 8:40-56; Matthew 9:18-26

Focus: Examining preconceived notions of male superiority

“According to men, being masculine means being instrumental and active: a leader, confident and self-reliant, non-expressive of feelings, logical and rational, competitive, ambitious and successful in one’s work.”

—*Masculinity: Identity, Conflict, and Transformation*, by Warren Steinberg
(Boston: Shambhala, 1993), p. 46.

Bible Study

- *Luke 8:40–56; Matthew 9:18–26: Jesus, Jairus, the hemorrhaging woman and the child of Jairus*

In this text, a busy Jesus pauses his agenda to respond to a distraught man, Jairus. It is worth noting that Jairus is the chief authority of the local synagogue—an important man. But Jairus sets aside all measure of status and dignity to plead for the health of his daughter. He publicly throws himself at Jesus’ feet to beg Jesus to save his daughter. Jesus recognizes Jairus’s distress and agrees to help. But a woman (who has bled for 12 years) reaches out to touch Jesus, interrupting the journey to Jairus’s home.

The Hebrew people of Jesus’ day observed purity codes (see Lev. 12 and 15), so contact with a bleeding woman rendered any man she touched unclean. This was a serious violation, especially when the man was a priest or religious leader, because he could not conduct the worship or the business of God’s people until he had been ritually purified—a process that consumed the remainder of the day until sundown. The woman knew if she were caught, it could result in severe punishment, possibly even death (see Lev. 15:31). Not only did she risk violating the purity codes, she also risked offending the temple leader, Jairus, who would see impurity on the man he needed to heal his daughter.

But even as focused as Jesus was on saving the life of Jairus’s child—even with a large crowd pressing in on him—he was still aware that someone had touched him to be healed. He stops progress toward Jairus’s home to address the person who had sought healing. Rather than punish her or berate her for hindering his mission to save a girl’s life, he recognizes just how much the woman needed him. Then the nameless woman who had been ostracized and deemed unclean is addressed by Jesus as if she were a family: “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” Jesus restores her to full health and, more importantly, to full family status with God and God’s people. Jesus also empowers this woman in two ways, by providing the healing she sought and by informing her that it was her faith in God that made her whole.

Jesus was not bound by the social conventions of the day or even the limitations of this finite life. When told that Jairus’s daughter has died, Jesus continues on his way to Jairus’s home and restores the girl to life.

Discuss:

- Did the woman in this story take the power of healing from Jesus or did he give it?
- Who and what are Jesus’ priorities in this story?
- What do you think is the most important thing Jesus did for the woman?
- Where do you see Jesus’ divinity in this story?

- What can we learn from this reaction of Jesus and how can it help us in the future?
- What social conventions or messages about masculinity keep us from having full relationships with others?

Addressing our overinflated sense of importance

In small groups, read one of the following passages and discuss the Mirror Questions in reference to it.

- Mark 19:13–15
- Mark 10:13–16
- Matthew 13:24–30
- Matthew 1:40–44
- Luke 5:12–16

Mirror Questions

- What is the conflict raised in this passage about leadership and self-importance?
- How does Jesus redefine what social conventions are important and what is not?
- How does this challenge the way men relate to others in general?
- How does this illustration challenge your thinking and behavior?
- What will you do to incorporate a change in orientation in your relationships?

Homework

- ***Read Matthew 14:13–23.***

This passage reflects Jesus' call to serve God and others, even when he is emotionally distressed and in need of solitude.

Reflect:

- How does this illustration of Jesus challenge and stretch your willingness to attend to others around you when you are in need of rest or alone time?

Session 4—Through a Glass Darkly: Facing the Shadow Self

Scripture: John 8:1-11

Focus: Comparing ourselves to others and justifying ourselves

Preparation

- On newsprint, print some of the messages society teaches:
 - ◆ “There is always a pecking order, so show your dominance over lesser males.”
 - ◆ “Males, by virtue of gender, are always superior to women.”
 - ◆ “Make the other guy look worse than you by pointing out his faults or weaknesses.”
- Have available the list of messages about masculinity compiled during the opening session.
- Make a copy of Student Page 4 each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Lord God, Source of life and love, you alone are sovereign over all people and relationships. But we confess how easily we fall into the trap of thinking ourselves lord over our families, over other important relationships and over our own lives. Too often we expect those around us to revere us when we discount their worth. Too often we concentrate our criticisms on their shortcomings and fail to acknowledge our own mistakes. Holy Lord, forgive our arrogance and teach us anew the path of Christ, that we may gain the joy of life lived with integrity and grace. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Discuss personas and judging in relationships.

Call attention to the list of messages about masculinity compiled during the opening session and the messages you printed from above.

Discuss:

- What particular messages listed convey a sense of gender, intellectual or spiritual superiority?

Point out that it is a common tendency to overinflate one’s importance by devaluing other people or by overemphasizing their shortcomings. Being self-important and condemning others not only damages relationships, but can destroy other’s sense of worth. This is especially true when the relationship is unequal, such as between a parent and a child or between a controlling husband and a submissive wife. Invite the men to name characteristics and responses of the dominant individual (i.e., feelings of disdain and loathing, messages of disgust or a lack of forgiveness).

Give participants time to read the quote on Student Page 4. We create personas that reflect only our strengths, not allowing others to see us as our true flawed and struggling selves. Discuss:

- What is part of the male persona cultural messages create?
- What is left out?

3. Study the Bible.

- *John 8:1–11: The woman caught in adultery*

4. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure. (10 minutes)

In pairs, invite the men to share with each other a personal illustration that demonstrates how projecting one's superiority damages the relationship we have with that person.

Closing (*5 minutes*)

5. Summarize the basic points.

Summarize using the following:

- In an effort to establish credibility, many men point out their own strengths and the weaknesses of others.
- The persona we create for ourselves is not the true or whole self.
- Not only is one's own persona false, but the persona we construct about others is false as well, and often damages our relationships with those individuals and with others.
- Christ encourages an honest and truthful examination of oneself as a human being before we project a negative persona on our neighbor.

6. Close with prayer.

In the same pairs as for self-disclosure, ask the men to pray for God's forgiveness and guidance in addressing the tendency to compare ourselves with others and judge ourselves superior.

Homework

Ask the men to think of a time they projected superiority onto another person and reflect on the questions in the homework section of Student Page 4.

Session 4—Through a Glass Darkly: Facing the Shadow Self

Scripture: John 8:1-11

Focus: Comparing ourselves to others and justifying ourselves

“The persona is a social construct. It deals with a man or woman in relationship to others, either in reality or fantasy. The persona has to do with a man’s experience of himself in the eyes of another. On the basis of social norms that have been integrated, a man imagines what the situation requires of him, what the social rules and demands are, and then decides whether to present himself according to those requirements. . . . The persona represents a limited way of being human. Even if we were to take all the various personae a man develops—professional, husband, parent, and so on—much of what he potentially could be is not included. In this sense while the persona is real, it is also a false self, in that it is not a complete reflection of a man’s individuality.”

—*Masculinity: Identity, Conflict, and Transformation*, by Warren Steinberg
(Boston: Shambhala, 1993), pp. 43–44

Bible Study

- ***John 8:1–11: The woman caught in adultery***

In this passage, the religious leaders focus their attention on the sins of the woman and fail to see her humanity. The act of publicly shaming the woman demeans her worth and directs attention to her sexual sin. Further, the leaders try to use this woman’s sin to unseat the authority of Jesus. Public shame and ridicule are humiliating actions which undermine the worth of any individual, especially when the one being ridiculed is being used as a pawn for another agenda (see verse 6).

Discuss the questions from Student Page, Bible Study Overview.

Mirror Questions

- How does this illustration in the life of Jesus counter those cultural messages?
- In what ways does this example call us to redirect our attention towards others?
- How does it challenge the way that we discipline or correct others’ behavior?

Homework

Identify a time in your life—preferably recently—when you projected superiority onto another person. Reflect on the following:

- How might you have responded differently in a way that honored the other person’s dignity?
- What might you say to the person about your behavior?

Session 5—Don't Just Do Something . . . Stand There!

Scripture: John 4:7-30, 39-42; Luke 18:9-14

Focus: Learning to become consciously aware of the full humanity of others

Preparation

- On newsprint, print the following messages that society teaches:
 - ♦ “Women who dress a certain way are asking for it” (to be treated as sex objects).
 - ♦ “She must have done something to cause the abuse.”
 - ♦ “She is a Welfare Queen and already gets my tax money! I don't need to help her.”
 - ♦ “Single mothers are somehow damaged or at fault for not having a husband.”
- Make a copy of Student Page 5 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your own choosing:

Holy and Gracious God, when we consider our own relationship to you, we are made keenly aware of our shortcomings. We are truly humbled by and dependent on your grace, as revealed through the cross and resurrection of Christ. We are so dependent on the magnitude of your grace, but too often we judge our neighbors as being inferior to us. Forgive us when we foolishly engage in these thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, Holy God. Remind us once again we are all your children—equally dependent on your love and grace. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Reflect on societal messages.

Call the group's attention to the messages you posted on newsprint, and to the text box on Student Page 5. Invite the men to comment on the messages.

- Which messages resonate with them?
- Which are perhaps part of an subconscious narrative that influences how they view single mothers?
- What power–vulnerability relationships are at play in any of these messages?

3. Study the Bible.

- **John 4:7-30, 39-42: Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well**

Invite the group to read John 4:7-30, 39-42 and the related material from Student Page 5.

- **Luke 18:9-14: The Prayers of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

Invite the group to read Luke 18:9-14 and the related material from Student Page 5.

Responding

4. Reflect on life application. *(10 minutes)*

Invite the men to pair up and to reflect on the application of this lesson in their lives. They may want to identify their own tendencies towards particular judgments or types of people. Encourage the men to revisit the societal messages as they talk. The partners will hold each other in prayer, asking God to help their partner to be more grace-filled and Christ-like in relationships with other people.

Closing *(5 minutes)*

5. Summarize the basic points.

Summarize the following for the group:

- It is a common human tendency to judge and condemn the behavior or character of others, especially those from a different socioeconomic class or culture.
- Condemnation isolates people from the redemptive nature of the community of faith and distorts the judging community as well.
- Jesus challenges the people who are judgmental and demonstrates a different, grace-filled response.
- Jesus demonstrates that one can challenge another's poor behavior without condemning him or her as a person. He urges them to correct their behavior, and by repenting of their wrongs, he encourages them to reclaim their relationship with the whole faith community and with God.

6. Close with prayer.

Invite the men to spend a few moments considering those persons whom they may feel a sense of personal superiority, offering up silent prayer for them. Close with a brief prayer.

Homework

Before the next session, invite the group to practice accepting others with whom they come in contact as whole persons, especially those to whom they may feel superior.

Session 5—Don't Just Do Something . . . Stand There!

Scripture: John 4:7-30, 39-42; Luke 18:9-14

Focus: Learning to become consciously aware of the full humanity of others

“Whenever men presume to be invulnerable in the exercise of power, it is easy that we disdain what cannot wound us (including women). Invulnerability also prompts self-sufficiency and isolation. Learning to acknowledge vulnerability will not lead us necessarily to impotence if it is balanced with an appropriate sense of power. I believe that the lives of men would be enhanced and society would be safer if men lived with a greater awareness of the close link between power and vulnerability.”

—*Jacob's Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*,
by Herbert Anderson (Bridge Resources, 2002), p. 38

Bible Study

- **John 4:7-30, 39-42**

It is a common tendency to judge others, either consciously or subconsciously. When we judge, we are often looking to accomplish two objectives—to communicate one's own superiority and to show the flawed nature of the other person. Even (perhaps especially) for those who are devout and focused on living ethical lives, seeing how one fares in comparison is tempting. Engaging in this type of judgment alienates people and blocks them from enjoying grace expressed in community. This is exactly the issue that Jesus confronts in this passage.

In this parable Jesus the Rabbi from Judea passed through Samaria. Samaria had been conquered by Assyria more than 700 years prior. Jews not only resented the Samaritans for having fallen and destroyed the state of Israel; they also despised them for what they viewed as impure faith in God. By the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans were virtually enemies. Simply by addressing the Samaritan woman, Jesus violates several cultural norms. He speaks to a foreign woman and asks her response. He asks for her to give him water, but merely receiving the cup would render him unclean. He engages her in theological discussion about God when her faith was considered culturally impure.

Mirror Questions

- What does the fact that she had been married five times before suggest about the men who married her? about the quality of the relationships she had with each of them?
- What does the same fact suggest about her?
- Why after five divorces might she be involved with yet another man with whom she is not married?
- The woman identifies Jacob as her ancestor; Jacob is also the ancestor of all Jews. What significance does this fact hold?
- How does Jesus engage in relationship with her?
- What is the focus of Jesus' conversation with her?
- How does this passage of scripture relate to unequal and sexualized relationships that men engage in today?

- Reflect on how easy it is to dismiss someone else if they come from a different social culture than one's own. What can we learn from Jesus about the way he treated the woman at the well?

Read Luke 18:9–14

In this story, the Pharisee represents all that is good in the Jewish society—keeper of the Jewish law, servant of the Jewish faith. The tax collector represents all that is bad. Although he is a Jew, he collects money for the Roman Empire and had the freedom to collect for himself. The tax collector could assure, through Roman military might, that any Jew who did not pay his demands would be punished. No Jew was hated more by his countrymen than a tax collector.

The Pharisee points out his superiority over other people and thanks God for his piety. The tax collector—fearful of even looking up to God—simply says, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” “This man,” Jesus said, “went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Mirror Questions

- How does this passage challenge your piety before God?
- How does it challenge the way you look at marginalized people?
- Why is humility so essential to ones' spiritual health and well-being?
- What other qualities are vital to spiritual health?
- What behaviors or actions of loved ones do we privately judge? Which behaviors do we consider ourselves superior to?
- What are the “stones of self-justification” that you carry with you and are ready to throw at strangers?
- Is there a difference between pointing out the judgmental attitudes of others as opposed to addressing our own?
- How easy is it to fall into the trap of judging others by pointing out what they have done?

Homework

Before the next session, practice accepting as whole persons others with whom you come in contact, especially those toward whom you may feel a sense of personal superiority.

Session 6—Confronting the Darkness in the Mirror: Objectifying Women

Scripture: 1 Samuel 11:2-27

Focus: Acknowledging the sinful tendency of males to sexualize females, especially when they are attractive

Preparation

- On newsprint, print the following societal messages:
 - ◆ “She’s got a body that just won’t quit!”
 - ◆ “Nice ass!”
 - ◆ “What a rack!”
- On another sheet, list the following Christ-centered relational principles:
 - ◆ Every individual is created in the image of God.
 - ◆ We were created to be in relationship with other human beings. We cannot leave that factor out of encounters with others.
 - ◆ Jesus is other-directed rather than self-centered.
 - ◆ Jesus honors the humanity of all people—prominent or marginalized, sinful or moral people.
- Make a copy of Student Page 6 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Merciful God, we acknowledge that you created us all to be whole. In both male and female, we see your image of wholeness. Forgive our tendencies to view women as objects of sexual desire and as a means towards attaining personal gratification and self-worth. We distort the gift of sexuality and sacredness of sex every time we engage in private fantasy about another person. Renew a right spirit within us, O God, that we act in ways that respect the dignity and wholeness of each person and of the relationships to which we are committed. We pray in Christ’s holy name. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Review societal messages.

Societal Messages

From a very young age, boys are taught to evaluate a woman’s looks. By the time a boy becomes a teenager, the comments are often sexualized (i.e. “She’s got a body that just won’t quit.” “Nice ass,” “What a rack”). When we reduce attractive women to objects of sexual desire, we diminish their personhood to merely being objects of our lust.

Some men sexualize platonic or professional relationships—pursuing women regardless of cues on her part that she’s interested in the man. Such unwanted advances are violations of the woman’s integrity. Persistent advances may end in damaged interpersonal relationships, psychological or physical harm for the woman, or in the most extreme cases, rape or murder. They also are violations of the law and will most likely result in legal charges of sexual harassment, resulting from overstepping boundaries of authority by a male employer or professional misusing his power by sexualizing the relationship. In the most extreme cases, such as physical assault, it may result in imprisonment.

Call attention to the societal messages posted on newsprint. Discuss these messages about women along with societal messages about masculinity:

- How do messages about stoic masculinity limit men’s personhood?
- What effects do these messages have on men? On women?
- How does a focus on sexualized femininity limit women’s personhood?
- What effects does this focus have on women? On men?

3. Identify male-centered relational evil.

Call attention to the description of the three forms of male-centered relational evil on Student Page 6. Ask the class to choose one form to focus on for this session—perhaps the form which impacts the local community the most. Also encourage the men to read about all three of these forms of relational sin on their own.

After the group reads the material related to their chosen focus, ask them to suggest reasons for these dehumanizing behaviors by men. List these on newsprint.

4. Study the Bible.

- *1 Samuel 11:2–27*

Invite the group to read 1 Samuel 11:2–27 and the related material from Student Page 6, keeping in mind the Christ-centered relational principles on newsprint.

Divide the class into three groups and assign one of the three male-centered relational evils to each group. Ask them to use the topic as a point of reference as they study the scripture, and answer the Mirror Questions on Student Page 6.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Share responses.

In the total group, ask men to share any general observations and responses to questions. Ask each smaller group to share responses they made to the questions related to their assigned topic.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Summarize the basic points.

- Manipulating and/or controlling another person for one’s sexual gratification is sinful behavior and distorts the humanity of both the victim and the perpetrator.
- There are three types of male relational sins which impact millions of people from every nation in the world—domestic violence, the spread of HIV/AIDS and human trafficking.
- All three of these relational sins impact many more individuals than just the perpetrator and the original victim.
- A position of power and authority tempts men into using that power and authority for personal gain. There may be dire and far-reaching consequences.

8. Pray for victims.

Conclude the class by praying for victims of the three contexts which identify some of darkest relational sins of males—domestic violence, human trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Homework

Ask the participants to bring Student Page 6 to the next session.

Invite the participants to become aware of how frequently they think of women as objects of personal desire. Suggest they practice seeing them as whole persons with strengths and weaknesses.

Session 6—Confronting the Darkness in the Mirror: Objectifying Women

Scripture: 1 Samuel 11:2-27

Focus: Acknowledging the sinful tendency of males to sexualize females, especially when they are attractive.

“Although it cannot be denied that men are affected by testosterone in their bodies, violent aggression or even rambunctious competitiveness can be regulated or controlled. . . . The human creature is more than biology. Men and women alike are moral agents who decide whether or how to act on impulses. They are ethical actors who can choose to modify aggressive behavior in order to honor the rights of others. Even if we acknowledge the power of cascading testosterone in a man’s life, he is still a moral agent who is free to decide how to use that power to act.”

— *Jacob’s Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*,
by Herbert Anderson (Bridge Resources, 2002), p. 50.

Dimensions of Male-centered Relational Evil

Three particularly heinous forms of violence are most frequently perpetrated by men. These male-centered relational evils objectify women and children, subordinating them to men’s priorities and power.

1. The sex trade and other forms of human slavery

Dominant persons (mostly men) buy or coerce women, children and even other men into paid sex work and other forms of human slavery. Those who monitor these actions in the world today, including the U.S. government and the United Nations, have reported that slavery is more widespread now than at any time in human history.

- The U.S. Department of State estimates that 27 million people around the world suffer in modern slavery at any given time.¹
- The United Nations says millions of women, children and men are trafficked around the world for purposes of forced prostitution, labor and other forms of exploitation every year, resulting in a multi-billion-dollar a year industry.²
- Nearly every country is involved—either as a country of origin, destination or transit.
- Traffickers recruit women and children through deceptive means, promising employment or monies paid to other family members. In impoverished countries, family members and friends think the employment is legitimate and deliver the trafficking victims into highly sophisticated networks in which the victim disappears.
- In the United States, tens of thousands of women, children and men are trafficked each year from dozens of countries. Recent cases of children trafficked into the United States include victims from 11 to 14 years of age from Honduras, Latvia, Mexico, Korea, Japan, Cameroon, Taiwan, India and Vietnam.

2. Domestic violence

Domestic violence includes any physical, psychological, emotional, financial or sexual means of controlling the behavior of one’s spouse, domestic partner or children. Domestic violence in any form violates the integrity and

well-being of the victim who is created in the image of God. Abuse of another person reduces the true humanity of the perpetrator, who was also created in the image of a loving God.

- In the United States in 2010, violent crimes by intimate partners totaled 509,230 and accounted for more than 13 percent of all violent crimes.³
- Of female murder victims in the US in 2010, 37.5 percent were killed by a husband or a boyfriend.⁴
- In 2010 in incidents of murder for which the relationships of murder victims and offenders were known, 24.8 percent were slain by family members.⁵
- Currently in the United States, one in four females will face some form of domestic violence in their lives.⁶
- A significant number of females will face a form of dating violence, coercion or manipulation of some kind, resulting in control over the victim within the context of a dating relationship. In fact, one in five women who have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.⁷
- From 1994 to 2010, about four in five victims of intimate partner violence were female.⁸
- A victim of domestic violence returns to the perpetrator an average of seven times before making a permanent break in the relationship. Victims tend to be blamed for returning to the perpetrator, but struggle with leaving due to financial dependency, lack of resources, social isolation, love for or emotional dependency on the perpetrator, a fear of losing the children and other reasons.⁹
- The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues says, “Native women are almost three times as likely to experience rape or sexual assault as other women, and in some tribal communities, the rate of homicide of Native women is 10 times the national average.”¹⁰

3. The spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa

In the past 30 years, the spread of HIV/AIDS has affected millions of people globally. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest concentration of victims of HIV/AIDS in the world.

- In 2010, 33.3 million people lived with an HIV or AIDS diagnosis. These numbers include some 2.5 million children under age 15.¹¹
- The misconception that having sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS has fueled a high demand in trafficking children for the sex trade and resulted in many rapes in sub-Saharan Africa.
- In 2009 in the country of Lesotho, 23.6 percent of adults ages 15–49 were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. In Malawi that percentage was 11.0 and in Botswana, 24.8.¹²
- The repressive patriarchal attitudes so prevalent in most of Africa, combined with a lack of education of its young people, has contributed to a pandemic of HIV infection throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa.
- Slightly more than half of all people living with HIV are women and girls.¹³
- The number of children orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa exceeds 16 million children. Almost 90 percent of all children who are orphaned by HIV across the globe live in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁴

Bible Study

- ***1 Samuel 11:2–27: David, Bathsheba and Uriah***

The story of David and Bathsheba is the story of a king who overstepped his boundaries as a man and king of dignity. From the roof of his palace, King David watches a beautiful woman bathing. He inquires about the woman, and learns she (Bathsheba) is the wife of one of his best warriors fighters, Uriah.

While Uriah is in battle, David instructs his servants to bring Bathsheba to him. He seduces her and then sends her home. Upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant, David instructs Uriah to go home and wash his feet, a euphemism for making love to his wife. But Uriah is a man of honor, and because his troops are at battle, he sleeps not in his own bed with his wife, but at the gate of the king.

David tries to get Uriah drunk in hopes he will go home and make love to his wife, but this too fails. So David sends him back to battle, with a note to his superior officer to put Uriah in the heat of battle and then back away so that Uriah will be killed. Risking not only Uriah, but a group of soldiers, the officer obeys David's command. Uriah is killed in battle and after a period of mourning David sends for Bathsheba, who becomes one of his wives and bears him a son—Solomon.

Mirror Questions

- Identify the consequences of David's lust.
- How does his power corrupt his judgment?
- Compare Uriah's honor of Uriah to David's treachery.
- Read 2 Samuel 12 for the confrontation between Nathan and David as a result of David's sinfulness. What are the long term consequences that are foretold?
- What are the parallel issues in David's lust for Bathsheba with the male-centered relational evil that is your focus topic?
- David plans Uriah's murder to cover his reputation. While he didn't set out to kill Uriah, that is a consequence of acting on his lust. What are some of the unintended consequences of the male-centered relational evil that is your focus topic?

Homework

Bring this page to the next session.

Become aware this week how frequently (if at all) you tend to think of women as objects of personal desire. Practice seeing them as whole persons with strengths and weaknesses. What might you say to encourage your male friends or acquaintances to view them in a more holistic light?

Notes

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2. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2012* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), 1; accessed at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Trafficking_in_Persons_2012_web.pdf
3. Jennifer L. Truman, *Criminal Victimization, 2010*, (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 2011), Table 5.
4. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2010*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2011), calculated from data in "Expanded Homicide Data," Tables 2 and 10.
5. Ibid.
6. Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, "Extent, Nature and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey" (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2000).
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*, 25.

8. Shannan M. Catalano, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993–2010* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2012), 1.
9. June Sheehan Berlinger, “Why Don’t You Just LEAVE him? Answers to Your Questions about Domestic Violence,” *Nursing*, April 1998, 34–40.
10. “Event Report: SPSSI Congressional briefing on the Violence Against Women Act,” The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, February 15, 2013; accessed at <http://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&featureID=178>.
11. UNAIDS, *World AIDS Day Report 2011*, 6.
12. UNAIDS, *The Report on the Global Aids Epidemic* (2010), 181.
13. *Report on the Global Aids Epidemic*, 10.
14. *Report on the Global Aids Epidemic*, 112.

Session 7—When Evil Stares Back from the Mirror: Lust and Loathing

Scripture: 2 Samuel 13:1-39

Focus: Confronting the repulsiveness of lust and the responses to relational evil

Preparation

- Post the newsprint sheet from last session with ways men sometimes objectify women:
 - ◆ “She’s got a body that just won’t quit!”
 - ◆ “Nice ass!”
 - ◆ “What a rack!”
- Also post the sheet with the Christ-centered relational principles:
 - ◆ Every individual is created in the image of God.
 - ◆ We were created to be in relationship with other human beings. We cannot leave that factor out of encounters with others.
 - ◆ Jesus is other-directed rather than self-centered.
 - ◆ Jesus honors the humanity of all people—prominent or marginalized, sinful or moral people.
- Make a copy of Student Page 7 for each participant; have available a copy of Student Page 6 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Gracious God, as a result of our shortsightedness, our actions often have unintended consequences. Driven by desire, lust or personal gain, we choose to focus on personal gratification rather than your will for us. Lord, teach us to be wise; teach us to work for the redemption of lives broken. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Review from the previous session.

Review some of the phrases used and mindsets at work when men objectify women. Ask volunteers to name the three relational evils the group studied (domestic violence, human trafficking, and HIV/AIDS.) Also ask volunteers to summarize the story of David and Bathsheba.

3. Study the Bible

- **2 Samuel 13:1–39: Tamar, Amnon and Absalom**

Tell the men that this passage continues the story of David’s family begun in Session 6. Invite them to read 2 Samuel 13:1–39 and the related material on Student Page 7.

4. Go deeper in small groups.

Review the three types of relational evil—domestic violence, human trafficking and sex slavery, and HIV/AIDS. Again divide into the same three groups as in Session 6, but assign the men a different scenario to explore with this scripture. For example, if they focused on HIV/AIDS in the last session, assign either domestic violence or human trafficking.

Distribute copies of Student Page 6. In their small groups, invite them to discuss the Mirror Questions from the perspective of their assigned type of relational evil.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. Report out in the total group.

In the total group, invite the small groups to report on their discussion of the last two questions. List on newsprint suggestions made by the groups about the church's role in addressing the relational evils and about what response should be made to perpetrators. Ask for insights or observations on the other questions.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Summarize the main points.

- Lust is the driving force behind a multitude of relational sins.
- Lust blinds the perpetrator to the consequences of his actions—consequences for himself, the victim, and their relationships in unforeseeable ways.
- When lust is satiated, the perpetrator may react to the victim out of loathing or disdain, further wounding the victim.
- Sexual sin often has ripple effects—anger, violence or vengeance that cannot be anticipated.
- The Christian church and men of faith have an ethical responsibility to educate themselves about relational evil and how it violates God's will for us.

7. Close in prayer.

Close with a brief prayer, or invite a volunteer to do so.

Homework

Invite the men to assess privately their personal tendencies to sexualize relationships with others who are not their partners, and to write the prayer suggested on Student Page 7.

Session 7—When Evil Stairs Back from the Mirror: Lust and Loathing

Scripture: 2 Samuel 13:1–39

Focus: Confronting the repulsiveness of lust and the responses to relational evil

“Often we (men) have very little relationship with our bodies. We do not see them as a source of joy or satisfaction. We are estranged from our bodies. This makes it easier to use them in an unfeeling way. Sexuality becomes an issue of conquest. It becomes a question of how many women you can get off with and how many times you can screw them. In this sense, sexuality is closely identified with power. For men it can become almost second nature; often it becomes connected to violence. This is partly because this form of sexuality can leave us frustrated and unfulfilled, and it can be easier to take that out on others, than to look at ourselves. The roots go very deep.”

— Victor Seidler in *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*, edited by Larry May, Robert Strikwerda and Patrick D. Hopkins (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), p. 65

Bible study

- ***Samuel 13:1–39: Tamar, Amnon and Absalom***

In this passage, King David’s children bear the consequences of “the thing that David had done that displeased the Lord” (recounted in 2 Samuel 11–12). Amnon, Tamar and Absalom were children of David—Tamar and Absalom by the same mother. Amnon falls in love with his half- sister Tamar. Sick with longing for her, he tricks her into being alone with him (rare for a king’s virgin daughter) and rapes her.

With his sexual desire satisfied, Amnon is immediately filled with loathing for his sister and sends her away. Shamed, Tamar takes refuge in her brother Absalom’s home. Absalom vows revenge and ultimately kills Amnon. King David banishes Absalom for Amnon’s death.

Consider the loathing that Amnon felt toward Tamar. His reaction is not based on anything she did or didn’t do, but stems from his feelings of guilt for having raped his own virgin sister. This cycle of attraction and repulsion is a dynamic at work in many cases of domestic violence; the perpetrator woos the victim, but once she is controlled by him, the perpetrator rages against the victim. The cycle repeats.

Mirror Questions

Review the three types of relational evil—domestic violence, human trafficking and sex slavery, and HIV/AIDS. Consider these questions from the perspective of these types of relational evil:

- Amnon’s lust blinded him to the consequences of his actions. What are the parallels between each relational evil and the unforeseen consequences of Amnon’s actions?
- Being consumed by lust drives men to a variety of aberrant and destructive behaviors, from stalking, to an addiction to pornography, to rape and even murder. The cycle repeats itself until a greater force breaks it. What might the cycle of aberrant behavior look like based on each type of relational evil?
- Exodus 20:5 suggests that children will pay for their parents’ sins; 2 Samuel 11–13 shows this dynamic. What are the multigenerational consequences of the each type of relational evil?

- Absalom's desire to protect Tamar and avenge her rape lead to Absalom being a murderer, living in exile and David losing both Absalom and Amnon. How might each relational evil impact (or even perpetuate sin by) innocent people?
- What role should the church play in addressing these types of relational evils?
- What role and responsibility should the church have towards perpetrators of relational evil? How might the church and Christian men minister to the perpetrators?

Homework

Assess privately your personal tendency to sexualize relationships with others who are not your partner. How much of a role does the demonstration of personal power play into this practice in your life?

Write a prayer of confession to God, admitting the truth and seeking God's help to change. This week, practice consciously removing any thoughts and actions from your life which sexualize your relationships with others.

Session 8—Mirroring Our Fathers and God as Father: Exploring Male Relationships

Scripture: Luke 15:11–32; Matthew 18:21–35; Luke 23:32–43

Focus: Exercising forgiveness in a way that preserves our relationships with others and reflects the One in whose image we are created

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 8 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Lord God Almighty, we come to you today as older and younger brothers, as fathers and as sons. We acknowledge that none of us is perfect in our relationships with those around us, especially those with whom we have the closest of relationships. We recognize that within our hearts there are barriers that we have erected between us that cause pain and sorrow to ourselves and others. Yet our hearts long for wholeness. Lord of resurrection life, bring us hope as we try to repair and strengthen our relationships. Transform our relationships and reveal to us again the depth of love's healing power. For we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Study the Bible.

Point out that oftentimes men struggle with maintaining healthy relationships with other men, particularly with men to whom we are related. The story of the Prodigal Son provides the opportunity to explore a variety of themes—such as decision making, selfishness, forgiveness, money and public opinion—and the impact they have on relationships.

Invite the men to respond to the following questions:

- What are some ways that fathers might respond if their sons had made them the object of public ridicule? After they had disowned the family and wasted their family fortune? After their actions brought shame to the family?
- **Luke 15:11–32: The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

Invite the men to read Luke 15:11–32 and the related material on Student Page 8.

Responding (10 minutes)

3. Study the Bible in small groups.

The role of forgiveness is at the core of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ. Divide the class into two groups and assign one of the two passages to each small group to study and respond to, using the questions on Student Page 8.

- Group 1: Read and discuss Matthew 18:21–35.
- Group 2: Read and discuss Luke 23:32–43.

Closing

4. Summarize the main points. (5 minutes)

- At first glance, the father in the parable may seem weak, allowing his son to make poor choices. However, the father allows the son to make his decision and face the consequences, even as they impact the rest of the family.
- At the core of the father's love for the prodigal is both permissiveness and patience.
- The father's love for the prodigal is a seeking love. The value of the father's personal honor is not considered when his son returns to him.
- This parable illustrates God's extravagant and unmerited grace.
- The extravagant nature of the father's grace toward the prodigal son is offensive to the son who remained obedient to his father. Obedience without compassion can itself cause alienation from God and neighbor.
- Compassion is measured by forgiveness when one's sense of justice is affronted, but the wrongdoer seeks to be reconciled.

5. Close with prayer.

Conclude the lesson by inviting a member of the class to offer a closing prayer.

Homework

Invite the men to reflect on the Prodigal Son story with questions on Student Page 8.

Session 8—Mirroring Our Fathers and God as Father: Exploring Male Relationships

Scripture: Luke 15:11–32; Matthew 18:21–35; Luke 23:32–43

Focus: Exercising forgiveness in a way that preserves our relationships with others and reflects the One in whose image we are created

“Fathers who are reluctant to bless their children may not know what it is or what it means because they have not received a blessing. For myself, the absence of a blessing has been like a hole in the soul that establishes the presence of emotional poverty where promise should reside. The promise of leaving home and letting go is often closely linked to the bestowing of a blessing. It is one of the ways that we make friends with our adult children.”

—*Jacob’s Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*,
by Herbert Anderson (Bridge Resources, 2002), p. 113.

Bible study

- **Luke 15:11–32: The parable of the Prodigal Son**

The following points were shared by Dr. Kenneth Bailey at Montreat Conference Center in a lecture in the spring of 2002 in the Chapel of the Prodigal. Dr. Bailey was teaching by referring to the chapel’s fresco on the Prodigal Son story and conducting a Bible study on this passage for those in attendance.

- For the younger brother to demand his inheritance while the father was still living was to communicate a total disregard for the relationship he had with his father. It would have been perceived in that culture as wishing the father dead.
- No respected father would allow such a request to be honored, and yet here the father’s response is to follow through with the request of the youngest son without any resistance.
- The son squanders his money. Very often commentators on this text have assumed the son spends his money on prostitutes and wild parties. The scripture does not say that; rather it says that he wastes his money recklessly until it is all gone. At that point his “friends” desert him and he is left destitute.
- The type of work the young son performs when he runs out of money suggests how far he has fallen from his status as a wealthy Jew. He takes the only job that he can find—feeding the swine of a foreign farmer. According to Jewish purity codes, pigs were considered so unclean that to eat their meat was a violation of the basic restrictions for every Jew. The prodigal son is so poor he becomes the servant of unclean animals and would have eaten the pigs’ food. The prodigal son loses his money, dignity and identity.
- The prodigal son comes to his senses and tries to improve his circumstances with an apology. Verses 18 and 19 reveal a well-rehearsed confession: “Father I have sinned . . . I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”
- Throughout the undisclosed amount of time that the prodigal son was gone, the father never stops watching for the “dead” son’s return. While still a long way away, the father spots the son coming and runs to greet him.

- Prominent men within the Jewish community wore robes to signify their status as land owners. The only way for a man to run in a robe was to lift the hem of the robe to his waist, which would have been seen as scandalous, or at very least foolish. The father's running illustrates the father's radical forgiveness at the cost of his dignity. Consider the son's condition at this reunion—emaciated, filthy and smelling of unclean swine. None of this is of concern to the father; a restored relationship is his sole focus.
- Even before the prodigal son offers his practiced confession, the father restores the relationship with his lost son with a hug and kiss. He orders his servants to bring the best robe and the family ring, signifying a total restoration of his relationship as a member of the family. The restoration of relationship is based on the profound love, forgiveness and grace of the father toward the son.
- Ironically, this story does not conclude with the total restoration of the family. The older son is estranged towards both the father and the younger brother, perceiving the father's generosity and grace as favoritism. The parable ends without resolution.

Mirror Questions

Reflect on the following:

- What model of masculinity does the father represent?
- How does the father greet the prodigal son?
- How does his reaction compare with the reaction of a father you may know whose son showed him disregard?
- What model of masculinity does the older brother show at the start of the story? At the end?
- How does the father respond to this elder son's frustration and anger?
- How would you define the masculinity of each of the three male characters in this story? How does the value the father places on relationship with both his sons inform the way he expresses his masculinity?
- Many in the church are older brother types and have less tolerance for the mistakes of other men. How does the parable of the prodigal son challenge our reaction to grace extended to less dependable individuals?

Small-group Bible Study

Group 1: Read and discuss Matthew 18:21–35.

- In what type of circumstances or situations do you have difficulty forgiving others?
- How does this story challenge your own concept of forgiveness?
- What situations harden your heart towards forgiving others and make it difficult for you to be more Christ-like?

Group 2: Read and discuss Luke 23:32–43.

- What can you do to change the dynamics of the role forgiveness plays as you learn to forgive yourself for things you have done wrong? Also as you forgive others for things they have done?
- What roles do consequences play in addressing the issue of forgiveness? What about when the wrong done causes serious consequences?
- What connection is there between withholding forgiveness and striving to maintain our own control?
- When it appears to have no apparent effect on the one who perpetrated the wrong, how does truly forgiving

another person feel to you?

Homework

Reflecting on the Prodigal Son story this week, ask yourself the following questions

- At this stage in my life, am I more like the prodigal son or the older brother?
- Why do I answer this way? How does the forgiveness I offer compare to the father's forgiveness?
- What can I do to become more like the father in the parable? How does the radical nature of this level of forgiveness help me to make peace with the worst things I have done in my life?
- What role does the phrase of Jesus, "Go and sin no more" play in the true nature of being forgiven and being in right relation to God and others?

Session 9—Keep a Stiff Upper Lip: A Man’s Public Image

Scripture: John 11:1-44; Luke 22:47-53

Focus: Reflecting on the learned behavior of suppressing our tender feelings and exploring how this puts us out of touch with ourselves and with others to whom we relate

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 9 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Holy and Merciful God, our Lord teaches us that we are to have life and have it abundantly. Christ speaks about a quality of living, but we have confused his message of abundant life with an abundance of possessions and personal power. In our quest for power and wealth, we find ourselves further and further from the truth. Teach us, O God, the abundant life of relationships well shared, of discovering joy through compassion and of the sharing of our time and talents with others. Teach us to embrace the truth revealed in the teachings of Christ. We pray in his holy name. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Engage in Bible study.

• *John 11:1-44: Compassionate Empathy*

Invite the men to read John 11:1-44 and the related material from Student Page 9.

• *Luke 22:47-53: A Sidelong Glance at Anger*

Invite the men to read Luke 22:47-53 to explore how Jesus encountered the opposition that came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Immediately after Peter’s violent act of using a sword to cut off the ear of the temple servant, Jesus responded by healing the servant’s ear and commanding those present to stop all forms of violence.

• *Mark 11:15-18 and John 2:13-22: A Precautionary Look*

Ask the men to read Mark 11:15-18 and John 2:13-22 together, and the material from Student Page 9.

Responding (10 minutes)

3. Discuss anger.

Ask a volunteer to read the warning aloud from the Responding section on Student Page 9.

Invite the group to discuss the questions that follow the warning.

Closing (5 minutes)

4. Summarize the basic points.

- All people are a composite of physical, emotional and intellectual dimensions. Yet males often learn from a young age to suppress emotions.
- Over time, suppressing feelings alienates a man from his true self and from his ability to empathize with and form relationships with others around him.
- Our culture encourages men to express anger more frequently than other emotions. The negative consequences of anger can have lasting and detrimental effects on our most important relationships and on our selves.
- Empathy creates intimacy between people.
- Our potential to experience deep worth and joy comes from being in healthy relationships. Such relationships are based on mutuality, trust, emotional accessibility, compassion and dependability.

Homework

Encourage the men to reflect on the homework questions on Student Page 9 in prayer, writing or both. If they are troubled about particular incidents, ask them to seek out someone they trust to help them explore the issues.

Session 9– Keep a Stiff Upper Lip: A Man’s Public Image

Scripture: John 11:1-44; Luke 22:47-53

Focus: Reflecting on the learned behavior of suppressing our tender feelings and exploring how this puts us out of touch with ourselves and with others to whom we relate

“The male struggle to express feelings varies with personality differences and family influence. For some men, affectionate feelings are easily expressed; other men are more comfortable with sadness and others with joy. Shy men may also know fear; gregarious men may be familiar with loneliness . . .” “. . . Men ask a great deal of others when they expect others to know our unexpressed emotions. And men ironically must trust others to get it right. It would be a lot simpler and clearer if men could express the deep tenderness they feel.”

— *Jacob’s Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*,
by Herbert Anderson (Bridge Resources, 2002), pp. 68 and 70

Bible Study

- ***John 11:1-44: Compassionate Empathy***

This passage gives us insight into the depth of Jesus’ empathy, as well as Christ’s power over death. The Mary and Martha of this story are in all likelihood the same two sisters from Luke 10:38-42, and John 12:1-3. Biblical scholars identify these two sisters and their brother Lazarus as being among the closest friends of Jesus in all of the Gospels.

Jesus is deeply touched by Mary and Martha’s grief over Lazarus’s death; he weeps openly. This is a profound expression of empathy; one of the most mature examples of a man who was fully human. However, most men do not easily express this level of empathy because we have been taught to hide our feelings, not only from others, but from ourselves.

Mirror Questions

- What does this passage teach us about what it means to be truly human?
- If you have difficulty in expressing more tender emotions than anger, why do you think this is so?
- What physiological impact does keeping one’s feelings bottled up inside have on the health and well-being of men?
- How can men support and encourage each other to become more aware of, and in touch with, healthy expressions of humanity?
- ***Luke 22:47-53: A Sidelong Glance at Anger***

Jesus encounters the opposition that comes to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Immediately after Peter’s cuts off the ear of the temple servant with a sword, Jesus responds by healing the servant’s ear and commanding those present to stop all forms of violence.

Mirror Questions

- Jesus uses his power to heal and to bring an end to violence rather than to fight his way out of the arresting

scene. Do you view this as a show of strength or weakness?

- What does this communicate to you about the use of power and authority?
- What can you incorporate from this example in your response to danger and threats?

- ***Mark 11:15–18 and John 2:13–22: A Precautionary Look***

Jesus is very angry at what he found in the temple. His action is physically threatening, but directed at inanimate objects. It unsettles everyone in the temple courtyard and calls attention to the actions of the moneychangers as a violation of the sanctity of the temple. We must remain focused on the fact that his anger occurred as a result of a violation and the manipulation of the relationship between God and God's people. The moneychangers were taking advantage of the guilt of the people and making money off their desire to be made right with God. Jesus' actions were dramatic and swept aside the role of the intercessors, who were little more than profiteers.

Mirror Questions

- Does Jesus use his anger to intimidate the moneychangers and the temple priests, or could there be a different interpretation of his actions?
- What does this action teach us about Jesus' use of anger and the limits placed on his display of anger?
- How does Jesus direct his anger and his forcefulness?
- What lessons should we take with us from these texts about our use and misuse of anger?

Responding

Warning: In no way does this text justify threatening anger of any form within a family. The use of aggression, violence or threats is much more an indicator of the brokenness of the person who engages in them than an expression of authority. Such rage is a demonstration of the need for help in discovering more constructive ways of dealing with one's emotions.

Discuss:

- Is anger ever appropriate in relationships? If so, when?
- What should be the guidelines that we adopt in the expression of our anger?
- Do you agree with the opinion of the curriculum writer about not using Jesus' anger as a justification for anger in the home? Why or why not?

Homework

Reflect on the following questions in prayer, writing or both. If you are troubled about particular incidents, seek out someone you trust with whom to explore the issues.

- Based on the quotation above from Herbert Anderson, what are the emotions you find it easy to display? the hardest time to display?
- What emotions were freely shared in your family of origin and which ones were withheld from view? Does this offer any insights into your own patterns?
- How do you express anger to those with whom you work? to family members? to friends? Are there differences in the way you express anger to one group over another, and if so, why?
- What consequences have you faced over the years because of way you express anger? Do you have any remorse over past flare ups?

Session 10—The Reflection in Your Suit of Armor: Redefining Authority and Greatness

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 14:1-14

Focus: Moving from the self-centered awareness that society values and teaches every day to the servant leadership modeled by Jesus

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 10 for each participant.
- There are several passages of scripture for study in this session. Read over each passage and the related material on Student Page 10. If necessary, choose one or two passages on which to focus.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Holy One of Israel, too often we confuse the recognition that we have been created in your image with a reason to exert our dominance over others. We confuse our will with your will and fail to comprehend the impact of our actions on others. Guide us, Lord, to a greater understanding of an authority borne out of Christ in our lives. For we pray in his holy name. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Examine authority and power.

Invite the men to read from “Examining authority and power” from Student Page 10.

3. Study the Bible.

Invite the group to read the following scripture passages and related material from Student Page 10.

- *Matthew 3:13–17: Honoring the authority of another*
- *Matthew 20:20–28 and Mark 10:35–45: The desire for greatness*
- *Luke 14:1–14: The seat of honor*

Responding (10 minutes)

4. Engage in an exercise of self-disclosure.

Ask the men to divide into groups of three and discuss the following:

Think of a time when you exercised your authority in a way that got you in trouble with others—maybe your wife or children, your peers or co-workers. Share your experience with the two others in your group. Talk about what you could have done differently to create a more positive outcome. Take time in your small group for all three to respond.

Closing (5 minutes)

5. Summarize the main points.

- To be a Christ-like leader is to balance leadership with an underlying measure of humility.
- A Christ-like leader does not demand respect, nor is one's leadership measured in deferential treatment.
- A Christ-like leader leads first by serving the needs of those he or she leads.
- Self-serving leadership distracts from the authority of a leader and weakens the impact of one's leadership on the followers.
- The bonds between the disciples and the servant leader remain strong when the disciples know that the leader keeps their best interest in mind at all times.

6. Share and pray in pairs.

Have the men team up in pairs. Invite each man to share with the other something in his own life that came out of this session for which he wants his partner to pray. Take time for both men in each pair to pray for the other.

Homework

Ask each man to spend some time this week reflecting on the way he exerts his authority—as a friend, spouse, father, son, boss or co-worker. Ask the men to consider the following;

- How is your expression of authority manipulative or coercive?
- How does it build up others from a perspective of shared authority?
- What changes does this lesson suggest to you about a stronger Christ-centered expression of authority that you may adopt in your life?

Session 10—The Reflection in Your Suit of Armor: Redefining Authority and Greatness

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 14:1-14

Focus: Moving from the self-centered awareness that society values and teaches every day to the servant leadership modeled by Jesus

“Honor is a form of reverence, esteem, exhausted regard, and deference an individual receives from others. Honor is accorded individuals that represent ‘certain archetypal patterns of behavior.’ Honor is therefore a social good. That is, honor is good that individuals can receive from others if they represent envious traits and behaviors.”

—“Honor Emasculation, and Empowerment” by Leonard Harris, in *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*, edited by Larry May, Robert Strikwerda and Patrick Hopkins (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), p. 275.

Examining authority and power

The attainment of one’s own status and authority as a mature male in personal, social, educational and occupational/professional relationships is one way we measure our worth. From the construction site to the factory assembly shop, from the position on a sports team to the role one plays in a family, one’s position brings with it a certain measure of respect. The higher or more “important” the role one plays, the more authority accompanies the position.

However, some men—teens and young men in particular—often mistakenly equate the authority of a position with the respect they think they deserve by virtue of the position. They expect to be honored in a certain way because of their position. Frequently, this creates problems in professional and social relationships, and most particularly within the context of interpersonal relationships. Often when the expected level of respect is not shown, the man responds brusquely and aggressively, demanding respect be shown to him. This may lead to damaged relationships.

Mirror Questions

- How does a person who is in a position of authority act differently from the average person?
- What messages does our society tell us about commanding the respect and honor afforded to us because of our roles?
- What are the messages that society communicates about demonstrating authority over other people?

Bible study

- **Matthew 3:13-17: Honoring the authority of another**

This passage focuses on the beginning action of Jesus’ public ministry. John recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and when Jesus submits himself to the authority of John the Baptist to be baptized, John is hesitant to baptize him. In submitting to John, the will of God could be carried out through the actions of John as a means of revealing the identity of Jesus as God’s beloved son. But it also helps us to understand that the word righteousness conveys the concept of justice. God’s justice is fulfilled in the Baptism of Jesus by John. There is an interdependence of relationship between Jesus and John who together reveal the will of God through the act of Baptism.

Mirror Questions

- How does the interconnected nature of authority between John and Jesus change the way we view the authority entrusted in us?
- In this illustration, true authority does not have to demand its own honor or respect from others. How does that change our understanding of the role of authority in our own lives?
- **Matthew 20:20–28 and Mark 10:35–45: The desire for greatness**

These two passages deal with the request for James and John to be seated at Jesus' right and left in heaven. Jesus' response is that it is not for him to offer and then he assures them that they will receive the same kind of "cup" (or consequence) that he himself will face. In the Mark passage, the other 10 disciples got angry with James and John—most likely because each of them had coveted the same kind of honor. Jesus reminds the disciples what it takes to be a true follower of his. To be both a disciple of Christ and a person of authority means something very different from what the world teaches.

Mirror Questions

- What challenges does Jesus' example of authority and servant leadership offer to the way you exert those roles?
- How does the role of servant leader inform your understanding of the role of being a husband or a father, and what behavioral differences does it require in your life?
- How does the role of servant leader change the way you relate to co-workers and other people with whom you come in contact with daily?
- **Luke 14:1–14: The seat of honor**

Invited into the house of a lead Pharisee to eat a meal on the Sabbath, Jesus comments on the guests taking the places of honor they deem appropriate to their own status. Jesus suggests guests should take the place of lowest honor, so the host could invite them to move up. He concludes the parable saying, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Mirror Questions

- What is the role of humility that Jesus seems to be suggesting about his understanding of leadership?
- What lessons might one extract from this text about the role a father plays in a family? How might that reorientation improve family dynamics?
- How does an orientation of humility expressed by one in authority strengthen the bonds between fellow workers, or if in a church, with other members?

Homework

Spend some time this week reflecting on the way you exerts your authority—as a friend, spouse, father, son, boss or co-worker. Consider the following;

- How is your expression of authority manipulative or coercive?
- How does it build up others from a perspective of shared authority?
- What changes does this lesson suggest to you about a stronger, Christ-centered expression of authority that you may adopt in your life?

Session 11—A Sidelong Glance at the Selfish Side of Success

Scripture: Luke 12:13–31; Luke 22:24–30; John 13:3–17

Focus: Contrasting self-worth based on possessions and power with self-worth based on the quality of relationships

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 11 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Gracious and merciful Lord, so often when things are going our way, we glory in our abundance, but to fail to consider giving to others. Too often we build bigger and acquire more, failing to consider the needs that could be met if we opened our hearts and resources to others. Grant us a different perspective on life—one that takes into consideration the needs of others. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Study the Bible.

Invite the men to read the following passages and the related material from Student Page 11.

- *Luke 12:13–31: Rich toward God*
- *Luke 22:24–30, John 13:3–17: One who serves and washes feet*

Responding (10 minutes)

7. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure.

Divide the men into groups of three to share answers to the following questions:

- As Christians, we are all called to be disciples of Jesus. How does Jesus' example of leadership challenge your perception of an effective leader?
- What changes to your style of leadership in your family, work and church does this course present for you?
- How might a community of Christian men, who seek to embody a clear sense of this model of leadership, serve as a support to you as you grow?

Closing (5 minutes)

7. Summarize the basic points.

- The role of authority, as commonly enacted in this world, often comes with hierarchical baggage that damages relationships.

- Domination, coercion and control are all distorted expressions of effective authority.
- The expectations of the privilege and superiority afforded to a leader are potentially damaging to the relationships between members of a Christian community or in a family.
- Humility is essential for a Christian leader to integrate in one's leadership style.
- Jesus presents the concept of servant-leader to maintain balance and humility in a leader's role of authority.
- All disciples are called to follow the example of servant-leadership of Jesus Christ.

8. Pray in pairs.

Conclude the session with prayer in teams of two, with each man asking the other what specifically to pray for as it relates to the hierarchical way we demonstrate authority.

Homework

Invite the men to consider the concepts of shared authority and servant leadership that have been addressed and to think about the points raised in the Homework section of Student Page 11.

Session 11—A Sidelong Glance at the Selfish Side of Success

Scripture: Luke 12:13–31; Luke 22:24–30; John 13:3–17

Focus: Contrasting self-worth based on possessions and power with self-worth based on the quality of relationships

“Rights talk’ is intended to govern interactions between strangers, between people who do not care for each other, and who may even be in overt conflict. . . What I am suggesting is that we would be better off if intimates conceptualized and dealt with differences as two people who care about one another rather as two people who must treat each other justly. . . Suppose we focus on our mutual care, on the fact that I take an interest in you and you in me. I want to promote your interests as well as my own; you want to promote mine as well as yours. . . If we emphasize love and care rather than rights and equity, we will be better able to cope with some of the effects of our sexist culture.”

—“Real Men” by Hugh LaFollette, in *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*, edited by Larry May, Robert Strikwerda and Patrick Hopkins (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), pp. 128–129

Bible Study

- **Luke 12:13–31: Rich toward God**

Greed is a common expression of the honor one directs towards oneself. In this passage, the abundance of a crop creates a dilemma for a man who wonders what to do with the surplus. The man considers building a bigger barn, equating abundance with a comfortable future. Jesus announces that the man’s soul was at risk for thinking so selfishly and suggests he share the extra with neighbors who are needy.

Mirror Questions

- How does the self-centeredness of a family breadwinner negatively impact family relationships?
- How does this passage of scripture challenge you as a husband, friend, supervisor or employer?
- If we shift our thinking away from the abundance of possessions to the quality of relationships, how might our perception of life be changed?
- **Luke 22:24–30, John 13:3–17: One who serves and washes feet**

Gathered around the table, the disciples argue with each other as to which disciple is the greatest, but Jesus intervenes. Jesus urges humility, rather than the pride of the kings of the Gentiles who “lord it over them.” But there is a second descriptive phrase in this passage worth noting: “those in authority over them are called benefactors.” A benefactor is someone who, by virtue of status and resources, functions as a patron—someone who provides for the needs of others. The structure of the relationship between a benefactor and the recipient is a hierarchical relationship and not one based on mutuality.

The distinction made in this passage combines the role of leader with servant. The Greek word for servant here is *diakonias*, meaning table waiter, from which we get the term deacon. In other words, the leader must wait on and serve the needs of those who are part of the leader’s group. The group already knows they are to carry out the instructions of the leader and serve the leader in that manner. But here Jesus illustrates that the proper relationship be-

tween leader and group is more mutual, with the leader also serving the needs of the group.

The style of leadership that disciples of Jesus were to embody was that of a servant-leader. We see this style of leadership fully enacted in John 13:3–17. When the disciples had gathered for the feast of the Passover, Jesus removes his garment of authority and washes the feet of each of his disciples, wiping them clean with the towel tied around his waist. It is worth noting that Peter, “the rock upon which Jesus would build his church,” resists being washed by his Lord, perceiving the act as too demeaning for Jesus. Serving one another in humility is central to the role of discipleship.

Mirror Questions

- Share a time in your life when one who was in a position of authority served you in a significant way. What do you think motivated your mentor/leader?
- How are leaders who serve with grace and humility perceived by their peers and by those they serve?
- Jesus leads by serving, in so doing he says he confers on them an authority to serve as leaders in his kingdom? What does this mean for you? What does it mean for Christ’s church?
- How do you think your relationships with loved ones could change if you focused more on this dimension of servant leadership?

Homework

Consider the concepts of shared authority and servant leadership that have been addressed in Sessions 10 and 11. Identify for yourself some necessary steps to integrate more deeply this type of leadership in your life and with your relationships. Think about its application as it relates to your relationships—personal and professional. Articulate a vision of the kind of mutual leadership you would like to create in your life.

Session 12—The Look of Love: Acceptance and Friendship

Scripture: Luke 19:1–10; John 15:12–17; Matthew 28:16–20

Focus: Exploring how friendship and mutuality empower lives and ministry

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 12 for each participant.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Pray the following, or a prayer of your choosing:

Loving and merciful God, so often we look with disdain and judgment on people who we believe personify some evil quality. We fail to see who they truly are—fellow children of God, endowed with their own talents and abilities. Open our lives and our hearts that we may learn to view our neighbors with the love that Christ had for everyone. Instill in each of us respect for all people, that we may see each other through the eyes of Christian love. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Exploring (40 minutes)

2. Study the Bible.

Invite the men to read the following scriptures and the related material on Student Page 12.

- *Luke 19:1–10: Acceptance and friendship*
- *John 15:12–17, Matthew 28:16–20: Shared authority*

Responding (10 minutes)

3. Engage in an exercise in self-disclosure.

Have class participants discuss in groups of three:

- What are some ways that we can equip and empower our loved ones to live their lives more fully?
- How do you share your authority with those in your family or those with whom you work?
- How does the example of Jesus' empowerment of his disciples challenge the way you exercise your authority as a man, boss, friend, husband or father?

Closing (5 minutes)

4. Summarize the basic points.

- Empathy is understanding and relating to the feelings of another person. To empathize we must be in touch with our own emotions and allow the emotions of another person to impact us. Jesus did this very well both as a friend and as the Messiah.
- Jesus recognizes the deep desire of Zacchaeus to connect with him and made himself to

available to spend an evening with Zacchaeus. When Jesus offers Zacchaeus' the opportunity for connection, Zacchaeus' response is to make amends to those he treated unfairly and to give generously to the poor.

- Jesus empowers his disciples in a variety of ways, including teaching them, serving their needs, calling them his friends and blessing them with the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. Close in prayer.

Invite a member of the class to close the session in prayer.

Homework

Ask the men to reflect on the male friendships in their lives using the prompt in the Homework section of Student Page 12.

Session 12—The Look of Love: Acceptance and Friendship

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10; John 15:12-17; Matthew 28:16-20

Focus: Exploring how friendship and mutuality empower lives and ministry

“Friendship is a gift and a sign. It is a gift that invites God and all those whom God loves into deep and enduring relationships. It is a sign that human beings are creatures whose goodness requires belonging and a sense of community. In that sense friendship is central to the moral life. It is also necessary for survival. We cannot endure without friendships of one kind or another. Friendship is like breathing- living depends upon it. I am a friend to others when their needs evoke a spontaneous willingness to respond for the sake of their well-being. My neediness evokes the same response from a friend.”

—*Jacob’s Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*,
by Herbert Anderson (Bridge Resources, 2002), p. 119

Bible study

- **Luke 19:1-10: Acceptance and friendship**

The story of the chief tax collector Zacchaeus is the story of a man who uses the distorted values of the world to gain status. Tax collectors were seen as enemies of the Jewish people even though they themselves were Jews. The tax collectors worked as collection agents for the Roman Empire. By the time of Jesus, Jews were more heavily taxed than any other people under the control of the Roman Empire, because of their refusal to worship the Emperor and to assimilate to the pagan customs of the Romans. Tax collectors were also notorious for collecting more than the Romans required. This practice helped them to become the wealthiest Jewish citizens, but also the most hated by other Jews.

Zacchaeus is small in stature and struggles to see Jesus as he passes through Jericho. So Zacchaeus climbs a large sycamore tree, where Jesus spots him and invites himself to dinner at Zacchaeus’ house. In all likelihood Jesus is the first honorable guest Zacchaeus has had in his home for a long time. Over the crowd’s protests that Zacchaeus is a sinner who should be shunned, Zacchaeus repents.

Mirror Questions

If you do not have two or three close male friends with whom you can share your deepest joys and sorrows, challenges and shortcomings, reflect on your need for close friendship.

- Discuss examples of men who establish their self-worth by coercive behavior and manipulative means.
- How do the changes Zacchaeus made in his life open him up to genuine friendships?
- What changes in your life would allow you to have a close friendship with another man?
- Making amends for those who were wronged by his past actions is only half of what Zacchaeus promised. He also offers to give half of what he owns to the poor. How does doing for others and making amends provide a change for Zacchaeus’s life? Is this the kind of change that transforms human relationships? If so, how?
- What do you think Zacchaeus learned about power, wealth and authority from his encounter with Jesus? Is that kind of transformation possible within your own life and relationships?

- ***John 15:12–17, Matthew 28:16–20: Shared authority***

In these parallel passages, Jesus alters the dynamic of his relationship with his disciples from a master–student relationship to one of colleagues. His authority remains as the leader of his disciples, but he elevates their status to that of his equals. He empowers them for their own ministry of baptizing the nations, first through his teachings then by bestowing on them the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ whole teaching ministry revolves around equipping and empowering his disciples to do God’s work.

Mirror Questions

- How else does Jesus empower his disciples for ministry and treat them as equals?
- How does this text challenge our growth as disciples of Jesus Christ?

Homework

If you are a man who has one or two close friends with whom you can openly address any issue than you are very fortunate indeed. If you have that type of friendship with another male, you are also in a minority of men.

If you do not have this kind of friendship, identify someone with whom you would like to become better friends and begin cultivating that friendship. The old saying goes, “To have a friend you have to be a friend.” Identify some ways you can nurture a strong friendship with another male.

Session 13—Be the Mirror for Someone Else . . .

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:11-13

Focus: Celebrating the opportunities for continued growth and reconciliation

Preparation

- Make a copy of Student Page 13 and the Covenant of Discipleship for each participant.
- On newsprint, print the first two questions from the Relationship Themes Self-assessment from Student Page 13.

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Pray together.

Merciful Lord, we are thankful for the opportunity we have had to study your word and to learn from your son what it means to be truly human. We are also thankful for the opportunity to share our humanity with each other and find ourselves accepted and valued for the people we are. Thank you for the deeper relationships that have grown out of this group. We ask for your spirit's holy guidance in each of our lives as we learn to walk more steadily and boldly in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, our Lord. We pray in his Holy name. Amen.

Exploring (25 minutes)

2. Study the Bible.

• **1 Corinthians 13:4–13**

Remind the group that the study began with a consideration of the defining characteristics and behaviors of love that Paul includes in 1 Corinthians 13. Ask one or more volunteers to read the whole chapter aloud. Discuss the following:

- How do the qualities of love identified by Paul correspond with the way Christ related to all people?

3. Review the basic elements of a Christ-centered masculinity.

Ask the men to silently read the list of elements of Christ-centered masculinity on Student Page 13, then invite a volunteer or volunteers to read the list aloud. Ask for comments or questions on the list.

Responding (20 minutes)

Invite the men to respond to the prompts in the Relationship Themes Self-assessment on Student Page 13.

Ask the men to name the ways this course has challenged their own behavior.

4. Construct a Covenant of Discipleship.

Give the participants time to construct a Covenant of Discipleship. Allow time for each man to find a partner with whom to covenant, and to make preliminary plans for the regular interaction to which they are covenanting. If there is an uneven number of men in the class, suggest a three-some or partner yourself with someone.

Closing (10 minutes)

5. Pray the litany of commitment from Student Page 13.

Session 13—Be the Mirror for Someone Else . . .

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Focus: Celebrating the opportunities for continued growth and reconciliation

“To be free and self-determined selves, men need to be simultaneously autonomous and connected to others through communities of mutual recognition.” (p. 92) “A man of integrity is someone who is willing to say publicly that he is acting in accord with what he believes. That is a risky thing because it means our lives can be measured by standards of coherence between what we say and what we do.” (p. 114)

—*Jacob’s Shadow: Christian Perspectives on Masculinity*, by Herbert Anderson.

The Basic Elements of a Christ-centered Masculinity

- We embrace the mind and teachings of Christ upon whom we structure our identities.
- We are created in the image of a Triune God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—also called the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer God.
- Because human beings reflect the plurality of God, males and females together reflect the wholeness of God.
- Jesus took time for the needs of all people, often before his own needs were met.
- It is human nature to have an over-inflated sense of importance, but this does not reflect our true nature as revealed in Christ.
- Jesus placed a higher value on relationships than on tasks.
- It is human nature to justify our own worth by comparing ourselves to others, but that is not reflective of the will of Christ for our lives.
- Jesus accepted people as they were and invited them to become who God rather than shaming their behavior.
- Jesus calls us to treat all human beings with a high level of respect.
- When we reduce someone to an object of sexual desire, we violate their integrity as a person and violate our own integrity as well.
- Three forms of male relational evil that impact millions worldwide are domestic violence, human trafficking and HIV/AIDS. To be a disciple of Christ is also to address these forms of evil.
- The love of God is a love that allows for the full expression of human free will, allowing for the experience of natural consequences.
- God’s love is also a radically forgiving and unmerited love, which welcomes us home.
- Without forgiveness in our lives and relationships, we are incomplete human beings and do not reflect the true image of God’s love.
- To be Christ-like is to be fully in touch with our emotions as men, where our tears and other “awkward” expressions of emotions are accessible to us at appropriate times.

- Christ conveys authority and power through love, not dominance.
- A Christ-like love accepts the marginalized and outsiders without condemnation.
- Christ's leadership is a servant leadership with power derived from service, love of the other and love of God.

Relationship Themes Self-assessment

1. What basic elements of a Christ-centered masculinity are my strengths?

2. Which of these traits do I need to focus on improving and making stronger in my life as I relate to other people?

3. Identify at least three and no more than five relationship goals that you would like to concentrate on for the next three months.

4. Identify behavior and changes in attitude that will help you measure the progress you make towards these goals.

Share these goals with a person with whom you are willing to enter into a covenant of discipleship.

A Litany of Commitment

Pray the following litany together:

Leader: Merciful Lord, we come before you this day, mindful that as men we are full of contradictions and inconsistencies. Yet through Christ, you demonstrate an everlasting love for us.

Participants: **Lord, all our lives we have heard messages about masculinity that, positively and negatively, have shaped us and our relationships.**

Leader: Lord, through your Holy Word, you have helped us to critically examine the messages with which we have been raised, and have set before us your will for our lives, based on the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Participants: **We thank you, God, for Jesus, who sets before us a model of discipleship based on humility, empathy, compassion and forgiveness and who invites us to follow in his footsteps as we grow as men of faith.**

Leader: Holy Father, in this course we have looked into the darkness of our own masculinity and confess how easy it has been to be misguided. We confess the harm and brokenness we have brought on others, especially on those whom we love.

Participants: **Accept our remorse for our actions and for those of other men. Help us to face the consequences of our wrongdoing and to begin the process of restoring our relationships to the healthy dynamics that Christ wills for all his people.**

Leader: Lord God, help us to be bold enough in our faith to follow the path that Jesus sets before us. Keep us strong, especially when others try to undermine our desire to be guided by him.

Participants: **Thank you, Jesus, for a direction that is always supported by forgiveness. When we fall short, help us to stand again and redirect our path toward your will for our lives.**

All: **We thank you, Lord, for the gift of redemption, reconciliation and healing and for the hope they bring to our lives. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Covenant of Discipleship

With one other person in the class—preferably of a different generation than your own—form a covenant of discipleship. This means that starting today you will create a relationship of accountability with this person by meeting together to share the successes, challenges and setbacks you are experiencing as you grow in your relationship with Christ.

Begin today with each other using the following suggestions:

- Identify three to five significant behavioral changes in the way you relate to others that you want to make in your life, based on insights that from this course.
- Write down those changes on a piece of paper and let them serve as a covenant of discipleship that you make with your covenant partner and with God.
- Develop a strategy for each of those three to five changes to make those changes more permanent.
- While you are together, plan when you will get together (ideally at least once every other week for an hour) to talk about the progress and challenges you have made with your goals
- Before you leave this session, join together in prayer for each other and for the growth of the discipleship that unfolds between the two of you.