

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SONSHIP: BIBLICAL CONCEPTS AND THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FATHER  
AND SON RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
Rawlings School of Divinity  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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December 7, 2017

## ABSTRACT

### SONSHIP: BIBLICAL CONCEPTS AND THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FATHER AND SON RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017

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This research exposes and explains the biblical concept and purpose of sonship in the church. More specifically, it will illustrate an effective model of the spiritual father and son relationship between pastors and their leaders and followers showing how to duplicate the same patterns according to God's design for the Church. The rationale for this topic is derived from perceiving the need to address the deficiency in the effective duplication of leadership within the Church. Regarding leadership, much of the Church has neglected or deviated from the need for spiritual fathers to leaders and how this biblical concept and principle is to be used in an effective and legacy-building Church. This research will be approached first by giving historical and current data of the father-like relationship biblical leaders had with their followers and its significance. This research will utilize Scriptural models of relationships between leaders and followers in the Bible to demonstrate how churches can effectively apply this spiritual fatherhood model for the concept of sonship.

Abstract Length 163 Words

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I thank and recognize Jesus Christ, my Savior, for absolutely everything that He has allowed me to be and get to do. He is the reason I exist and the core of everything I am supposed to become. If not for Him, I would not have been molded and shaped into even having the idea of this project. I thank Liberty University for having such an instrumental part in furthering my education, sharpening my skills and knowledge, and preparing me to represent the Kingdom of God in such a notable and scholarly way. I want to take this time to acknowledge and thank the late Dr. Charlie Davidson for starting this journey with me and being my mentor when I started the Doctor of Ministry program. He was excited about the topic of my project, telling me right before his passing how he highly anticipated seeing its completion. I now thank Dr. C. Fred Smith for willingly taking over and being my mentor and all the faculty and staff that aided in my success. Pastor Brad McClary, Sr., I thank you for the seasons of personal development and the inspiration to focus my research topic in this much-needed area. For all the valuable insight and feedback to make this project what it is, I thank the following pastors/leaders and their churches: Bishop Eric Freeman (The Meeting Place Church), Dr. Holton Siegling, Jr. (First Scotts Presbyterian Church), Pastor Al Levine (Johns Island Church of Christ), Pastor David Butler (St. John Lutheran Church), Pastor Tracy Howard (True Gospel Ministries), Rev. Greg Hodgson (Calvary Episcopal Church), Pastor Eric Manning (Mother Emanuel A.M.E.), Pastor Brian Thomas and Assistant Pastor John Lakin (North Star Christian Center), Father Marcin Zahuta (St. Thomas More Catholic Student Center), and, last, my father, Pastor Anthony B. Thompson, Sr. (Holy Trinity Reformed Episcopal) for also believing in what God wants to do in my life and helping along the way.

For those who respectfully held me accountable and continued to encourage me through this process, I thank Dr. Gwendolyn West, Tajuane Dockery, and Veronica Dargan. I appreciate my cousin, Sadara Shine, for contributing to my development as a leader, specifically as it relates to me being able to exercise the concepts in this project as an influence and mentor to her. To my longtime friend, James Singleton, thanks for insightful discussion at times that would spiral this project into concepts with deeper meaning. A special thanks to Jennifer Gilmore, who selflessly supported and read through my work with that additional, keen eye. Last and most certainly not least, I most graciously thank and love my endearing mother, Yulanda Thompson, who has truly epitomized the unconditional love of God and tremendously supported me through it all. You have truly been the “Most Valuable Person” (MVP) in my life immeasurably.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.

--1 Corinthians 4:15 KJV

When the Apostle Paul said, “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel,” what was the principle that underlay his thinking (1 Cor. 4:15)?<sup>1</sup> Is there some theoretical or spiritual contrast between what a teacher can do versus a what a father in Christ can do? How does having a father in Christ have such an impact on the life of a believer? These questions can be answered or addressed through the Word of God and the patterns that the Heavenly Father has passed on in the Bible. One of the terms used today to describe a father in Christ is “spiritual father.” Spiritual fathers are those men who help believers navigate through their identity issues and see the kingdom and how people fit into that.<sup>2</sup> When thinking about a spiritual father, it may help to also look at the dynamics of a biological or natural father.

When it comes to the idea and nature of one’s biological father or guardian serving as a father, there are several variations and thoughts on what that might actually look like. Traditionally, much of the world may understand the concept of a father as a male parent to a child as well as the concept of a son or daughter being a child to a parent. In other situations, priests, pastors, ministers, preachers, clergymen, and other men that may be identified as men of the cloth may be identified as fathers.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture verses are cited in King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Seth Barnes, "10 Secrets of Spiritual Fathering," January 28, 2010, accessed February 3, 2010, <https://www.sethbarnes.com/post/secrets-of-spiritual-fathering>.



Some people may say that they do not have a father or never had a father; however, it is biologically understood that it does take an egg from a female and sperm from a male to produce a baby. Is this the only thing that constitutes being a father? This may be the case for the traditional perspective of how a father comes to be, though some may believe that being a father involves more than just the biological creation of another person.

There are many characteristics of what a father may be. It can be viewed that fathers are the disciplinarians, the teachers, the authoritarian, the figures that provide validation and affirmation in their children's lives, the providers, and the protectors, just to name a few. These same characteristics can also be viewed in the spiritual nature when it concerns the Heavenly Father. Fathers are essential and fundamental to growth, development, foundation and structure, impartation, validation, protection, and instruction in how people live and navigate through their lives. One can look through the Bible to find these characteristics of God, the Father, just as one can find many of these same qualities in a natural man who serves in the capacity or function of a father.

One of the basic obstacles in knowing the need for a spiritual father is understanding what biblical Scriptures illustrate and teach about them and their role and how it is interwoven into the life of a Christian believer. There are quite a few correlations between a biological or natural father and a spiritual father. "Increasing father involvement in children's lives is one of the most important ways to address material and spiritual poverty in this country."<sup>3</sup> When it comes to natural parenting, one can see that both mothers and fathers play such a vital role in the life of their child. The father's unique parenting role is essentially viewed as the traditional head of the household or the leader who makes the final decision on parenting and home structure and

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Carter, "25 Facts on the Importance of Fathers," The Gospel Coalition, March 28, 2019, accessed July 8, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/25-facts-on-the-importance-of-fathers>.

living. When considering the role and function of a spiritual father, it will be examined through the nature of a man consistently with what the Bible illustrates. This is not to exclude the leadership roles and functions that women can and do possess; however, the concepts and principles regarding a spiritual father will be gathered from the biblical presentation of the role of the male parent. The same will be considered when referencing the term “son” as not being exclusive to only males. Son and sonship for this particular research will symbolize both a male and female in order to illustrate the concept of the spiritual father’s relationship to both genders. “For as many are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). This includes not only male but female believers in the Kingdom of God as well.

Fathers have children and children, regardless of knowledge of or physical access to them, have fathers. As persons are adopted into the Kingdom of God (Gal. 4:5-7) through their faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26), they are considered God’s children regardless of age, gender, race, or culture. It is to be noted in this project when referring to the children of God, it is the indication that the children of God are those that belong to and have their faith in Jesus Christ. “To all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Referring to 1 John 3:10. Matthew Henry’s commentary states, “From the discrimination between the children of God and the children of the devil, they have their distinct characters. In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil.”<sup>4</sup> Mankind can be considered the offspring of God in that they are products of His creative work; however, not all men are the children of God distinctively as a father with a son.<sup>5</sup> In the book of Ephesians Paul states, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1). As a

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, 1 John 3. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Complete). <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/1-john/3.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “Is Everyone a Child of God?” Bible.org, accessed January 2, 2019, <https://bible.org/question/everyone-child-god>.

child of God, the Father, one seeks to be like Him and models one's life after Him. The role of father is of divine origin and begins with God the Father. He gives patterns to live by and to share with others. Just as a natural child needs and benefits from his father being a model and guide to his life, there is a need for God as the Heavenly Father to be a guide and model for everything in the lives of people.

### Statement of the Problem

Many people in the world may not be familiar with having or knowing a biological father. Many people also may not be familiar with or even understand what a spiritual father may be. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “24 million children in America—one out of three—live without their biological father in the home. Consequently, there is a ‘father factor’ in nearly all of the societal ills facing America today.”<sup>6</sup> This is a significant number of children in America that live without their biological father, and the absence of a father may create significant challenges. The research available on this topic can illuminate some parallel truths related to spiritual fathers and their spiritual children.

Growing up without a father has a significant impact on the proper development of a child. One can see throughout time that being raised with a father in the home or in the same environment with their child has changed and decreased. “As important as dad is, many children in America and throughout Western civilization are living without a father, or bear the scars of an abusive, demanding, uninvolved father.”<sup>7</sup> The father in this natural sense has a strong value and provides notable benefits when present and available. The Bible also teaches a principle of

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2015).

<sup>7</sup> John Bishop. *God Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why It Matters* (Colorado Springs, Co: Multnomah Books, 2013), page #.

being like God, the Heavenly Father. God stated in His Word, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness;...so God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him” (Gen. 1:26). One can see further in the Scripture that God does not limit this image to just males; however, there will be in this thesis a focus on just the context of having the likeness and image of God, the Father. If a person is to take on the nature of the Father, then it is essential to know who He is and how He operates. Considering the number of biological fathers absent from the home, it is reasonable to inquire about the number spiritual fathers absent from the lives of Christian believers. Is there any correlation between the two? The following research has identified how the lack of a physically present father figure in a person’s life, modeling the role of healthy and mature men, makes navigating the developmental journey from child to adult more difficult. The statistics about the impact of fatherlessness is alarming:

- 63% of youth suicide victims are from fatherless homes.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.
- 75% percent of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes.
- 71% of all high-school dropouts come from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- 75% of adolescent patients in substance abuse centers come from fatherless homes.
- Children living in two-parent households with a poor relationship with their father are 68% more likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs, compared to all teens in two-parent households.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Parker, “Statistics on Fatherless Children in America,” LiveAbout, March 29, 2018, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://www.liveabout.com/fatherless-children-in-america-statistics-1270392>.

It is thus easy to imagine the deep impact that the absence of a spiritual father might have on a son's spiritual developmental journey.

Just as many people today do not know who their biological father is, there are even more who do not know who God, the Father is as well. In order to identify with the father, one needs to know who a father is. Before addressing the need for a spiritual father, it is important to know how to identify God as Father of all. Traditionally, a father is viewed as being the source and provider for the household. What happens when a child grows up without seeing the male figure as a father in the home and providing for the family? If there are children that grow up not knowing that their father could've been their protector, they may not understand what it means to be protected by a father. If a child grows up without a father being the provider in the home and securing their secondary needs as head of household, aside from a mother that child may not know what it is like for a father to be the provider in the home. Again, it is not that a mother cannot provide these things; however, as a child grows up they may not experience what it is like to have these things come from a male father figure. The ultimate example of a father is God, Himself. The Bible illustrates qualities of His love, care, protection, provision, guidance, and teaching. These are qualities that represent what a father offers to his children.

Some people may have a challenging time relating to God as a Father. People often project their expectations or experiences of what a father should be, or has been, onto their conceptualization of the Heavenly Father.<sup>9</sup> By design, the relationship with one's biological dad should prepare one for a relationship with the Heavenly Father. A daddy's nature provides a window through which one can experience the heart of God. According to The Washington

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<sup>9</sup> Kia Stephens, "How Fathers Affect Our View of God," The Father Swap Blog, August 2, 2017, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.fatherswap.com/2015/07/how-fathers-affect-our-view-of-god/>.

Times, “Sociologists say it is common for people to perceive that God is like the fatherly figures in their lives. If dad is caring, patient and concerned, then children will believe God has those same characteristics. And the opposite holds true when a father is harsh, judgmental or absent.”<sup>10</sup> A boy who longs for his absent father has a hard time seeing God as capable of filling that role. A girl who feels she has to succeed in sports and school to earn her father's approval may see her relationship with God in a similar way. For others, the word *father* may bring up memories of abuse or neglect. The challenge for many people is that they project the troubled, limited or absent relationship they have with their own fathers onto God the Father. Consequently, any spiritually significant father figure would be treated in the same manner. This limited experience limits their experience of God the Father who is offering them so much more. “Fatherhood is also greatly influenced by men’s relationships with their own fathers, the quality of their relationship, and the extent to which the father was emotionally available.”<sup>11</sup> Let’s further state that fatherhood is also greatly influenced by women’s relationships as well. These areas of relationship impact a person’s ability to perceive the truth of God as Father and their spiritual understanding of what it means for God to be Father. Negative associations or even a lack of healthy associations regarding a father can have significant impact on a person’s developmental journey and on their perception of a father-son relationship.

For the purposes of this research, the word Church is referred to as God’s Kingdom of Christian believers living according to the Scriptures of the Bible. If one has a minimal level of understanding of God the Father and experiences resistance or opposition as a part of one’s

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Matthew Brown, "Father's Faith: Perceptions of God May Stem from Dad-child Relationships," *Washington Times*, June 15, 2013, accessed January 6, 2019, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/15/fathers-faith-perceptions-god-may-stem-dad-child-r/>.

<sup>11</sup> Gary L. Dick, “The Changing Role of Fatherhood: The Father as a Provider of Selfobject Functions,” *Journal of Psychoanalytic Social Work* 18, no.2 (2011): 107.

relationship with God the Father, it would be reasonable to expect that person to have the same difficulties with anyone in a role of spiritual father in their lives. If Jesus Christ is one with God the Father (John 10:30), and the Church is the branch of Jesus on earth (John 15:5), then one can theologically identify the functions of God as Father through the body of His believers. Would the Apostle Paul make the statement that there were not enough fathers if he did not see the need for the same spiritual blueprint of fatherhood on earth? Paul indicates to the church in Corinth that because they came to the Lord through his ministry that they were, in a general sense, children to him through the gospel. They were born again through his ministry, so in a way, he was a father to them. However, Paul says of Timothy that he is a "beloved son" (1 Cor. 4:14-17). This demonstrates a difference between being a father to someone in the gospel (in a general sense as some pastors may be to certain congregations) and walking in a true spiritual father/son relationship as Timothy and Paul did. Some pastors may only be one of the ten thousand instructors which Paul refers to (1 Cor. 4:15). This also leads to the need to understand the clear distinction between teachers, mentors, pastors, and spiritual fathers.

Spiritual fathers can and do function as teachers, mentors, and pastors; however, those same three roles may not represent the entire capacity of father. For many people, there may be a fine line between accurately recognizing all four of these positions distinctively because they can function so closely together and oftentimes may mirror one another in certain dimensions. Within the Church, this can lead to many people considering a person as their spiritual father who is actually operating under the role of a teacher or a mentor. Several reasons for this lack of clarity exist including some of what has been mentioned previously such as loose role definition and absence of spiritual father role identification. Consider this example for someone in the Church. If a person never experienced a father in their life who supported them in their

development through guidance and instruction, there is a probability that they will receive and embrace their first male spiritual teacher and perceive them also as their spiritual father based on their lack of experience differentiating between the two roles. The person only identifies with what they perceive to be as a spiritual father because they have taken a characteristic of what they heard, learned, or understood in part and then draw overly generalized conclusions and believe they are true. Some teachers may just be teachers, some mentors are just mentors, and some pastors are just pastors. It is important to accurately understand the roles people play in the Body of Christ and place them in proper perspective. If one understands the function and capacity of a spiritual father, one might have more realistic and reasonable expectations of that position.

When a spiritual father is misused, abused, or not used at all it can lead to many misconceptions and inaccurate doctrines that guide people towards inaccurate or unfruitful living. When a person encounters the unknown, there is the tendency for them to create their own philosophy, which may do more harm to them than good. This process can place an over emphasis on a particular aspect of a concept causing distortion or neglect the truth which hinders them from gaining the full benefit of being in the Kingdom. The Bible offers patterns to identify how to live accurately and operate in the Kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 4:14, Paul asserts his fatherhood by saying, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you” (1 Cor. 4:14). In the preceding verses one can identify that Paul and the other apostles’ lives were patterned after the crucified life of Christ and were contrasted with the lives of the Corinthian believers which were patterned after the wisdom of the world.

In current society, there are several instances where some spiritual positions are looked upon as being obsolete, however, it doesn’t mean that they actually do not exist. When God



called the Israelites out of Egypt, He intended to lead them out of that worldly system into a new way of life by way of Moses. He wanted Israel to establish a new pattern which was a godly lifestyle that submitted to God's laws. By Israel's example, all other nations would be able to see firsthand the blessings that naturally result from following God's laws. Israel, though, failed at this high calling. Rather than setting a righteous pattern for the rest of the world to follow, the Israelites followed after the world's wicked pattern. When people are unaware of a pattern to follow or don't believe that there is a pattern to follow, there is a higher probability they would create their own way of thinking and how they do things in life.

The same idea applies not only to patterns of how one generally functions in life but also the patterns in the positions that people hold such as pastors, elders, and other biblical roles. Though these may be biblical offices, there are also leaders in today's church with the same functions that operate in a fatherly manner. The patterns of these fatherly roles can be traced through the Old and New Testament. There may be people who don't believe this fatherly role exists today but may believe that they were only applicable to the New Testament ages. Corroborating with the words of Jesus, Paul says: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law"<sup>12</sup> (Romans 3:31). When one reads these words and the words of the many other writers in the Bible, it urges one to revisit the old law and read more of the background history. The New Testament is the explanation of the Old. How could one understand the new covenant that God instituted with His people the Jews in Jeremiah 31:31, if one did not have the records of the prophets who wrote about it? It is essential to look at the history of the Old Testament and the patterns of the New Testament because it serves as the framework of life here on earth.

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<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:31 (New King James Version)

Another aspect that may contribute to obstacles in understanding and developing spiritual father and son relationships within the Church is the level of submission, authority, guidance, and obedience involved in these relationships. Not only are there current patterns to be made aware of in one's spiritual functions and roles, but there are patterns which were set down for these roles when they were first formed. If a father desires for their child to complete a specific task for a specific purpose, he might want them to follow the instructions that he gives them and in the manner in which he does it. There may be times when a child does not follow instructions to the degree it was intended. Whether it was for good intentions, selfish motives, or willful rebellion, they chose not to submit to their father's instructions but take measures into their own hands. Thus, the pattern has been broken and taken on a different form with unintended results of the father. This also contributes to spiritual children straying away from the Truth that is being taught by their spiritual father.

Spiritual sons and daughters may stray from their spiritual father's teaching, and the potential to do so is always there. In 2015, a survey of 35,000 American adults shows the Christian percentage of population dropping to 70.6%.<sup>13</sup> Some of these reasons can be attributed to this as human behavior demonstrating free will and choice, especially when considering that all spiritual sons and daughters are not actually children classified by age. It can be challenging for many to follow the Father's instructions and patterns, so to then consider following the patterns from a spiritual father who receive instructions from God for His people may be even more unyieldingly challenging. Submission, authority, guidance and obedience are all key components when establishing and building effective and healthy spiritual father and son relationships in the Church.

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Burke, "Millennials Leaving Church in Doves, Study Finds," CNN, May 14, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/index.html> (accessed January 2, 2019).

The Bible has several illustrations of the concept of spiritual fatherhood and sonship. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, there are examples of men of God who demonstrated the characteristics of a spiritual father and examples of various dynamics between spiritual father and son relationships. It would be essential to study the Bible through its many illustrations and exemplary teachings in efforts to understand the biblical concepts and spiritual dynamics of spiritual father and son relationships in the Church.

#### Statement of Limitations

This project will be limited to the interviews with ten pastors from the following church denominations: Baptist, A.M.E., Reformed Episcopal, Episcopal, Catholic, Pentecostal, Non-denominational, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Church of Christ. All of these pastors from these churches will be interviewed whether they received formal (institutional) or informal training before becoming the leader for their church. An online survey will be conducted with only active members of their churches. Church members to complete the survey has an age range from 18-65. This would include members regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, race, position outside of the pastor/church leader, or having an understanding and knowledge of the topic of this research. The participants in the interviews and the surveys have used English as their dominant language. This project will not address any racial or cultural issues regarding its topic. Additional research would be needed to identify any cultural variances. Although there may be additional benefits to collecting data outside of the South Carolina region, amongst the chosen ten churches data collected is limited to Charleston, SC and Columbia, SC. These were reasonably geographical areas to meet with the pastors in a convenient physical location. The interviews were conducted at the location of their churches in their offices.

The contents and research in this project may stimulate questions whether every Christian requires or needs a spiritual father, if spiritual mothers exist or are to be considered, or whether God can be a female or referred to as mother. The project is designed to reveal the biblical concepts and help identify why there may be the need for more spiritual father and son relationships in current day rather than it being a biblical mandate or commandment. In the research material and Bible references used, God will be referred to as Father in the masculine and male gender context.

### The Theological Basis for the Project

The Bible illustrates many concepts, characteristics, and principles of the type of Father God is, the patterns that are demonstrated through the Old and New Testament, as well as indicating a legacy to be carried out in the Kingdom for His ultimate purpose and design.

Isaiah 64:8 states that “God is our father and that while He is the potter and we are the clay, we are the work created by His hands” (Isa. 64:8). This illustrates the quality in a father to form, instill, and impart the characteristics of Himself inside of His children validating all are created by Him. Paul describes how “we have received the Spirit of adoption and cry out Abba, Father. Our spirit confirms with God’s Spirit who we really are, which is His children” (Rom. 8:15-16). God Almighty can actually become one’s Father in a very personal way. Upon spiritual conversion, one also enters into the role of child to God the Father. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). By way of confessing Jesus Christ is Lord and receiving Him into one’s personal life, one is received into the Kingdom of God with God being the ultimate Father. This can be seen as the spiritual conception of a child of God. Galatians 4:5-6 tells one that “we receive the adoption of sons and that God sent the Spirit of His

son into our lives crying out Abba, Father” (Gal. 5:5-6). This would also indicate that Christian believers are truly considered spiritual children and heirs of God. Just as there are Biblical references to support the Father-son connection one has with God the Father, there are also biblical patterns and concepts that are illustrated through Scripture to further promote this type of relationship.

One can look at when God has done things throughout the Scriptures, that He had done so with patterns in mind to follow. Just as God instructed Moses to build a temple according to the patterns that He designed, God also has set patterns in how He desires His spiritual nature of fatherhood to be structured. The Scripture indicates how God instructed Joshua not to stay away from what He commanded Moses (Josh. 1:7). The things that God shared with Moses would produce success and prosperity if followed. These early instructions in the Old Testament indicate a pattern to follow which was passed down to Moses through the eternal Father, God. In 2 Chronicles 7, God appears to Solomon giving him insight on the importance of following the patterns and commandments that He, Himself, gave Solomon’s biological father, David. He let Solomon know what would happen if those patterns, commandments, and statutes were followed as well as what would happen if they were not to be followed (2 Chron. 7:17-19). Here again is an instance where God illustrates a pattern of commanding and teaching the importance in following the same patterns that He instructed to the listener’s predecessor. In the New Testament, Jesus illustrates these same guiding principles of following a pattern set forth by the Heavenly Father. Jesus encourages the listener to abide by and follow the commandments given by God as He, Himself has done the same thing (John 15:4-7). Scripture indicates the necessity in receiving from natural leaders that which God has placed over all His children’s lives and to live according to those same patterns that they live by (Hebrews 13:7). When the Scripture

refers to “considering the end of their conversation,” it denotes observing and looking at the lives these leaders are living according to God’s patterns and follow after them.

There are other Scriptures that are related to living according to the patterns and principles that God, the Father, has set and will be referenced later. Patterns are not just blueprints to buildings and material items designed to follow a previous physical structure, but they are also patterns that are designed by God to yield certain outcomes for spiritual growth, development, and internal structure in people’s lives. God desires to establish and build Himself within the lives of His believers and be transformed proving who He is in the earth. Jesus told Peter that he was the rock in which He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). Here, Jesus is illustrating that He is the person that is building and developing a person by the patterns of His nature. This demonstrates a characteristic of a father who imparts of himself into his child so that they may take on the nature, culture, and principles of who he is.

Jesus’ relationship with God the Father is the highest reflection and most intimate Father/Son relationship and earthly relationships reflect the realities of this one to some degree or another, ideally. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes more than 150 references to God as a father. For the Jews of that time, this was a new way of addressing God. “While Old Testament writers sometimes described God using qualities of earthly fathers (and mothers), Jesus referred to God using more informal, intimate language. He also invites His followers into this relationship, teaching us to address God as our Father in heaven.”<sup>14</sup> In John 14, Jesus describes His relationship with God in a very unified and purposeful manner as to demonstrate the various dynamics in their relationship (John 14). In verses 7-11, one of the first things that Jesus describes and indicates to His disciples is the nature and image He has of God, the Father.

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<sup>14</sup> Vance Fry, “God...the Father?,” *Focus on the Family*, (2016): Accessed on March 18, 2018, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/spiritual-growth-for-kids/trinity/god-the-father>

## The Statement of Methodology

This project is designed to show concepts of spiritual fathers and sons in the Bible, that it exists in today's church, the variations of its use and understanding in churches today, and how it is still a relevant concept in the Church today. There are many times where people tend to see in the world a reflection of what they see in the Church or vice versa. What exists are some incongruent connections to how the patterns of the Church should operate in the world today. This is the same when it comes to the types of relationships that are demonstrated through the Bible in efforts to exemplify those same concepts and principles.

The project introduction begins by referencing Scriptural texts that illustrates a father as a spiritual influence and it also begins to illustrate the dynamics between a biological father or male guardian with his children. The reader will see some of the characteristics that a biological father could also have. This approach is taken to help the reader make connections to the concepts and principles of learning the characteristics of spiritual fathers. It may be difficult for many people to embrace or understand the concepts of a spiritual father due to: not knowing or understanding how the Bible reveals this concept, not knowing God as the Father in Heaven, and not with not experiencing a positive father figure in one's life. Much of this is discussed in Chapter 1. Through this, the reader will be able to identify issues that may cause barriers to discovering spiritual father and son relationships as well as discover qualities that produce healthy dynamics between these individuals. The reader will be able to identify some of the causes and reasons that this concept of sonship may not be as prevalent in the current society of the Church or why it may not be as active in the Body of Christ.

As mentioned within the limitations portion of this project, this research may stimulate some questions regarding variables outside of the context of this project. This provides the

reader with boundaries in what the researcher is conveying to the audience regarding the desired concept. Beyond the statement of limitations, the theoretical basis for the project will offer researched literature, best practices and data, and biblical references to support the concept that the researcher is putting forth and designing. In addition to this, each researched literature and material in this project is briefly discussed to further support the model and concept for this study. The reader will be able to identify other sources that are aligned to the material for this project and make a sound connection to the purpose of this project.

In Chapter 2, the reader will be able to understand the reason for this research and why it was chosen. It will introduce the type of people that were used in this study for data collection, but it will also discuss several dynamics with the concept of spiritual fathers and sons supported by other research. Some of the things that will be address are fatherhood and father-like qualities, biblical models of father and son relationships, distinctions between spiritual fathers and teacher/mentor-like roles, challenges due to this lack of relationship, reasons and causes of its deterioration or lack of existence, characteristics of a spiritual son (not related to gender), and the benefits associated with development and legacy from strong spiritual father and son relationships. This portion of the project will solidify the proposed concept as well as illustrate supported material that is needed to reinforce it.

The results and findings of this project were gathered from almost 100 people which included pastors, leaders of churches, and the members of those churches. Chapter 3 captures what this project has discovered through a series of surveys and interviews. Surveys were completed by members of churches and the personal interviews were with pastors and leaders of churches. Some of the questions in the surveys and interviews will be discussed so that the reader can identify trends, patterns, and mindsets from the participants that reveal their



knowledge and perspective for the concept of this project. The data in this section of the project will support the purpose of this research and will reveal correlations across participants that are distinct across denominations. Data collected across ten denominations with ten pastors or church leaders. Charts and tables in this section will also assist the reader in being able to visually recognize and interpret the data collected. The overview of these results will help the reader understand why this topic would be beneficial.

Last, Chapter 4 will revisit the purpose of this project while leading the reader through an explanation of the project to the need for the concept of sonship being demonstrated more in the current day Church. Within this section, emphasis will be placed on how the Church can improve on developing healthier and stronger, spiritual father and son relationships. This portion of the project will help to bridge the connections between the concept of spiritual fathers and sons to practical methods that would benefit the Church as a whole.

## Review of Literature

There are various resources that were selected by the researcher to provide support for this project. The following sources included in this thesis are books, journals, articles, internet sites, quotes from interviewees, and Scriptures from the Holy Bible. This review of literature will also demonstrate this thesis's contribution to the field of ministry as well as to the components written and illustrated in this project.

### **Books**

An important contribution to this work is John Bishop's *God Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why It Matters*. This book discusses how it

is likely that a person's view of God is influenced by the relationship one has had with one's father. It references some of the characteristics of God as Father and how the Bible itself reveals significant qualities of the Father in Heaven. This supports material in the project by showing associations people have when they view God as Father.

*Helping Parents Make Disciples* by Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and Kirby Worthington offers insight on parent's involvement in making disciples. In this book, the author seeks to equip the reader in assisting parents facing challenges in dealing with their children. Its overarching theme is faith and love but also addresses biblical patterns that are used when addressing parenting. This project includes illustrating some of the challenges faced between a father and a child. The information in this book assists with understanding effective parenting or discipleship through God's character.

*In Charge* is a valuable book by Myles Munroe outlining certain principles about leadership. He offers the idea that leaders reproduce after their own kind which would be the determinant factor for whether the coming generations are effective or not. His book is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the concepts of leaders and the second part provides practical methods for leadership. This book supports this project by addressing the need for discipleship and duplication of leadership. This legacy concept is described in the model for spiritual fathers and sons.

*My Father's Names: The Old Testament Names of God and How They Can Help You Know Him More Intimately* by Elmer L. Towns is effective when looking at material from theological perspective. Towns provides the biblical meaning of the names of Gods in this book. In this book, he reveals the connection God has with his children as Father. This literature helps to uphold this project's foundation of fatherhood originating from God being Father of all His

children. In order to identify spiritual fathers on earth, it is important that there is an understanding and knowing the Creator of all fathers.

*Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* by Frederic W. Bush, David A. Hubbard, and William S. Lasor is a helpful book for reviewing historical information from the Old Testament regarding the different types of father and son relationships in Scripture. This book offers a breakdown of the Old Testament into four parts. Utilized in this project is illustration of the spiritual father and son characteristics between Elijah and Elisha. This project also provides examples of leaders in the Bible who have demonstrated the concept and traits of being spiritual fathers and sons. This book provides a historical perspective on the subject matter of this project.

*Replenish: Leading from a Healthy Soul* by Lance Witt reveals some of the issues church leaders and pastors face being a leader and how having a healthy soul matters not only for their personal development, but also for those they are leading. It discusses aspects of creating a healthy leadership in the church, developing better systems in the church, and reasons that may lead to lack of church growth. The information in this book supports this project because some of these very key elements are just as important when it comes to having healthy spiritual father and son relationships in the church.

*Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance* by Robert Saucy emphasizes the Bible as essential in Christianity because of the extent its records God's activities and interventions in human history. Saucy's research applies to this project because it illustrates dynamics of the relationship God has with his children as Heavenly Father. It reveals the character and nature of God which supports information in this project for how those same characteristics can be translated on earth.

*The Alliance of Honorable Men* by Jonathan David describes and teaches conceptual principles on covenant relationships and partners. It discusses the alliance of spiritual fathers and sons as well as the patterns these two positions produce. This book fully supports this project by illustrating the fundamentals required in establishing and maintain a spiritual father and son relationship.

*The Audacity of Leadership* by Anton Gunn breaks down the type of leadership style that supports the characteristics in a spiritual father. There are several types of leadership styles that exist, and this book focuses on transformational leadership also known as transformative leadership. The author offers 10 essential traits of this type of leadership and how it can be implemented in the environments in which one serves. Extracted from this book is the concept of building a legacy for the next generation of leaders. One of the purposes of this project is to show that spiritual fathers create a legacy for the continuation of their work. The illustration in this book also provides a worldview as to how this concept could be applied whether it is in the Church or not.

*The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being & Making Followers of Christ* by Bill Hull discusses the relationship between Moses and Joshua and describes how their relationship manifests itself into five characteristics humans need to grow and develop. These five characteristics are comprised of relationships to nurture, apprenticeship for competence, accountability for tasks, submission for shaping, and wisdom for decision-making. All of these characteristics mentioned in this book are also highlighted as necessary characteristics to support the concept of spiritual fathers and sons. It also illustrates another model from the Old Testament that exemplifies the dynamics in such a relationship.

*The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero addresses how leaders in the Body of Christ are faced with one of the greatest challenges of living balanced and healthy lives. It provides practical methods and awareness of how to live a healthy, balanced life while demonstrating the importance of having an ongoing relationship with God. While this book describes the Church as a model for people to follow as well as using patterns from the Bible, the project references these same measures for people to identify the same associations.

*The Gospel of John* by John Phillips serves as a commentary series providing doctrinally sound interpretation of the book of John in the Bible. This source has supported showing the relationship between Jesus as Son and God as Father. It reveals the connection and the unity that is held in this relationship and offers a practical sense in how to define that same relationship within the Church itself.

*Theology for Today* by Elmer Towns provides sound doctrine towards the understanding of Scripture. He helps to provide a foundation for the reader to obtain a theological framework and context when approaching Scripture. Taken from this work are certain concepts of God as Father. The theology in this book supports the project by providing biblical doctrine in the concept of fatherhood.

*Radically Unchurched* by Alvin Reid discusses the issues revolving around the unchurched. According to this book, the unchurched is considered those who have little to no interaction with a Christ-centered church or do not have a clear understanding about the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This undergirds some of the information in this project by addressing possible reasons why people may not know or understand the concept of spiritual fathers and sons from a biblical perspective.

## Articles

*Assessing the Impact of Father-Absence from a Psychoanalytic Perspective* by Kim A.

Jones examines the role of the father and the effects of his absence within the context of psychoanalytic theory. It explores some of the earliest psychoanalytic writing on the father and his role in child development. The research project addresses some of the issues faced when there is no father or spiritual father. This article supports findings on those type of effects.

*Church and Ministry Statistics and Their Implications for Leadership Training* by

Christopher Cone provides statistical data on the reasons people have and have not attended church. The author wanted to identify these significant trends to demonstrate that there could be an effective way to educate and approach these issues with opportunities to connect people more with God and the Church. The information provided in this article is helpful for this project because it reveals the magnitude of people's connection, or lack of connection, to God and the Church. If people are not connected to God accurately, they will not understand or perceive the importance of certain relationships in the Church such as spiritual fathers and sons.

*God...the Father?* by Vance Fry highlights a few characteristics referencing father-like qualities in God, the Heavenly Father. The writer of this article intends to educate the audience in how Jesus connected to God as Father as well as reveal the similar qualities that are demonstrated by natural fathers. This work provides this project with another example of a father and son relationship indicated through Jesus and God, the Father.

*Ministry Duplication* by Kent Shaffer discusses the importance of ministry duplication by looking at the example set by Jesus Christ. He described how Jesus made efforts in duplicating Himself through the twelve disciples that followed Him. Within this project, Jesus is also examined using the concept of being a spiritual father to the twelve disciples. This project seeks

to reveal one of the characteristics of being a spiritual father is being able to duplicate oneself through principles of discipleship.

*Parental Autonomy Support and Ethnic Culture Identification Among Second-Generation Immigrants* by Neetu S. Abad and Kennon M. Sheldon supports the vitality in fathers being a primal force in developing their identity. This project addresses that man's identity is found through relationship with God, the Father, and that this type of identity exploration is also encouraged by spiritual fathers as they imitate the principles of God.

*Research on the Happenings in Pastors' Personal and Church Lives* by Richard J. Krejcir provides statistical data and research on some of the challenges pastors face regarding their leadership. He provides data in several areas about how pastors feel about their work and outcomes in the ministry as well as mentioning the lack of discipleship that exist in the Church today. This article supports the principle that a spiritual father should exercise duplication and legacy-building in Christ and stresses that this concept should be injected more into the Church.

*Scholarship on Fatherhood in the 1990s and Beyond* by William Marsiglio, Paul Amato, Randal D. Day, and Michael E. Lamb focuses on fathers in at least four different ways. It looks at the factors of cultural representation, diverse forms of fatherhood and father involvement, father-child relationship, and father identity. The project addresses all of these areas as it relates to spiritual fathers' relationships to their sons and daughters. It particularly addresses the absence of fathers.

*The Changing Role of Fatherhood: The Father as a Provider of Selfobject Functions* by Gary L. Dick offers valuable insight on the role of a father. According to this article, fatherhood is evolving and is significantly influenced by men's relationships with their own fathers. The author describes how it is important that the father demonstrates the ability to identify certain

needs with their child and help to establish their identity. One of the essential aspects within this research is that a spiritual father needs to be able to help their child develop healthy and effectively.

*The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* by Marianne Meyers Thompson addresses how God can be perceived as Father and lists some of the qualities and characteristics of God, the Father. The author addresses the questions of what one calls God and what is His name. The material in the project illustrates certain qualities that a spiritual father demonstrates as he emulates the nature of God, the Father.

*25 Facts on the Importance of Fathers* by Joe Carter offers several reasons fathers are important in a person's life. This project seeks to also make some correlation between biological fathers and spiritual fathers. Believing that the characteristics of natural fathers originate from God, the Heavenly Father, it is implied that these two positions hold the same type of qualities. Some of the facts that this article mentions are also noted in the research of this project. The article supports the need for fathers to be in a person's life to prevent or reduce spiritual poverty.

### **Thesis/Dissertations**

*A Study of Fatherlessness in the African-American Community in Relationship to the Positive Role of Christianity* by Kevin A. Smith gives another perspective on fathers that are absent from the home. Though the title of this thesis indicates how it may address fatherlessness within the African-American Community, the author also addresses the importance of the role of the father regardless of race. It targets an area of discussion in this project where absent fathers have significant impact on the relationships with their children. The author's thesis helps to support the idea in this project that children are affected when the father is not present. This



work also demonstrates comparatively that the absence of spiritual fathers can also have a downward effect on their spiritual sons and daughters.

*Father Presence Matters: A Case for Family* by Marcia Redmon Miles reveals the responsibility a father has in developing and strengthening the family as well as God's concept on father involvement. She reflects on the church as a leading voice and advocate promoting father involvement. The purpose of this project is to reveal the importance the Church modeling the concept of spiritual fathers and sons and demonstrating the need for more of these types of relationships. This literature illustrates and supports the need for a more present father role.

## **The Bible**

A foundation of this research project consists of the Word of God due to its purpose. Several references from Scripture were used in the development of this paper to help illustrate and support the concept of sonship specifically with the dynamics between spiritual fathers and sons.

*1 Corinthians 4:17* - "For this very cause I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and trustworthy child in the Lord, who will recall to your minds my methods of proceeding and course of conduct and way of life in Christ, such as I teach everywhere in each of the churches."

*2 Corinthians 6:18* - "And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

*Exodus 3:10* - "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

*Galatians 4:4-6* - "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoptions of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

*Genesis 1:27-28* - "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."

*Genesis 2:7* - “Then the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath or the spirit of life, and man became a living a soul.”

*Isaiah 64:8* - “God is our father and that while He is the potter and we are the clay, we are the work created by His hands.”

*Jeremiah 29:11* - “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil to give you an expected end.”

*John 10:14-15* - “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

*John 14:8* - “Philip said, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

*Luke 9:1-2* - “Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.”

*Luke 10:1* - “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”

*Numbers 11:25* - “And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him (Moses), and gave it unto seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.”

*Philippians 2:19-23* - “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore, I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.”

*Psalms 68:5* - “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.”

*Romans 8:14* - “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

*Romans 8:15-16* – “We have received the Spirit of adoption and cry out Abba, Father. Our spirit confirms with God’s Spirit who we really are, which is His children.”

*Romans 8:29* - “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

*Romans 12:6* - “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us”

*Ruth 1:16* - “And Ruth said, Urge me not to leave you or to turn back from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God.”

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **“LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON”**

The interviews consisted of meeting with local pastors and leaders of churches from several different denominations. The role of a father is typically viewed as a leader or one of an authority figure; therefore, the interviews conducted with pastors and leaders focused on gathering their perspectives and knowledge on the role of a spiritual father in the Church. The surveys consisted of the various members and other leaders of the churches. Under the leadership of a traditional pastor, other leaders and members of a church would typically be viewed as the followers of their pastor or the established leader in their church. Followers (even those that may also be considered as leaders) function in a more submissive and obedient nature to their leader which is reflective of children to father relationships. The surveys were designed to gather how members felt about spiritual fathers and sons, what they might understand about the concept, and how they viewed themselves in respect of the spiritual father and son relationship. Ten select denominations were used in completing the interviews and surveys amongst the members of the churches. Various denominations may use different methods in their worship service or ministries but are understood to hold the same foundation of the Christian faith. It would be useful to include different denominations in this research to provide for a broader perspective and insight on the concept of spiritual father and son relationships. All

of the people included in this research collectively represent a small portion of the Church to capture an impression of what people in the current day Church feel and know about the dynamics between spiritual fathers and sons.

Before looking into the dynamics between spiritual fathers and sons, let's consider a question about duplication and multiplication of the Church. What does the Bible say about multiplication? One of the first Scriptures in the Bible that mentions multiplication in relation to the increase in the number of people is in Genesis 1:27-28, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:27-28). Before God mentions multiplication, He informs the reader that male and female have been created according to his image. This illustrates that man and woman take on a likeness of God by nature and that He purposely created man and woman to be like Him. The following verse then shows God instructing man and woman to be fruitful and multiply which denotes procreation for the sake of duplicating not the two of them but Himself. There is cause for God to desire people to be in His image. When anything is produced or created it is done for a functional purpose. Therefore, when God created man and woman in his own image, he was intentional about it and had purpose for what He wanted.

Man's creation has very little to do with one's ontology and biology but rather has more to do with one's calling, the purpose given to mankind by God. This reveals an important characteristic about spiritual fatherhood and fathers in general. Fathers help establish identity and help to define and shape purpose in the lives of their children. Humans were originally called by God to be His representatives and His image bearers on earth. Man's purpose has great significance and impact on how he navigates through life. This will be addressed after briefly

clarifying what the image of God entails. The “image of God” in its Latin origin is *Imago Dei*. Theologically, it denotes symbolic relation between God and humanity.

“The term *imago Dei* refers most fundamentally to two things: first, God’s own self-actualization through mankind; and second God’s care for humankind. To say that humans are in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities of human nature conscious recognition of their being in the image of God means that they are the creature thought whom God’s plans and purposes can be made known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God.”<sup>15</sup>

The Apostle Paul said, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Here, the image of God means the same thing where people are called to be conformed in the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. With these things, one can understand at least three things: God calls humans into relationship with Him, has men to be representatives of Him to the rest of creation by His name, and has men to be stewards and care-takers of creation. This leads into the next concept of fathers helping to create purpose and establishing identity.

Under the premise and Scriptural text that God is the Father of all creation, one can then further identify with one of the attributes of a father as it regards defining purpose and discovering identity. When considering the Book of Genesis, one can identify that God created everything from the seas, skies, land, light, and every living creature that included animals and mankind. In the very beginning of Genesis in this creation, the Scripture describes that God spoke everything that He wanted to exist on earth, and it came to be. In the second chapter of Genesis, the Bible states “Then the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath or the spirit of life, and man became a living a soul” (Gen. 2:7). The distinction here is that when it came to the creation of man, the Bible illustrates the different

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<sup>15</sup> PBS, Accessed on March 18, 2018, [pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html](https://pbs.org/faithandreason/theogloss/imago-body.html).

approach God took in creating mankind. Even with the creation of other creatures (animals), the Scripture indicates that when it came to mankind, God formed and shaped man according to a specific design and breathed a part of Himself into man. Furthermore, in the later Scriptures He gives man privileges that He did not give to anything else He created which was to declare names and titles of things on the earth. In essence, Adam functioned as God did when he began the earth by speaking creations into existence. Adam took on the image of and function that God, the Father, did by the authority that God gave him. “Careful exegesis of Genesis 1:26:28 does indeed suggest that the *imago Dei* refers to human rule, that is, the exercise of power on God’s behalf in creation...A Royal-functional reading of the *imago Dei* is essentially confirmed.”<sup>16</sup> When God wanted to start a family, unlike the way He created Adam, He did not create one out of dust but he called Abraham who was already existing to demonstrate the pattern of His image. When God elected a nation to represent Him to the rest of the world, He chose Israel to be His image-bearer, and in the New Testament God has called Christians to be the image of His Son.

Since the beginning of time, the desired pattern of the Heavenly Father is for His children to be conduits for others to also be created in His image. This is the purpose for His children and helps create an identity of who His children are. A study at the University of Missouri states that fathers play an essential role in their child’s ability to create an identity in response to interactions with other family members and the outside world. The study proved that the presence of a supportive father would influence the capacity of the child or adolescent to build resources necessary to stay grounded in various situations. Studies on family functioning discovered that fathers are typically instrumental caregivers, responsible for informing their child

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<sup>16</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei In Genesis 1* (Brazos Press, 2005), 88.

of their role in society, encouraging them to achieve success, and disciplining them when they do not meet acceptable standards.<sup>17</sup> The Heavenly Father through the Scriptures also provides the principles and standards in life that help navigate through social interaction and affairs of this world. So, as a father, it is relevant to bring some validation in how to conduct oneself in society and in various environments. Just as this serves as such a benefit to a child with the presence of a father, there can be some adverse effects with the absence of a father.

“Certainly, the changing role of fathers has been received positively in most societies; yet, with more concentration on role equality, the view of modern fatherhood is ushering in an ominous trend. The new father figure has gradually been emerging but with an increased emergence of the absent father. The absent father sometimes remains part of the family yet vacates his role due to work commitments and other activities. His mindset and neglect impact the children most, contrary to widespread belief that children grow up unaffected.”<sup>18</sup>

The absence of a father can lead to behaviors that effect having healthy relationships, lessen positive choices and sound decision-making, increase criminal behavior, and develop emotional and behavioral instability. In a biblical sense, these behaviors can be comparative to developing proper relationships within the Kingdom and the world, having a sober and sound mind, having a consciousness of sin behavior, and being able to operate under self-control identified by the fruit of one’s character. As it pertains to multiplication and duplication, there are also instances when a person with an absent father reproduces that after its own kind. If behavior is learned then there is the implication that the human tendency would only be to produce what is familiar, seen, or modeled after. Now, the absence of a father doesn’t always represent the lack of physical presence of a father figure. Fathers can be physically present but

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<sup>17</sup> Neetu S. Abad and Kennon M. Sheldon, “Parental Autonomy Support and Ethnic Culture Identification Among Second-Generation Immigrants,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 22, no. 3 (2008): 652-57.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin A. Smith, “A Study of Fatherlessness in the African-American Community in Relationship to the Positive Role of Christianity” (2017). Doctoral Dissertations and Projects. 1630. <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/1630>

also emotionally, spiritually, and mentally disconnected from their children's lives. This can also lead to the same if not more significant problems in a person's frame of reference regarding a father and what it means to benefit from a healthy father and child relationship.

Consider a child growing up without a father or with a father that was abusive by neglect or other means. The child would not understand what it means to have a father in his/her life or may have a skewed mindset of what a father is supposed to be like. Therefore, salvation and being introduced to God as Father, may cause some mixed feelings and misguided interpretation as to who that is. Through a study by a psychoanalytic researcher, Eva Seligman, it was discovered that a significant number of adult patients who considered themselves "half-alive" suffered from issues with abandonment and anxiety which left them overly dependent upon their mothers. "Seligman thought that the father played an essential role in mediating the transition from the womb to the world."<sup>19</sup> If these problematic issues occur within settings in the world that exists today, how likely are they to occur within the Kingdom of God or the Church itself when it comes to the importance of having spiritual fathers in positions?

As this research has begun to recognize God as Father, it has also illustrated the desire that He has for mankind to be created after His own image. Though this indicates a degree of multiplication and patterns that the Heavenly Father seeks to accomplish on earth, it extends the same nature and principles of His Fatherhood to be established as well. Fathering is inclusive in the image of God because it is a part of Who He is and what He does.

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<sup>19</sup> Dr. Kim A. Jones, LCSW, "Assessing the Impact of Father-Absence from a Psychoanalytic Perspective, *Psychoanalytic Social Work* 14, no.1 (2008): 46.



## Our Father Who Art in Heaven

“And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:18). God declares that He is the Father to His believers and that they are his sons and daughters. He is making a statement from the position of where He sits. This alone implies that there are functional characteristics of how He will be the Father to mankind. The Bible indicates many characteristics that the Heavenly Father possesses and how He demonstrates those qualities.

### **God the Father As Nurturer and Provider**

When an earthly father nurtures his child, he is providing him with positive training. Likewise, the heavenly Father will care for His children. “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?” The promise includes food, drink and other basic necessities, for as it concludes, “your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”<sup>20</sup> In the original translation of the book of Genesis, the name given to God by Abraham is “Jehovah Jireh.” This is the Hebrew word for “The Lord will provide.” It can also simply mean that He will see to it. God sees what’s going on in His children’s lives and knows exactly what His children need.

### **God the Father Provides Impartation**

Impartation is associated with the act of giving or granting something. Through Scripture, God reveals how He imparts upon His children. When something is imparted upon people, it signifies a level of relationship that one has with the one who imparts. Within

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<sup>20</sup> Dr. Elmer Towns, *My Father’s Names: The Old Testament Names of God and How They Can Help You Know Him More Intimately*. (Ventura, California: Regal Books 1991), 86.

Christianity, the Trinitarian nature of God reflects a relationship between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus, God came personally into human history.<sup>21</sup> It was through this relationship that humans were able to receive the things that Jesus was able to receive from God, the Heavenly Father. “Philip said, “Show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8). In Christ God Himself comes to man, and in the Holy Spirit He imparts Himself to man.

A Scripture in the Old Testament says, “And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him (Moses), and gave it unto seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease” (Num. 11:25). God divinely imparted of the spirit from Moses to 70 elders. This occurred after Moses cried out to God because the burden of leadership was too heavy on his life. He needed the strength and support from his Heavenly Father. The impartation upon the 70 elders enabled them to take on a much greater responsibility to support Moses and ultimately to fulfill God’s plans.

### **God the Father Validates and Affirms**

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil to give you an expected end” (Jer. 29:11). During this time in the Bible, the people in Israel were in exile. They were ripped from their homes and families and placed in unknown territory. In spite of where a person is in life or what may be occurring at the present time, the Heavenly Father assures His children that everything will work out and His children will flourish. Just as God can impart spiritual gifts upon His children, He also validates Himself through His children by the use of His gifts. In the book of Romans, it states, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom. 12:6), was written by Paul to explain

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Saucy, *Scripture: Its Power, Authority, and Relevance*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing 2001).

how God the Father also affirms His children through the use of gifts He has bestowed upon them. He provides His children with only things that He can provide to be used for His namesake.

### **God the Father As Teacher**

“Fathers are to command by equipping their children with the sound biblical principles found in God’s holy Word.<sup>22</sup> They can also encourage them to use those principles and maximize upon them in areas of their lives. It will empower them to actively participate in the culture they identify themselves in. God reveals His truth to the people who humble themselves to be taught by Him. If His children are filled with pride and the so-called knowledge of this world and their trust is in that then how can they receive the revelation of God’s truth. God teaches His people through His Law what is good and holy, the things they are to do and not do. He teaches people as they live their lives and when they experience things through many circumstances in life.

### **God the Father as Disciplinarian**

Just as much as God loves, He also corrects and serves as a disciplinarian. The Bible declares, “For the Lord corrects and disciplines everyone whom He loves, and He punishes, even scourges, every son whom He accepts and welcomes to His heart and cherishes” (Heb. 12:6 AMP). In this, God acts as a father not allowing the faults of His children to go unchecked or uncorrected. Here, the Bible illustrates the need for chastisement. God also chastised the children of Israel after Moses had miraculously led them out of Egypt. Moses was gone a long

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard Kirk Kitchens, “Spiritual Innovation: A Faith-Based Model To Equip Men To Become The Spiritual Leaders For The American Family In Crisis” (DMin thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 1285.

time up on the mountain, and they became worried that he might not come back. They decided to make a golden calf to worship. As their punishment, God told Moses that He would blot them out of His book then strike them with a plague (Ex. 32:1-35 KJV). They eventually had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all of that generation had passed away. When God gives instructions to follow just as any father would do, there is the expectation that it will be carried out. Whether intentional or not, God has ways in which He can bring correction. Correction and discipline are not always such punitive concepts. God may also be acting in ways to redirect His children when they are not acting according to the blueprint that He has for their lives.

### **God the Father Gives Assignments**

In the book of Exodus in chapter 3, God has a moment with Moses as He speaks to him through a burning bush. In the verses 7-10, God introduces to Moses the problem He sees with the affliction that is impressed upon his children. As a Father, He not only sees the problems that is associated with His children, but He instructs Moses to follow His commands to deliver the people out of Egypt. God says, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exod. 3:10). He gives Moses an assignment on earth to complete on His behalf. God gives everyone an assignment on this earth to complete. One’s assignment is decided by God yet discovered by oneself. An assignment is a mission or position to which a person is assigned. Through the assignment, God gives revelation and as life surrounds that revelation, it comes to life within the individual.

## **God the Father as Protector and Covering**

“A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5). To those that are oppressed, God is a Father to those that need him. “Even among Christians there is a tendency to ignore those who are less fortunate.”<sup>23</sup> To those who don’t have a father, God says that He is their Father. Despite the dangers, God’s people can live with an unshakable confidence in the safety of His protection. To actually benefit from the protection of the Heavenly Father, there is the need to align and submit oneself under the authority of God. God can be the protecting Father His children need, however, if they walk away from Him they walk away from that protection. A father cannot protect what he cannot hold onto. One writer indicates that while the children of Israel were preparing to flee Egypt, a spirit of death was being released against the firstborn of the land. The only protection for Israel at that time was the shed blood of a spotless lamb on the doorposts of their dwellings. If the blood was in place, they were spared.<sup>24</sup> God is always there for His people. It is mankind that has demonstrated the tendency to walk away from Him. He promises if His children will follow His words, and walk in His light, they will have His protection.

## **God the Father Produces His Likeness**

It has been mentioned previously that God produces mankind in His own image according to Genesis 1:26-27. Notice the overall context of these verses. It is the very first chapter of the Bible, and God is laying the foundation for what will follow as a result of His creation. If the foundation is not laid correctly, then the rest of the building is crooked or not as functional as He intends. God is beginning to establish the vision of what His purpose is and

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<sup>23</sup> Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today*, (Cengage Learning, 2008), 152.

<sup>24</sup> David Cannistraci, “Understanding the Covering of God,” *Charisma*, July 7, 2013, <https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/spiritual-growth/1617-gods-got-you-covered> (accessed on January 4, 2019)

where His children are headed in life, and the need to have some insight into Who He is. Therefore, He tells His children immediately that they are made in His image and His likeness. He contrasts mankind with the animals. Each one of them reproduces after its kind and when they reproduce, they look like their parents. They look like each other. God is clearly implying that He is reproducing Himself and that His purpose is that His children will be exactly like Him when He is finished. Even now, in physical form, His children are made in His image so that they will have the potential to be exactly like Him.

### Fathers on Earth, As It Is in Heaven

The Bible provides many examples and characters of men who functioned and demonstrated characteristics of a father either to individuals, tribes, or assemblies in some form. It gives one a picture of how God relates to His children. Looking again at the leading Scripture for this project in 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul reveals to the Corinthian church that they have more teachers in Christ to guide them than they do fathers. He also explains that he only became their father in Christ through the glad tidings of the Gospel. Furthermore, in the next verse Paul encourages the church to follow in his footsteps being imitators of him. While substantiating the need for spiritual father and son relationships in the Church, it is also important to look at biblical characters that have demonstrated those same relationships and the patterns they used within the dynamics of those relationships. Through them, it is possible to identify the patterns of fatherhood that God has shown mankind and how He wants them to be executed and establish that same concept of leadership here on earth. Now that this written literature has illustrated characteristics of being a father through the works of God, readers can examine the attributes of

being a father translated through the lives of other biblical leaders in the Old and New Testament.

## **Abraham**

Starting with the Old Testament, Abraham is told by God that he will be the father of many nations. His name was changed from Abram which means high, exalted father to Abraham which means father of a multitude (Gen. 17:4-6). How can a human being naturally be a father of many nations? In this sense, God is using Abraham as an example to illustrate that one should look upon him as being his spiritual seed and a father of the faithful. It is not saying that everyone has a direct biological link to Abraham, but at most it is signifying that the patterns in which His children were designed may originate from this man who was connected to God.

In verses 4-6 of Genesis, there are three components to examine. God tells Abraham that His covenant is with him, in other words, there is a solemn pledge God has made with Abraham. This in itself reveals that Abraham as a spiritual father to many has a bonding relationship with God, the Heavenly Father. The second thing these Scriptures reveal is that this Father and son relationship between God and Abraham leads to Abraham presenting that same fatherhood to many other nations. Thirdly, God tells Abraham in these verses that He will make him exceedingly fruitful and make nations of him. This recognizes a characteristic of a spiritual father producing of himself in building a legacy after his own kind. Abraham is not the founder of faith in God because God is the Creator of all things. It is said that “in Genesis Abraham has no teaching; he is a father and not a founder like the Buddha or Jesus or Muhammad. That he, like them, nonetheless becomes a paradigm to be imitated is therefore all the more unusual and interesting.”<sup>25</sup> Here again, the emphasis and realization is placed on imitation by spiritual nature.

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<sup>25</sup> John Levenson, *Abraham Between Torah and Gospel*, (Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, 2011)

## Moses

Moses was the biblical leader that was responsible for leading the people of Israel out of Egypt. He offers many qualities of a father such as a shepherd, mild and meek, but also a warrior who is capable of blood-shaking acts of violence, a gentle teacher who is also a wonder-worker, a lawgiver whose code of justice is merciful, and an emancipator who leads his people with strong authority.<sup>26</sup> One of the characteristics of a father that Moses demonstrated much of was being a protector of people. As God has served as a Father to His people that were oppressed, Moses also functioned as a liberating father to those oppressed in Egypt. There are three instances in Scripture where Moses steps in to be a protector and defender for people. The first was when he witnessed an Egyptian beating on a Hebrew and kills the Egyptian for this abuse. The second incident was when he addressed an unjust aggressor for fighting another Hebrew. The third time in these verses where Moses comes to a defense was when he rescued seven daughters of a priest from being attacked when trying to get water from the troughs (Ex. 2:11-19).

More specifically, Moses demonstrates his father-like qualities when he serves as a teacher and predecessor to Joshua. At least twice, Moses helps Joshua adjust his perspective on things and provides some enlightenment on the issue at hand. In Exodus 32, Joshua hears a noise in the camp while he and Moses are coming down from the mountain and think it is a noise of war. Moses shares with Joshua that it is not a noise of war, nor the sound of victory or defeat; nonetheless, Moses informed him that it is singing (Ex. 32:17-18). In Numbers 11, Joshua tells Moses to stop the men from prophesying after the Spirit of the Lord rested upon them to do so. Moses addresses Joshua by way of character and revelation. First, Moses asks if he is jealous for

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<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses: A Life*, (Ballantine Books, New York, 1998)



him but also teaches him that God would rather all men to prophesy (Num. 11:28-29). Here, Moses not only addresses the posture of Joshua's character, but he provides a level of correction that offers insight on how God is looking at this experience. The correction Moses offers Joshua is not punitive as much of it is more re-directive and instructional. Henry writes, "Though Joshua was Moses's particular friend and confidant, though he said this out of a respect to Moses, whose honour he was very loth to see lessened by the call of those elders, yet Moses reproves him, and in him all that show such a spirit."<sup>27</sup> Lastly, in efforts to produce a successor, Moses passes the torch onto Joshua by laying hands on him and giving him charge over what he was leading (Num. 27:23). In this chapter, Moses affirms Joshua as the next leader to carry out the mission that God had him to accomplish.

## **Elijah**

Another well-known relationship in the Bible associated with characteristics of discipleship, fatherhood, and the mantle of successorship is that of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah served years as God's prophet until he is informed by God to anoint Elisha to take his place in the future (1 Kings 19:16). Just as God has created His children in His own image and to follow in His nature, this illustrates Him honoring the same concept through men by anointing others to carry out the mission that is set.

"To signal the transition from Elijah to Elisha, 2 Kings reports their farewell visit with Elijah's "sons"—i.e., his apprentice prophets or followers. When a dramatic yet mysterious event took Elijah from him, Elisha cried out: "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen! Some years later King Joash voiced the same tragic lament over Elisha as the prophet lay dying. In a sense, this express set literary bookends around the life of Elisha. It suggests that godly leaders, not mighty armies, gave Israel strength; their prophets were their true defense."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew Henry. *Numbers 11*. Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete) <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/numbers/11.html>.

<sup>28</sup> William Lasor, Daven Hubbard, and Frederic Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, (W. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996).

Elijah was not Elisha's biological father, yet he cried out to Elijah as father. This signifies that their relationship was deeper than just Elijah being a mentor or teacher. He recognized Elijah as being more than that. Elisha did not want to leave Elijah's side. Children or adults with parents respond in similar ways in not wanting to leave their parents side or stray away from their guidance and counsel symbolizing them being a strong lifeline. The passage above also indicates that relationships that demonstrate patterns as such reflect strength for people and for a nation.

Every leader needs to plan for his/her transition. Whatever position one holds today someone else will hold it eventually. A legitimate concern as a spiritual father should be to want to see faithful persons in those positions that will build upon the work, not tear the work down. Elijah found Elisha in the field working. He was obviously a man of means because he was plowing with 12 yokes of oxen ahead of him. However, at the call of Elijah, he left them to follow Elijah. When spiritual fathers are looking for successors and desire for someone else to carry the mantle, they often look to those who have demonstrated the ability to be successful in some other area of their lives.

## **Paul**

Paul, of all the men and women of the Bible, clearly addresses the concern with having enough fathers in a spiritual sense to provide and spread the foundation and the teachings of Christ in a more in depth and personal manner. Notice that Paul refers to the believers at Corinth as his beloved children. The people in the churches that Paul planted were often referred to as his children because they were the ones whom he led to faith in Christ. They were spiritual children; and not just spiritual children but *beloved* spiritual children. Paul compared his

gentleness to that of a mother caring for her children and his firmness to that of a father (1 Thess. 2:7,11). Within the Corinthian church in the Bible, Paul implores that they imitate him. He encourages this after he makes his statement about not having many fathers in Christ. When he uses the word imitate, it is not suggested for people to take on his personality or his natural, born characteristics. He's referring to the Christ-nature that's in him and that he has demonstrated before them. His request for imitation derives from him seeing the need for the work of God to continue through mankind regardless of male or female. Therefore, if Paul is referring to the church as imitators, he is referring to this concept in spirit and in action as he continues to follow Jesus Christ. In accordance with 1 Corinthians 4:8-13 one writer stated, "Imitate me in being willing to be a fool for Christ, to be weak and without honor in the eyes of the world, to be hungry, poorly clothed, homeless, roughly treated for the sake of the kingdom."<sup>29</sup> Not only was Paul a strong leader and father to many churches, he played a vital role in the development, shaping, and fathering of an individual named Timothy in the Bible.

"For this very cause I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and trustworthy child in the Lord, who will recall to your minds my methods of proceeding and course of conduct and way of life in Christ, such as I teach everywhere in each of the churches" (1 Cor. 4:17 AMP). There are several things to consider from this verse. First, Paul recognizes and specifically states that Timothy is his son in the Lord. A father knows his child and a child knows his father. He is letting the Corinthian church know that Timothy will function as he would on his behalf. Timothy is now serving as the extension and voice for Paul in the church. Timothy continued to learn a lot from Paul as he was being prepared to be the leader that Paul had become in Christ. Paul explained Timothy's role in combatting errors among false teachers and how he would

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Anderson, "The Responsibility of a Spiritual Father," The Bridge, September 26, 2010 <https://www.thebridgeonline.net/sermons/the-responsibility-of-a-spiritual-father/> (accessed on January 5, 2019).

overcome falsehood. He even encouraged Timothy to make a positive presentation of the truth and to develop his own habits of personal integrity.<sup>30</sup> Paul actually carries this spirit and stature of a father in relation to all the saints and all the churches he has begotten in Christ through the gospel. He carries them in his bosom, as a father his children, and cannot rest until they are as they should be. Hence Paul labors for them continually in prayer, in much affliction and loneliness, in much fasting, laying down his life so that they might live and arrive at the goals God has set from them. This is the work of a spiritual father in demonstration.

### **Jesus Christ**

If there is ever a model in the Bible that demonstrates what a spiritual father would look like, it would be Jesus Christ. Out of the characteristics mentioned in this project, Jesus Christ has shown to function in every one of them. A reasonable assessment would be largely due to the fact that He was the closest to God than anyone else. Actually, Jesus declares in John 10 that He and God, the Father, were one (John 10:30). If this is true, one can conceive from this biblical statement that Jesus can exercise and function in the capacity of a father to people as well. There are several biblical references in which Jesus demonstrated this fatherhood of God towards people.

Jesus reveals Himself as teacher through several instances throughout the New Testament, however, in Luke 11 there is unique significance in how He teaches his disciples how to pray. “Luke 11 begins with Jesus “praying in a certain place.” When he has finished praying, one of his disciples asks, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (11:1). In response, Jesus offers a three-part

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Lea, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, (Broadman & Holman: Nashville, 2003).

teaching, including a model prayer, a parable about prayer, and some sayings about prayer.”<sup>31</sup>

As Jesus was reciting the prayer, He wasn't just speaking words that He wanted His disciples to repeat after Him. He was teaching them how to make that connection to God through prayer. He gave them the components of prayer so that they would be able to develop that prayer language and cultivate their own relationship to God, the Heavenly Father. A good spiritual father will always connect his children to God and ensure that He is the ultimate source. Which leads to the reason for Jesus correcting and rebuking Peter in Mark 8 when He was letting His disciples know that He would suffer, be rejected, and put to death. Peter not realizing and seeing the bigger picture of what God had already commissioned Jesus to do was thinking outside of the will of the Father. Jesus was teaching and revealing to Peter how he was thinking of what was pleasing to man and not promoting what God willed. A spiritual father wants to do the will of the Father, therefore, will promote the agenda of God, the Heavenly Father.

The role of a shepherd is to guard, protect, feed and shelter the sheep and Jesus is the Master at this. Jesus, the good shepherd's purpose is to give life and protect from destruction. “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:14-15). There is a connecting principle through these verses and a comparison that Jesus is making to reveal a function through a father and child relationship. The first verse clarifies that Jesus is the shepherd and protector and God's children are His sheep. In the next verse He equates this concept of God, the Father, knowing Him and Him knowing the Father. In other words, the same Father that knows and protects Jesus also operates through Him to do the same for His

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<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Johnson. Luke. Commentary on Luke, [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1724](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1724).

sheep on earth. It is every father's natural desire is to protect their child. The greatest protection is that nothing can separate God's children from the love of God.<sup>32</sup>

The Bible illustrates that Jesus provides for and meets the need for a multitude of people. He sees the need of the people when they did not have enough to eat, therefore, He provides for them by multiplying the five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt. 14:16-21). The Bible states, "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1-2). There are four things that Jesus did here. First, Jesus took the power and authority He had in Himself, and gave it to the twelve, so that they could do what He had been doing. Jesus gave them both power and authority and by doing this, affirmed who they were through God and Himself. Power is the ability to do a thing. Authority is the right to exercise that power. Not only did Jesus give the twelve His power, but He also gave them the right to exercise it as His specially called ambassadors. So secondly, Jesus imparted of Himself upon the twelve disciples. When the twelve went into a city, they were the personal representatives of Jesus Christ. The third thing that Jesus did in this Scripture was give His disciples assignments to do. Thus fourthly, in all of this that Jesus did, in essence He produced these disciples to be like Him in demonstration and in power. He empowered, validated and gave the instructions on what He wanted them to do. Though these are just a few qualities of Jesus, He encompasses the ultimate concept and embodiment of what a spiritual father should be.

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<sup>32</sup> Elmer L. Towns, *My Father's Names*, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1991)

## Sonship

The term “sonship” in this context refers to both males and females. The focus is not on gender, but on the nature of the relationship. According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, sonship is “the relationship of a son to a father.”<sup>33</sup> When utilizing this term in a biblical context, the term “sonship” is applied to both male and female which indicates no specific gender. Christian believers are sons of God in that they are supposed to be God’s image bearers. They are supposed to reflect Him as much as human beings can reflect him. Again, the idea is not ontological or biological. It is the reflection of the One whom a person calls Heavenly Father.

“A second position is that “sons of God” should be translated as “godly sons” and thus refers to the godly descendants of Seth. However, good exegetical principles require that “men/mankind” has the same meaning in Genesis 6:2 as in 6:1 Ha’adam (the same word in both verses) is understood generically as “humanity/mankind” in 6:1, thus referring to the entire human race, including both the descendants of Seth and Cain.”<sup>34</sup>

Sonship has no respect to gender. It is a concept used through the Bible to illustrate a deep relationship and connection with God, the Heavenly Father. This relationship that one has with God is also the same relationship that one could have within the framework of the Church to translate the patterns, methods, and image of God, Himself. Paul provides people with the revelation of mankind being adopted as sons. He says, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoptions of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:4-6).

There are two things to be considered in this Scripture. It explains that when Jesus was born, He was birthed through a female on earth and though it was a miraculous birth, it was

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<sup>33</sup> Merriam-Webster, “sonship,” accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sonship>.

<sup>34</sup> Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, Tenn: Holman Bible Publishers, 2004)

nonetheless naturally through a woman. The Scripture indicates that God sent forth His Son, which already indicates the position Jesus had with God. The second thing it reveals is due to Jesus being born and claimed as Son, mankind on earth is received by God and called sons by way of spiritual adoption. Though God in traditional terms is not the biological father of Jesus and mankind, it is a spiritual concept that believers in Christ are considered sons of God by way of Jesus (Rom. 8:14). So, now one can examine how this concept and principle of being a spiritual son or daughter is translated among people on earth. As much as the Bible provides people with examples of men who demonstrate the characteristics of a spiritual father, it also offers illustrations of men and women who receive from their leaders as though they would be a son or daughter.

## **Joshua**

Due to the type of relationship Joshua and Moses, Joshua demonstrated some characteristics of what a spiritual son may look like. He was not the only spiritual son of Moses because Moses had other protégés who were serving him and learning under his leadership. Joshua appears to have more of the characteristics that illustrated him more faithfully, listening more closely, and following Moses more intensely than others. He positioned himself in a place to humbly receive from his leader as well as become prepared to continue the work Moses was doing. “Joshua depicts the Conquest of the land promised to the fathers, whereas Acts shows the Church moving forward in conquest of the then known world.”<sup>35</sup> What was promised to Moses was then handed down to Joshua so that he could continue the work Moses left.

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<sup>35</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, “The Book of Joshua.” *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 32-33. Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1981.



Moses instructed Joshua to come to the mountain with him so that he could give him the tablets with the 10 Commandments and be prepared to teach them to the people (Ex. 24:12). Joshua was to closely follow the Book of the Law of Moses. This was the first time anyone had been asked to base his leadership upon another's writings.<sup>36</sup> All before Joshua had been governed by words directly from God's mouth. Now God uses Moses to develop a successor and give direction as to what God is commanding His people. Joshua learned from Moses and saw many things of Moses. Joshua heard the teachings of Moses and saw the miracles that God did through Moses as well as at Moses' request. Joshua undoubtedly witnessed the sins of Moses such as striking the rock, the anger and frustration of the people of Israel, and presumably many other times of hardship. Through this disciplining relationship, Joshua learned leadership. He learned what it was to care for the people, to pray for the people, to intercede for the people, and to offer sacrifices for the people. Joshua also saw God provide for the basic needs of the people which was food and water. "The concept of spiritual fathers and sons was a dominating theme of the Bible. God expected every one of his people to be fathered and mentored."<sup>37</sup>

## **Ruth**

In the Bible, Ruth and Naomi were two women that had a unique relationship like mother and daughter even though Ruth was not the biological daughter of Naomi. It is to be reminded through this project that when referring to the concept of spiritual fathers and sons, the patterns of these relationships are examined more so than the gender role. In this sense, Ruth is being used as a female and examined more in the role of a spiritual daughter to illustrate the other

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<sup>36</sup> Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua*, Chicago: Moody, 1981.

<sup>37</sup> Researchomatic, *Moses and Joshua Mentoring Relationships*, [www.researchomatic.com](http://www.researchomatic.com), October 6, 2011

gender functioning through this spiritual principle. There are two striking positions that Ruth holds within the relationship she has with Naomi.

“And Ruth said, Urge me not to leave you or to turn back from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth shows Naomi that she was committed and loyal to serving her and that she would also submit herself to the manner in which Naomi lived. Naomi evidently must have had a close relationship with Ruth in regard to the cultural ways and religious traditions of her faith, so close that it could be said that Naomi “rubbed off” on Ruth, so much so that she could make the kind of statement that nothing but death could separate her from Naomi.”<sup>38</sup> Spiritual sons and daughters have a strong sense and desire to be by the side of their spiritual father. This does not signify a desperate need for them to be physically alongside their spiritual father, but it does reveal that the heart of a spiritual son or daughter of loyalty and commitment to remain in their life. Ruth left her relatives, her homeland, and trusted God to bless her as she sought to bless Naomi. This is the very thing that Boaz commended Ruth for doing.<sup>39</sup> He recognized all that she sacrificed and committed herself to while yet praying that God repay her deeds in full (Ruth 2:11-12). Her commitment put her in a position to receive more blessings from God.

When Ruth tells Naomi that her people will also be her people and that the God Naomi serves will also be the same God she serves, she is submitting her life to the patterns of her leader. These were positions of choice that Ruth made to Naomi. Though God may lead people

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<sup>38</sup> Desmond Gaius Boldeau, “Developing a Mentoring Model, Based on Christ’s Approach to Discipleship, for Intern Pastors in the British Union” (doctoral thesis, Andrews University, 2014), 76.

<sup>39</sup> Robert L Deffinbaugh. Ruth: A Story of Redemption, January 10, 2010, A Study of the Book of Ruth.

to one another, there is a choice to be fathered or mentored by the person receiving.<sup>40</sup> This part of Ruth and Naomi's relationship reveals the level of submission that spiritual children demonstrate. Ruth was following Naomi but had never seen Bethlehem. She only knew polytheism; however, drawn by Naomi's witness, Ruth by faith and not sight turned to Naomi's God, Jehovah.<sup>41</sup> Naomi told Ruth about the true God and she believed because she had such a peace in her mother-in-law that defied the circumstances they were facing. Ruth's submission caused her to trust Naomi, thus trusting the God of Naomi. Spiritual children submitting to spiritual fathers also teaches submission to God. One author explains this by describing Naomi's posture with God and how it was model behavior for Ruth to follow. The answers for Ruth always came down to trusting God, obeying Him, accepting His will, and knowing there was a purpose in what was happening even if they could not see it.<sup>42</sup> This characteristic is seen through spiritual sons and daughters whereas they trust the God of their spiritual fathers.

## **Elisha**

As mentioned previously, spiritual fathers can impart of themselves and even a spiritual dimension of things onto their spiritual children. According to Scripture, many times this occurs when the spiritual son or daughter is in the right position having the proper mindset to receive from the spiritual father. Elisha serves as good example of positioning himself under the leadership of Elijah and seeking to obtain a portion of the mantle of Elijah carried. In 2 Kings chapter 2, Elisha decides to follow Elijah up until he is taken up to heaven by a whirlwind. During this time there were other prophets with them as well, but they did not continue to follow

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<sup>40</sup> R. Jeanene Moore, *Mentor: She Influences, Impacts, and Invests*, Ministry of Grove's First Baptist Church, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Hindson and Woodrow Kroll, "*Ruth*." *The KJV Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers. Nashville: Tennessee, 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Francine Rivers, *Unshaken: Ruth*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream: Illinois, 2001.

Elijah as Elisha did. Similar as Ruth to Naomi, Elisha was relentless in remaining by Elijah's side no matter the obstacle or the others who fell by the wayside. Before Elijah departs, Elisha, who had refused to leave his side, requests a double portion of his spirit. Elijah promises it will be so if Elisha sees him as he is taken up. Elisha watches him until he disappears, and then tears his clothes in two and takes up Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:1-13). There are some key elements to observe here when considering the position of a spiritual son or daughter.

Spiritual sons and daughters will remain faithful more than any other person when you're leading. They seem to latch on to their spiritual leaders in way that illustrates part of their destiny and life is hidden or dependent upon the person they are following. Elisha would leave everything to follow after Elijah. He even slaughtered his ox and sold all his farm equipment. There was no going back. Elisha committed himself 100%.<sup>43</sup> From this posture of spiritual sons and daughters, it can be seen that they do receive good fruit from having this position. One of the things that Elisha asks from Elijah before he's taken up is a double portion of his anointing. The Bible has recorded through Scripture that Elijah performed 14 miracles. After Elisha petitioned for a double portion of Elijah's anointing, throughout his life he actually performed 28 miracles which accounts for exactly a double portion of Elijah's anointing. Spiritual sons and daughters can receive a spiritual inheritance and impartation that only comes from the close relationship and connection they've developed with their spiritual fathers and leaders.

The other aspect of sonship is that when a spiritual son or daughter takes on the mantle of their spiritual father, it is evident to others that they walk in the same spirit, power, and authority as their spiritual father. Elisha's call gives one the idiom "take up the mantle," which means to pass an office from mentor to student (1 Kings 19:19-21). "Some see Elijah's cloak as a magical

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<sup>43</sup> Scott L. Engle, *Mentoring Friends: Elijah and Elisha*, 2004.

talisman that gives source to his power, but the cloak is powerful because of the anointing of the prophetic office, not the other way around.”<sup>44</sup> After Elisha took the mantle of Elijah, he struck the waters and asked where was the God of Elijah? When the waters parted and Elisha came through, the other prophets witnessed this and proclaimed that the spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha. They began to honor and respect Elisha just as they did Elijah because he was operating within the same power and spirit as Elijah did (2 Kings 2:13-15). The prophets recognized he was Elijah’s successor and truly qualified to become their leader. Elisha had proven the reality of his walk with the Lord and demonstrated he was qualified for the ministry he was called on to do. As spiritual fathers lay a foundation and groundwork for their children to carry out, it can be quite valuable and fruitful as others recognize that their children are just as equipped to finish the work. This can be identified as a strength because the work at hand will not die out but carried out through legacy.

Spiritual sons demonstrate an attentiveness to the spiritual father more than those around him. If he had looked off for just a moment when Elijah was taken up, he could have missed the departure and the blessing. Instead, Elisha had been faithful to stay with Elijah and to faithfully watch for the translation.<sup>45</sup> He would be the one to take on the responsibility of his mentor. There are many times believers may miss God’s will because they become preoccupied with their problems, or people, or success. Elisha could have become occupied with himself and the new position of authority and responsibility that he was about to receive, but his response as seen in the words he cried out as he saw Elijah pass from the scene demonstrates a different heart. It exposed where his heart was with Elijah and the perspective he had on the cause itself.

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<sup>44</sup> Eli T. Evans, “Passing the Mantle: The Cloak, the Call,” *Bible Study Magazine*, September 26, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids; InterVarsity, Downers Grove, 1979.

## Timothy

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he addresses him as "my true son in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2). Timothy is first introduced in Acts 16 when Paul is heading out on his second missionary journey. He stops in Lystra to pick up the young disciple who accompanies him, assists him, and serves as a sort of apprentice under him. Timothy's biological father was Greek, but no evidence is ever given that he was a Christian. As a result of this, Paul filled the shoes of a spiritual father to Timothy.<sup>46</sup> Paul was aware of Timothy's good reputation which led to his specific selection of him. His personal connection made him stand out and fit to be Paul's successor and understudy. The relationship between these two men may be the most common in the Bible when referring to spiritual father and son relationships. The dynamics between them demonstrated teaching, correction, support, appointing, and duplication by way releasing a spiritual son to continue the work that has already been laid. "Throughout the duration of this relationship, Paul ensures that Timothy is the right person for the job, equips him for ministerial tasks, empowers him for success, employs him in a challenging environment to develop effectiveness, and communicates to Timothy the value of their relationship."<sup>47</sup> One of the strongest functions that a spiritual father can perform is validation. Descriptively, it is a stamp of approval and affirmation for the spiritual son or daughter to be secured in who they are for the work they do and for others to receive them in the same respect as they would the spiritual father.

"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore, I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me." (Phil. 2:19-23).

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<sup>46</sup> Rick Warren, 3 Phases of a Paul and Timothy Relationship, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of This Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges," Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership 3, no.2 (2011): 35.

Paul had many followers and even those in the faith that he called children, but here with Timothy he draws a strong distinction and characteristic of a spiritual son. Timothy followed Paul and shared in his trials and tribulations closely as they continued to share the Gospel and do the work of the ministry of Christ. He became a companion of the apostle and then became the author of two epistles in the Bible that carried his name, Timothy.<sup>48</sup> He chose Timothy to function in the same role that he did towards the Philippian church. Paul let them know that Timothy had the same mindset and the same attitude and character traits towards them as he would have himself. Timothy was spoken for as any child to their father would want to be. While Paul knew Timothy sought to follow his instructions and teachings, he also knew that Timothy ultimately sought to do the things of Jesus Christ. “But you have observed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, tolerance, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured” (2 Tim. 3:10-11). It shows that Timothy not only follows Paul as his teacher and sought Christ but shows Paul’s validation towards Timothy. A spiritual son follows their spiritual father as their spiritual father follows Christ. Timothy was sent to the church of Philippi because Paul could not make it at the time. Spiritual sons are the arrows and the extensions of spiritual fathers so that the work of Christ will continue with spiritual patterns already laid and not be delayed, incomplete, or obsolete.

## **The 12 Disciples**

The Scriptures show that Jesus did have more disciples than the twelve disciples that most people may be familiar with. “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also,

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<sup>48</sup> Desmond Gaius Boldeau, “Developing a Mentoring Model, Based on Christ’s Approach to Discipleship, for Intern Pastors in the British Union” (doctoral thesis, Andrews University, 2014), 89.

and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1). Disciples of Jesus Christ were considered people that followed Christ when He would preach the good news from city to city as well as spread the same message that He did. “A central transaction in this relationship is the transmission of culturally privileged knowledge from the superior to the subordinate.”<sup>49</sup> There were twelve men who were much closer disciples than the rest. These men were more intimate with Jesus, demonstrated more commitment to Him, had more access to Him, received more personal instruction and guidance from Him, were trained directly by Him, and out of any other person or leader simply spent more time under Jesus witnessing the life that He lived before others as a model of what He wanted demonstrated. “The Hebrew equivalent to discipleship is *talmid* meaning a learner, or *talmid chakham*, a student or learner of the sage.”<sup>50</sup> In terms of the Jewish customary manner, the Hebrew *talmidim* was associated with a *rabbi Sage* or a student and teacher of the law, although accepted and used in a broader sense of all followers of a *rabbi*, but one whose aims were to raise up many disciples.<sup>51</sup> These are all characteristics of sonship as it regards relationship and receiving from a leader in spiritual manner that promotes and cultivates instructional learning, spiritual intimacy, and legacy building.

When Jesus called the disciples, he gave them a purpose and a goal to reach according to the patterns that He was going to set. Sons will usually adhere and respond to their spiritual leader and a directive rather quickly. Scripture describes Matthew being a disciple petitioned by Jesus Christ to follow Him and dropping what he was doing to do so (Matt. 9:9). James and

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<sup>49</sup> Martin S. Jaffee, “A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Texts of Oral Torah,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (1997): 529.

<sup>50</sup> Brad Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, London: SCM Press, 69.



John were also fishermen that left what they were doing to follow Jesus (Luke 5:10-11). Sons typically demonstrate an internal design to openly receive from their father without much struggle or resistance. The father speaks and instructs, and the sons listen and follow. This concept is not alien to the traditional pattern through a world view as well. The Bible refers to Jesus being the true Shepherd which describes when hearing His voice, the sheep recognize His voice and follow (John 10:3-4). Receiving from a spiritual father and following after him is such an inherent posture that an individual has. There will be a time when the disciple passes through the time of being led in discipleship. This is the moment when they step out from under the role of their leader while serving, ministering, and growing out of the foundation that has been laid. How will this be carried out is based on how well spiritual fathers have led them in the process.<sup>52</sup>

## **Jesus Christ**

Jesus not only demonstrates exceptional characteristics of a spiritual father as mentioned earlier, He also is greatly known as the Son of God. “In short, in the New Testament “Son of God” is not a terminus technicus, as the Latins say—a technical term that always carries the same associations.”<sup>53</sup> It always presupposes some sense of deriving from God, or of acting like God, or both, but the domains of such acting are diverse. “Regarding Jesus as merely ‘divine’ but not deity violates the context,” New Testament professor Craig Keener writes in his commentary on the Gospel of John, “identifying him with the Father does the same. For this reason...scholars from across the contemporary theological spectrum recognize that, although Father and Son are distinct in this text, they share deity in the same way.”<sup>54</sup> Jesus demonstrates patterns of a clear father and son relationship through Him and God, the Heavenly Father. Jesus

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<sup>52</sup> Andy Blanks, 4 Characteristics of Biblical Discipleship, Iron Hill Press, Birmingham, AL: 2014.

<sup>53</sup> D.A.Carson, *Jesus The Son of God* (Wheaton: Illinois, Crossway, 2012), 74.

<sup>54</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 372–74.

clearly teaches how the relationship He has with God, the Father, is specifically connected to his ability to perform and bear the fruit that God desires (John 15:1-8). One author implied that people are not dealing here with something marginal or optional. “If we are not united to the vine so that Christ’s life is flowing into us, then his words, his love, his joy will be utterly and totally barren. Nothing of any lasting value will come from us.”<sup>55</sup> This illustrates an essential component of being connected to a spiritual father, while He is connected to God. It reveals a pattern of a father and son relationship having an impact on one’s life personally and as it may relate to how one functions around others. Remember, Paul demonstrated the same concept and pattern when he strongly urged the Corinthian church to follow him as he followed Christ. Apparently, this pattern implores how dependent the son is of the father and that the father’s position is to model after the nature of God, the Father. Jesus reflected how people are to connect to the Father, how to receive, from the Father, the need for the Father, and how to demonstrate the nature and attributes of the Father. In this, He taught the necessary patterns needed in a father and son relationship for growth, development, and succession.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **EXAMINATION OF SONSHIP IN THE CHURCH AND ITS USE**

Previously mentioned in this research, there were interviews conducted with 10 pastors from different denominations surrounding the Christian faith and 10 of their members were asked to complete an online survey regarding issues surrounding sonship. The denominations that participated were Baptist, A.M.E., Reformed Episcopal, Episcopal, Catholic, Pentecostal, Non-denominational, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Church of Christ. All of the 10 pastors from

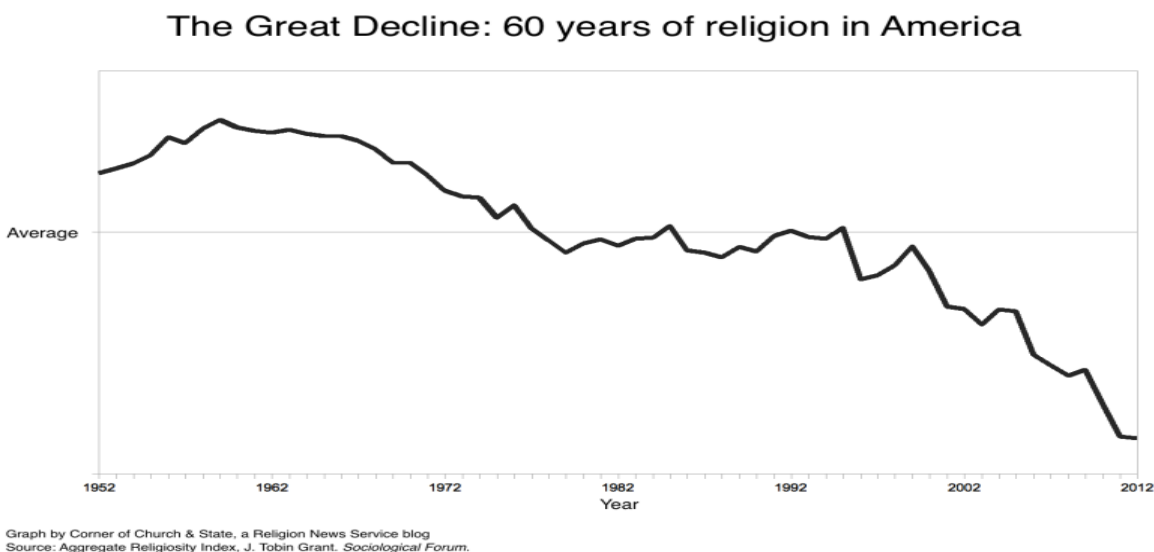
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<sup>55</sup> John Piper, What Does It Mean to ‘Abide in Christ’?, JohnPiper Publishing, Minneapolis, MN: 2017.

these denominations participated and completed the interview. After collecting the data from the online survey in which the members of these denominations volunteered to complete, it was discovered that not all 10 members from each church denomination completed the survey. It was also discovered that the 5 persons to complete the online survey representing the Church of Christ actually answered to one of the questions as though they were of the Pentecostal denomination. The results from this question did not have a significant impact on the results of the project. Before examining the results of the survey and the interview questions, there is other data collected in helping to reveal areas that lead to and support the purpose of this project.

If the goal is to look at the Church as a legacy-building unit and to develop more people to demonstrate the patterns of the Church in operation, let's first look at what has occurred in the place of fellowship of God's people over time. The place of fellowship is what is traditionally known as the four-walled church building. There has been somewhat of an evolution in religion itself beyond just Christianity in America.

**Table 3.1: The decline of religion in America over a 60-year period.**



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<sup>56</sup> Tobin Grant, The Great Decline: 60 Years of Religion in One Graph, Corner of Church and State, 2014.

Societal changes came in the 1960s, which included a questioning of religious institutions. The resulting decline in religion stopped by the end of the 1970s, when religiosity remained steady. Over the past fifteen years, however, religion has once again declined. But this decline is much sharper than the decline of 1960s and 1970s.<sup>57</sup> Church attendance and prayer is less frequent. The number of people with no religion is growing and fewer people say that religion is an important part of their lives. All measures point to the same drop in religion, so what might that say to the state of the Christian Church.

In table 3.2, it shows that Americans overwhelmingly see church attendance as a positive quality. About 88 percent of Americans find church attendance to be acceptable, and 65 percent believe it is admirable. Only 11 percent see church attendance as useless, with 17 percent seeing it as unusual. So even though there may be a decline in religion, this may reflect that people still see that it has some relevance in society. It helps to show that even if a person doesn't go to church, they admire the people who do. Taking this small piece of data, it shows some level of hope that people look to the church or going to the church as a leading and positive quality.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

**Table 3.2: Percentages of what Americans feel about attending church.<sup>58</sup>**

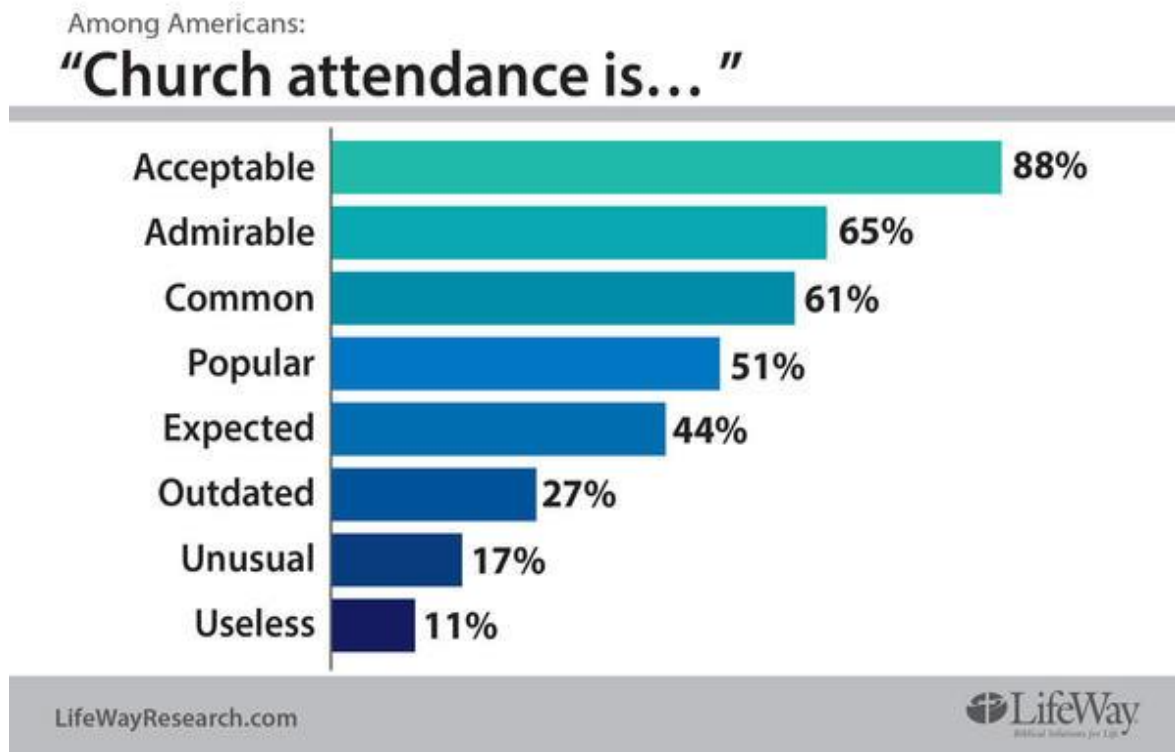
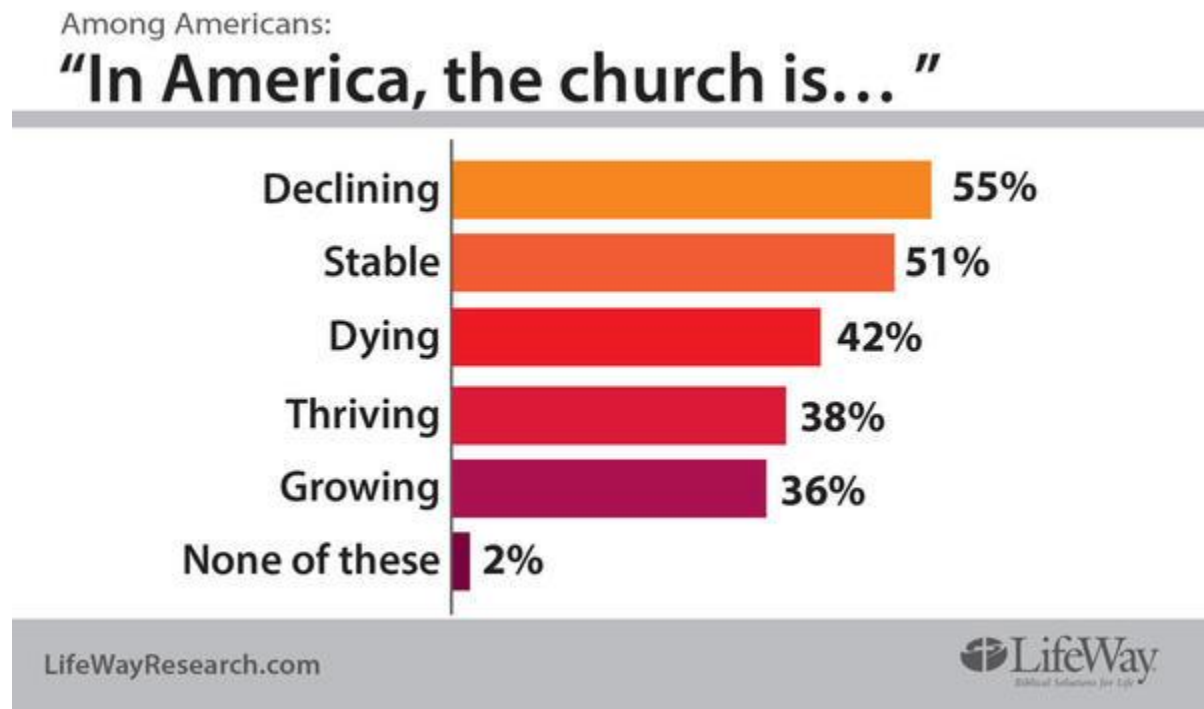


Table 3.3 shows that 55 percent of Americans believe church overall is declining in the country and 42 percent see church as a dying trend. The chart also shows that about half of Americans believe the church has a stable future in the United States. If 50 percent of Americans feel that there is no stability for the church in the future, it is an indicator that there is something that they don't trust within the church. What don't they trust in the church to be strong and lasting? Who is it that people don't trust in the church? Could it be that the leadership doesn't function in a nurturing manner to build people and secure them where they are?

<sup>58</sup> Herb Scribner, How Americans Feel About Church in Two Charts, Desert News Publishing Company, 2015.

**Table 3.3: Percentages of the viable condition Americans believe the church is in.<sup>59</sup>**



One of the characteristics of the spiritual father discussed previously was that of being a nurturer and a provider. Spiritual fathers understand the basic needs of their spiritual children and seek to ensure in providing them. When spiritual sons and daughters know that they can rely on their spiritual father, they then find strength, stability, and support they know they can get from him. As this type of leadership is replicated and multiplied within the church, it begins to be a part of the culture leaving little room for lack of stability. Everyone becomes stronger together and that message is passed down from person to person.

One of the concepts of having a solid and legitimate spiritual father and son relationship is being able to produce a legacy and make disciples so that the work of Jesus Christ can

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

continue on this earth. There are some factors at times that may prevent this from occurring effectively. There is research to suggest that the biggest challenges pastors face in the church are volunteers and change. Now, considering that many people who believe in spiritual fathers may connect this person with being a pastor, it is reasonable to use the role of a pastor to demonstrate concept of discipleship for the purpose of sonship. One of the roles of a spiritual father is to create disciples of Christ and as the people follow the leader, the leader follows Christ. Pastors fall in this role as they too lead the congregation before them and play an essential part in their spiritual growth and development. Therefore, spiritual fathers can be viewed as having the same challenges as a pastor as it regards discipleship.

The Institute of Church Leadership Development indicates:

- 50% of Pastors reported they spend an average of 3 to 4 hours a week in needless meetings! 25% spend more than 5 hours a week!
- 77% of pastors spend 20 hours a week or more with their families; this is significantly up from previous studies!
- 52% of pastors feel they are overworked and cannot meet their church's unrealistic expectations.
- However, 54% of pastors still work over 55 hours a week
- 57% cannot pay their bills
- 54% are overworked and 43% are overstressed
- 53% feel seminary had not properly prepared them for the task.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Richard J. Krejcir, Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update, Schaeffer Institute of Leadership Development, 2016.

Discipleship takes time and is a process because this leader is spending intimate moments with people while helping to shape and mold their lives into the person that God has called them to be. Jesus Christ spent hours throughout the day with his closest 12 disciples training them to be effective witness to preach the good news. Paul spent days pouring into Timothy until he entrusted him to function as he did when it came to pastoring other churches. Elisha followed Elijah where he went closely so that he could receive the same mantle and minister as Elijah did. Imagine these men who were spiritual fathers being consumed with needless meetings, overstressed with busy work, and time spent on other things that took away from developing more disciples. Based on research, these are some of the reasons that could lead to spiritual fathers not being able to adequately address the needs of his spiritual children. In the following table, Dr. Richard Krejcir address the biggest challenges that pastors face in their churches.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 3.4: Some of the biggest challenges that pastors face in their churches.**

Replies	Frequency
Recruiting Volunteers,	24.04%
Leading my People through Change (this includes apathy, fighting dead traditions and members focusing on the wrong or meaningless things),	21.41%
Developing New Leaders	19.24%
Balancing an Unrealistic Expectations,	12.93%
Handling Congregational Conflicts,	10.03%
Handling Criticism,	6.73%
Staff Conflicts,	5.62%

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



The table above reveals that recruiting volunteers' rates as the biggest challenge pastors face in their churches. It is followed by the next top 2 of leading people through change and developing new leaders respectively. As observed through the Bible, spiritual fathers and those who functioned in that nature, demonstrated the ability to seek the right people for the right job. Jesus handpicked each one of his disciples to teach, train, and prepare them for the mantle of spreading the Gospel. Leading people through change can be a very challenging endeavor. "Model fathers provide the needed inspiration for possibility thinking by revealing the secrets of how to prevail over every limitation."<sup>62</sup> Spiritual fathers demonstrate the ability to model this grace and continually rise to their next level despite of what they are lacking or what their limitations may be. As they do this, it gives them the ability and strength to develop new leaders. Their capacity to press through to the next level opens the opportunity for them to lead others through those same and familiar limitations and stumbling blocks. This leads to spiritual fathers being essential to discipleship. While this may be a strong attribute of a spiritual father, the other challenge to that is having a spiritual son and daughter receptive to being led and disciplined. Recent research has identified how important discipleship is to people or how they view managing their spiritual growth and development.

"Barna notes "Only 17 percent say they meet with a spiritual mentor as part of their discipleship efforts." That's it! This is why the church is not growing and this is why the church is failing at making disciples."<sup>63</sup> The majority of Christians do not even see relational communion with others as an important part of spiritual growth and development. The other thing is that many believe that discipleship pertains to personalized spiritual disciplines. The

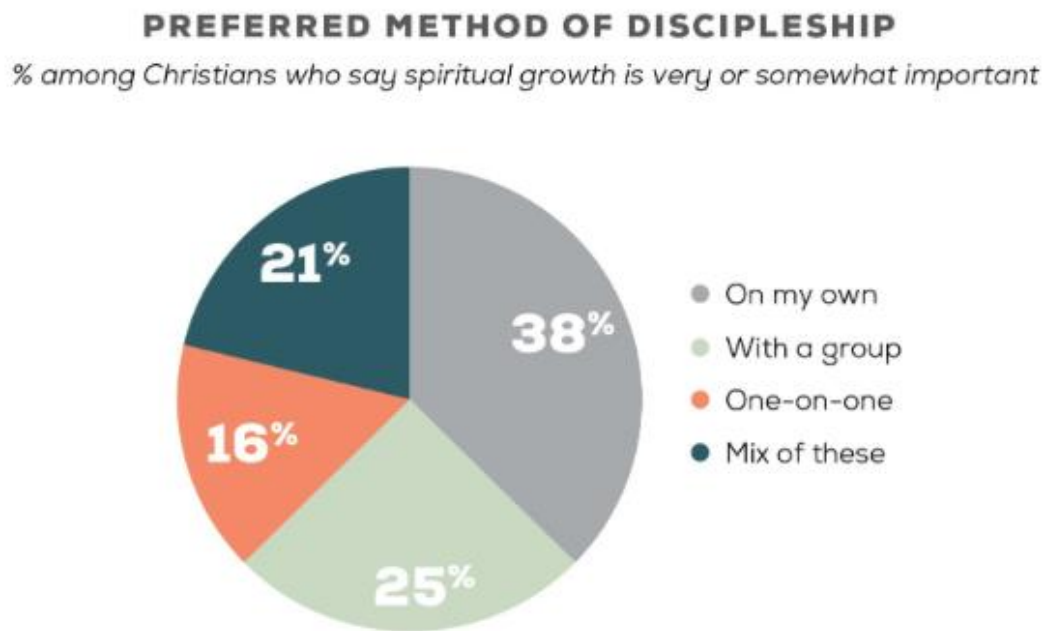
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<sup>62</sup> Jonathan David, *The Alliance of Honorable Men*, Jonathan David, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Fretwell, *Why Is not the Church Growing: A Discipleship Dilemma?*, Richmond, Virginia: 2017

problem was an eventual drifting from the early church communal relationship instruction and fellowship to a more individualized spiritual discipline-type formation. So then one can see that for the contemporary Christian, discipleship is perceived as a curriculum, not as much associated with communal spiritual growth. Discipleship became divorced from collective spiritual maturity, because it became divorced from the communal gathering and growth with others. The following table shows the preferred methods of discipleship that people desire or believe is important.

**Table 3.5: The percentages of how much Christians believe that spiritual growth is important.**



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<sup>64</sup> Barna, New Research on the State of Discipleship, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>, December 1, 2015.

In the extreme ends of a contrasting parallel, Christians either feel that they could grow and develop spiritually on their own or they prefer one-on-one with a leader or mentor of some sort. According to the table, most Christians prefer to grow on their own rather than learning from a particular person or from a group setting. If this is the mindset of the average Christian across the spectrum, this leaves a significant challenge for them to embrace the benefits of learning from, being led by, or being discipled by spiritual father or any leader for that matter. There is a definite need for people to understand the benefits of having a spiritual father in their life and the need to specifically demonstrate how it impacts their life in different areas of their growth and development. Fathers, in general, have significant impact on a person's life whether it is a biological father or a male that has stepped in functioning in the role of a father.

According to data collected by Promise Keepers and Baptist Press, if a father does not go to church, only 1 child in 50 will become a regular worshiper. This shows constant even if the wife still goes to church. If a father does go regularly, regardless of what the mother does, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will attend church as adults. If a father attends church irregularly, between half and two-thirds of their kids will attend church with some regularity as adults.<sup>65</sup> Another study that focused on Sunday School attendance revealed strikingly similar results. When only the father attends Sunday School, 55% of the children attend when they become adults. When only the mother attends Sunday School, 15% of the children attend when they become adults.<sup>66</sup> This is not to minimize the importance or the role of a mother, but it does serve to show the most compelling impact on the presence of a father. The father is seen as a strong authority figure when it pertains to being influential and a determinant factor for a person developing consistent patterns of spiritual discipline.

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<sup>65</sup> Polly House, *Want Your Church To Grow? Then Bring in the Men*, Baptist Press, 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Robert and Debra Bruce, *Becoming Spiritual Soulmates with Your Child*, B&H Publishing, 1996.

As it is possible to identify the significant impact from that of a biological father or male guardian in a person's life, one can closely examine the impact on having a spiritual father operating in a person's life as well. As mentioned earlier, there may be many causes or reasons as to why there is a low percentage of spiritual fathers functioning within the Church or why there may not be much discussion or knowledge on the subject matter in the Christian Church. Some of these reasons may be attributed to having no knowledge or understanding on the principle, resistance or denial of the concept of sonship and spiritual fathers, misguided childhood experiences, cultural or religious views, personal beliefs about religion and spirituality, misinterpretations of the concept through the Bible, or other factors that may contribute to its minimal attention. The next overview of findings will provide data and information on what pastors and leaders of churches perceive or understand about the concept of spiritual fathers and sons. It will also first provide data and an examination on what church members within these churches from across denominations believe or think on this concept as well.

72 people completed the online survey. One of the questions asked the participants whether they were a Christian by way of accepting Jesus Christ into their life as Lord and Savior. Out of the 72 participants there was only one that indicated they did not accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The interesting observation is that even though they are not considered a Christian by way of salvation, their response to other questions regarding the belief in spiritual fathers reflect that they do believe in this biblical concept. This participant also responded that they have or had a mother and father present in their life and that the relationship was positive and healthy. As mentioned earlier in this project, some people may project their past or current parental relationships onto others who may be a spiritual leader to them. Their projection can be

positive or negative depending on their experiences. This would be something to consider when looking at this participant's response. Even though they are not a Christian but believe in the biblical concept and current existence of spiritual fathers, their positive relationship with their natural parents may have positively impacted and contributed to their belief in this spiritual concept.

As it pertained to participants who expressed being a Christian, the results to believing in the existence of spiritual fathers were not consistent or the same as the one participant who was not a Christian. It could be understood that the results are not consistent based on a number of reasons and beliefs that people have. Nonetheless, the results reflect that just because a person is a believer in Christ that they will believe in the existence or concept of spiritual fathers.

According to the questions for participants that are Christians, the data reflected:

- 90% state they know what it means to have a spiritual father, 1% does not know, and 9% are not certain.
- 90% believe that spiritual fathers exist in this current day, and 10% do not.
- 80% think that spiritual fathers are biblically applicable in current day, 6% do not think so, and 14% are not certain.
- 80% think it is important to have a spiritual father in their life, 6% do not think so, and 14% are not certain.

With these same questions in mind, but looking at the participants who recorded not having a positive and healthy, parental relationship, the data reflected these different results:

- 80% state they know what it means to have a spiritual father, 0% does not know, and 20% are not certain.
- 80% believe that spiritual fathers exist in this current day, and 20% do not.

- 60% think that spiritual fathers are biblically applicable in current day, 0% does not think so, and 40% are not certain.
- 60% think it is important to have a spiritual father in their life, 0% does not think so, and 40% are not certain.

For participants that recorded having a positive and healthy relationship with their natural parents the data showed:

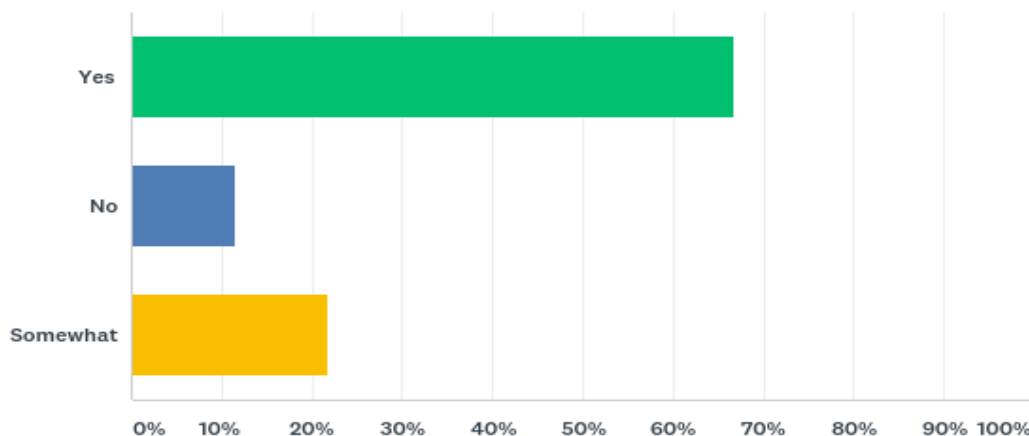
- 91% state they know what it means to have a spiritual father, 1% does not know, and 8% are not certain.
- 91% believe that spiritual fathers exist in this current day, and 9% do not.
- 80% think that spiritual fathers are biblically applicable in current day, 6% do not think so, and 14% are not certain.
- 83% think that it is important to have a spiritual father in their life, 5% do not think so, and 12% are not certain.

The data does reflect about 90% of Christians say they know what it means to have a spiritual father and believe they still exists today, however, 80% of the Christian participants believe they are still biblically applicable today and that it is important to have a spiritual father in their life. It is observed that less Christians actually believe that spiritual fathers are biblically applicable today. So, even though Christians may understand and believe in the concept, they don't believe that those same concepts are biblical for the time people live in today. This shows the need for Christians to view the same patterns of these relationships still apply and are beneficial to the body of Christ today. Referring back to the participant who was non-Christian but recorded having a positive and healthy relationships with their natural parents, one can see that their results were very close and similar to Christians who believe in the existence of spiritual fathers. The variation amongst these participants occur when looking at Christians who

had positive and healthy relationships with their parents versus those who did not have positive and healthy relationships with their natural parents. It is a 10%-20% difference in the results for this group. There was a 20% decline with the Christians that did not have positive and healthy relationship with their parents that actually feel that it is not important to have a spiritual father in their life. However, those that have positive and healthy relationships indicated that is important. It is to be noted that even though 60% of these Christians don't believe that a spiritual father is biblically applicable for current day or that it is important to have a spiritual father, the other 40% of Christian participants responded not certain to the same statements. This could reveal the impact parental relationships have on the perception, reception, or understanding of what it means to have a spiritual father. The tables below will reveal how many of the participants indicated that they know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father and whether they attend church regularly.

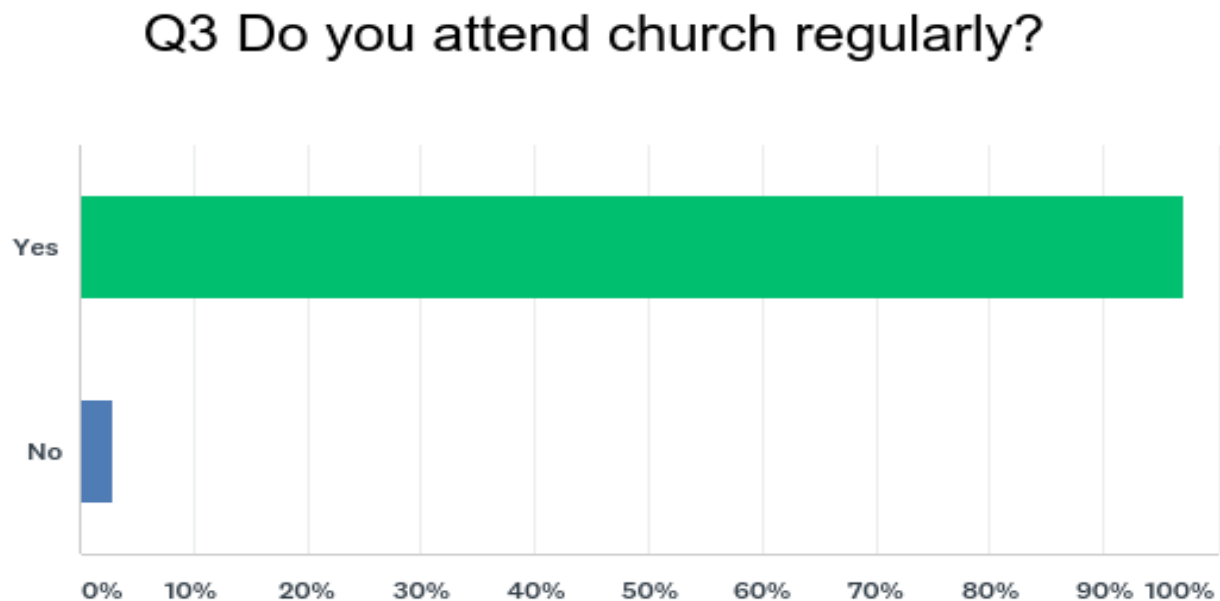
**Table 3.6: Percentage of the participants recorded that know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father.**

**Q14 Do you know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father?**



There are almost 70% of the participants that recorded they know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father. About 10% indicated that they do not know and about 20% felt that they had some level of knowledge on the subject matter. This raises some question as to reasons people may not know or are that familiar with this biblical reference. Is it being taught at the church they attend? Is the concept mentioned in any type of activity, session, or class in their church environment? And if it is not being introduced or taught, what may be the reason for that?

**Table 3.7: Percentage of participants that recorded they attend church on a regular basis.**



The table above indicates that between 95% - 100% of the participants attend church on a regular basis. In relation to the previous table where 70% of the participants indicate they know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father, it raises the questions how did they learn of this concept, from what environment did they learn of it, and what are the reasons the remaining 30% are unaware or not that familiar. One author stated, “The study of church history, however, is



meant to provide more than just inspiration. Serious reflection on the past protects us from error, reminds us of God's faithfulness, and motivates us to persevere."<sup>67</sup> In order to fully benefit from or see the value in spiritual father and son relationships, it is important to understand its purpose, history, and patterns throughout the Bible.

When collecting the data and information for this project, several different denominations were involved as participants in this study. This was done in order to fairly examine a number of different denominations due to their different administrations and approach to the ministry of Jesus Christ and gain a close enough generalization of the concept of sonship through other lenses. The concept of sonship through spiritual father and son relationships is not exclusive to one denomination over another, however, through this project it is intended to show the need for these relationship dynamics throughout every fiber of Christianity. "Although we have many denominations and disagreements, we all have as our focus worshiping the God of the Bible. We are one body of Christ, even if we don't agree on all points."<sup>68</sup> The 10 denominations that participated in this study through the online survey were: Baptist, A.M.E., Reformed Episcopal, Episcopal, Catholic, Pentecostal, Non-denominational, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Church of Christ. It was mentioned earlier in this study that there may be a margin of error in the data collection as it regards the data collected from the Church of Christ. It was discovered that some of the participants from the Church of Christ responded as Pentecostal, adding to half of the feedback to the Pentecostal results.

The following data will consider 2 questions from the survey filtering through denominations:

- 1) Do you think that a spiritual father is biblically applicable for today?
- 2) Do you know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father?

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<sup>67</sup> Jon Payne, Why Study Church History, TableTalk Magazine, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> JoHannah Reardon, Why Are There Different Denominations?, Christianity Today, 2016.

By filtering the results of the data per denomination with these two questions, it offered a closer examination to the familiarity of sonship through other church denominations. It is to also note that every denomination did not have the same number of participants respond to the survey.

**Table 3.8: Percentages of different denominations that believe a spiritual father is biblically applicable in current day.**

<b>Do you think that a spiritual father is biblically applicable for today?</b>			
<b>DENOMINATION</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>UNCERTAIN</b>
Baptist	100%		
A.M.E.	90%	10%	
Reformed Episcopal	100%		
Episcopal	86%		14%
Catholic	100%		
Pentecostal	100%		
Non-denominational	78%	11%	11%
Presbyterian	50%	50%	
Lutheran	100%		
Church of Christ	100%		

**Table 3.9: Percentages of different denominations that indicate they know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father.**

<b>Do you know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father?</b>			
<b>DENOMINATION</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT</b>
Baptist	100%		
A.M.E.	100%		
Reformed Episcopal	100%		
Episcopal	100%		
Catholic	100%		
Pentecostal	100%		
Non-denominational	100%		
Presbyterian	100%		
Lutheran	100%		
Church of Christ	100%		

In Table 3.9, 100% of every participant in every denomination indicated that they know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father. This illustrates that uniformly across several denominations, there is at least a knowledge base on the biblical concepts of sonship as it regards

spiritual fathers. So according to this data, there is no one amongst these participants that believes there is no biblical foundation and doctrine that speaks on spiritual fathers. They were all unanimously clear on that. The differences and variations occur in Table 7 whether they believe or not that that concept of spiritual fathers is biblically applicable still today. Among the 10 denominations, there were 6 denominations where all the participants believe spiritual fathers could be biblically applied in current day. These 6 were: Baptist, Reformed Episcopal, Catholic, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Church of Christ. The margin of error was mentioned before as it concerns the Pentecostal and Church of Christ denomination; however, according to the Pentecostal results reflecting 100%, it was safe to conclude that the Church of Christ was also 100% since a they also responded as Pentecostal. The Presbyterian denomination scored the lowest in believing spiritual fathers are still biblically applicable today. 50% of them believe that it does apply today, and 50% of them don't believe that it does. Like some of other churches, this may be attributed to the teaching style, administration, and different language used when discussing concepts and principles such as these. Some churches do not use the term "spiritual father" and may otherwise use words such as mentor, spiritual leader, or other terms that are reflective of a spiritual father nature. This will be addressed and explained a little more when examining the interviews conducted with several pastors for this study.

As can be seen from the data from the online survey, there is a significant portion of individuals that have some frame of reference of a spiritual father. Whether they have learned or heard of the concept through other settings or on their own, there is indication that it is not completely foreign. The question which also drives the purpose of this study is whether there is a strong belief in this concept of sonship for the current day Church. In the Christian Church, it is evident that Jesus is still relevant today, making disciples is still relevant today, pastoring is

still relevant today, and teachers in Christ are still relevant today. However, what is the current day relevance on fathers in Christ as Paul referenced when speaking to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 4:15)? Could this be due to the church pastors' knowledge on this concept? Could it be due to their unbelief or alternative view on this subject matter? Could it be that they used different language when teaching or explaining spiritual fathers and sons from a biblical perspective? The following portion of this study possibly answers some of these questions and examines what pastors of different denominations perceive, know, or feel about the concept of spiritual fathers and sons.

When asking each of the pastors whether they believed in the existence of spiritual fathers, they all agreed to the same positive response that they do. Not that there was much reluctance to the question, but there were three pastors that provided more insight to their response. Reverend Greg Hodgson expressed that the existence of spiritual fathers depends on how one gets defined as a spiritual father.<sup>69</sup> Pastor Eric Manning stated that he believes in the concept of a spiritual father, however, the terminology may be a little different. He used the word “confidant” and indicated that he understands it to be used more as a term of endearment in the Church as it pertains to spiritual fathers.<sup>70</sup> Dr. Siegling also indicated that he believes in the existence of spiritual fathers but the Presbyterian Church may not utilize that actual term in describing that role.<sup>71</sup> The important thing to note is that the idea and practice of spiritual fathers and sons is a concept that demonstrates a biblical pattern of relationships within the church. As Greg Hodgson alluded to how a person is defined as a spiritual father, one should look at the biblical characteristics through the Scriptures as outlined earlier to accurately define this role.

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<sup>69</sup> Greg Hodgson, interview by Author, Charleston, SC, April 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Eric Manning, interview by Author, Charleston, SC, April 2018

<sup>71</sup> Holton Siegling, Jr., interview by Author, Charleston SC, September 2018.

The online survey asked the participants if they knew what it meant to have a spiritual father, but the interview with the pastors allowed to go a little deeper into what they understand about spiritual fathers. From these interviews, there will be a number of questions extracted for examination. Each question will be followed by the responses of the pastors from each church. These questions will allow for the leader to expound on what they feel they know about the concepts of spiritual fathers.

- QUESTION 4: *What would you feel you understand about spiritual fathers?*

Bishop Eric Freeman shared how the book of Genesis illustrates the concepts of fatherhood in Hebrew. The father is a source and a resource for his children so that they in turn can be a resource. Bishop Freeman touched on one of the characteristics of spiritual father mentioned in this project which is being able to produce in his likeness. He also mentioned that he believes that there are three primary responsibilities in serving as a spiritual father: It is organic and is born out of an authentic relationship, there needs to be a mutual respect for one another, and there has to be a genuine care and concern.<sup>72</sup>

Pastor David Butler expressed that spiritual fathers are patriarchs like the Apostles in the Bible and those individuals on earth that have guided him in his spiritual journey. People have spiritual fathers even if they don't recognize that they do. Metaphorically speaking, he mentioned having his fuel tank filled by getting refueled by what he may consider a spiritual father.<sup>73</sup>

Dr. Siegling reflected on seeing references through Scriptures of fathers of the faith. Spiritual fatherhood is unique but in the context of a mini-god. He expressed seeing the

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<sup>72</sup> Eric Freeman, interview by Author, Columbia, SC, November 2017.

<sup>73</sup> David Butler, interview by Author, Charleston, SC, September 2018.

dynamics of a spiritual father as a great benefit to ensure the reflection of God and having that type of relationship on the earth. Instead of using the word “spiritual father,” he mentioned that he preferred using the term mentor to describe the relationship between what would conceptually be a spiritual father and spiritual son. He uses the father corporately when referencing the people that God has placed in others’ lives and believes they should be honored. Spiritual fathers grow by God’s grace and maturity but don’t have all the answers because God is the ultimate Creator. He also mentioned that spiritual fathers can be pastors, mentors, teachers, and function in several kinds of ways where they can be interchangeable.<sup>74</sup>

Reverend Greg Hodgson indicated that spiritual fathers are more of a spiritual guide or friend, and that they are not gender-based. They are the one a person entrusts themselves to for guidance, more so for spiritual matters. Everything a person experiences has a spirit attached to it and relying on someone who knows the landscape and understand these dynamics is invaluable.<sup>75</sup>

Other pastors have spoken to the same idea within each other’s responses that spiritual fathers are more like mentors. It was mentioned how they could be role models and help guide that person’s life into a certain direction. Pastor Anthony Thompson, Sr. indicated that a spiritual father nurtures, listens, encourages, and most of all leads them to Christ and be a living example.<sup>76</sup> Nurturing and encouragement that could also be affirming, are two characteristics listed in this project that a God demonstrates as Heavenly Father.

- QUESTION 5: *Would you consider yourself to be a spiritual father?*

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<sup>74</sup> Holton Siegling, Jr., interview by Author, Charleston SC, September 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Greg Hodgson, interview by Author, Charleston, SC, April 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Anthony B. Thompson, Sr., interview by Author, Charleston, SC, August 2018.

Pastor David Butler shared that though he would consider himself a spiritual father to many people, he would be curious as to what his church would speak of it. This is not the common term that is used within their church environment.<sup>77</sup>

Dr. Siegling expressed that he hasn't viewed himself as a spiritual father to his congregation but more as a shepherd and pastor. He doesn't have any issues with using the term spiritual father and acknowledges there are certain words and phrases that resonate with different communities of faith. His humbling remark and rightfully so is that Christ serves as the Mediator and has already done the work. This is what causes shyness away from the term spiritual father in efforts not to portray in any way a role beyond the honor Jesus Christ.<sup>78</sup>

Bishop Freeman believes that a person should not presume themselves upon someone that they are their spiritual father. When one serves people, grow with honor, show genuine care and concern, out of this is the birth of sons and daughters. The way people respond to a leader as a spiritual father determines what they are to them.<sup>79</sup>

All of the pastors that were interviewed considered themselves to be spiritual fathers in one varying degree to another. Most of the discussion centered around the biblical concepts of the sonship rather than the term spiritual father. This supported the underlying and foundational theme for this project that sonship in regard to spiritual fathers and sons serve as a pattern that has been laid down by God and practiced by Christian forefathers throughout time. Reverend Hodgson provided interesting insight on his thought on viewing himself as a spiritual father. He shared that he has fulfilled that role for people for several years by example or reliance, but he would not say that he is intentionally fulfilling that role currently. Over time people have viewed

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



him as a spiritual father. What's interesting in the ideology of spiritual fatherhood is that one never has to declare or showcase that they are a spiritual father. When they lead by example and purely function in the characteristics that represent a spiritual father, that's how people see them inevitably. A natural father doesn't have to prove to his children that he is their father because they know this from his life and by what he does for them.

- QUESTION 6: *If you consider yourself to be a spiritual father, do you have spiritual sons and daughters outside of your church membership? Do you have any thoughts on succession?*

Whether or not fully expository or specific in their reach of fatherhood beyond the walls of their churches, the pastors all shared some positive regard to a degree of fathering people outside of their church membership. One pastor expressed that he has fostered that relationship beyond his church membership but utilizes the term spiritual friend or guide. About two of the pastors think they may have spiritual sons and daughters outside of their church. One pastor has a mentoring program outside of the church and two others have served in occupations where they like a father to several people. Out of the 10 pastors, one pastor stated that some of his spiritual sons and daughters have planted churches in other areas. When others are planting churches based on the support, guidance, commission, and nurturing from their leaders, these are manifested fruits of the qualities of a spiritual father. One of the main factors of a spiritual father is being able to make disciples and have them established in places where God's work can continue and grow exponentially. The work is done through the hands of the spiritual fathers

and continued execution of the spiritual sons and daughters, but the glory goes to God.

“Disciples are to make God’s name glorified and not their pastor’s or any of his disciples.”<sup>80</sup>

When discussing succession with some of the pastors, this varied from church to church due to the infrastructure and administrative design in how their ministries operate. This project also conceptualizes a legacy-building Church in which the baton (symbolic to the work of the ministry) is passed down to the next person or generation. Some of the pastors’ denominations are structured in a way where they may have a governing board, council, or committee that makes the decision on who that pastor’s successor will be. With the concept of sonship proposed in this project, it may present some challenges or obstacles to ministries who may function in this nature. Overall, the concept in itself was not completely foreign to any of the pastors used in this project.

From the results of both the online surveys and the personal interviews with pastors of different denominations, it appears that most of the participants have been familiar with the concept of sonship regarding the dynamics of a spiritual father and son relationship. The results of this data present other arguments and further investigations on some of the participants responses. For the online survey takers, some of these may be to inquire what they specifically know about spiritual fathers in the Bible and how does their church denomination impact their level of understanding and benefit from this concept. For the pastors, further examination would be on how they specifically practice and utilize the principles of spiritual fatherhood in their church and what areas of lack within their ministry do they believe a spiritual father would be most beneficial. From both the online surveys and the interviews, the results do indicate positively that many people believe and are receptive to the concept of spiritual fathers and sons.

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<sup>80</sup> Gwendolyn West, *An Examination of Reaching, Teaching, Feeding, and Loving People for the Kingdom of God*, Lynchburg, VA, 2013.

The question would be whether the leadership would adopt more of its practice in their ministries for spiritual growth and development. During the interviews with pastors, there were some responses that were similar to the characteristics listed in this project for spiritual fathers and sons, but there were also quite a few that were not mentioned by many of the interviewees. This is in no way to reflect poorly on their ministries, however, it leaves some room to examine what measurements do they consider biblically on this concept and how would they incorporate it into their ministries going forward if any way receptive. Conclusive with these results and other research data collected in this chapter, it both supports this project in the familiarity people have with the concept and the need for the Church to develop more in its practice and utilization.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SPIRITUAL FATHER AND SON CONCEPT MODEL**

The first thing to realize in beginning of any spiritual father and son relationship is to recognize that God is in charge of succession. He should be the ultimate guide in how these relationships are to be established. The choice of the successor remains in God's hands.<sup>81</sup> God fulfills His purpose through His chosen leaders. Moses was told by God to view the Promised Land from a high mountain and then be prepared to die (Num. 27:12-23). Before doing this, he was to commission Joshua as his successor. God made a decision for David not to build a temple for Him. He did not want David to build a temple in the name of the Lord because he shed too much blood on the earth (1 Chron. 22:8). The Scripture teaches that though David wanted to continue in the Lord's work by also building Him a temple, God redirects him to let him know it was for his son, Solomon, to build. "In feeling, the impulse David was really

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<sup>81</sup> Kevin Beery, "The Moses-Joshua Succession from Joshua 1:1-18," *Enrichment Journal*, 2009.

glimpsing God's plans for the future. David had the satisfaction of knowing that the impulse was prophetic."<sup>82</sup> Recognizing who God chooses to further what you have laid a foundation to is key and essential in fathering. Jesus called those whom he wanted (Mark 3:13) and knew why he chose them because of what he saw they could become under his leadership and influence (John 1:42).<sup>83</sup> Jesus being one with the Father knew what God wanted (John 10:30), however, He also saw the potential and what the disciples could offer in the Kingdom of God. This speaks to the next principle in this model when establishing a spiritual father and son working relationship.

A spiritual father should be able to recognize, validate, and affirm their spiritual son in light of their purpose on earth. Jesus Christ demonstrates this trait when choosing the twelve disciples. The twelve disciples were personally selected and called by Christ. He knew them as only their Creator could know them (John 1:47). In other words, He knew all of their faults even long before He actually chose them. He knew that Judas would betray Him (John 6:70; 13:21), and yet he still gave him all the same privileges and blessings He gave to others.<sup>84</sup> In 2 Timothy 3-5, Paul writes a letter of thanksgiving to Timothy validating the call on his life and reminding him of his faith in Christ. "Paul's thanksgiving-prayer is then the basis for his appeal to Timothy. It supplies encouragement—Paul prays for him and affirms his faith; it implies obligation with a note of warning—there is a heritage that requires loyalty, and a confidence that must be validated."<sup>85</sup> Spiritual sons and daughters may not understand all that they possess as it

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<sup>82</sup> John McFarland, *The Sunday School Journal and Bible Student's Magazine*, New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908, 758.

<sup>83</sup> Gunter Krallmann, *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ*, Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2002, 52.

<sup>84</sup> John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2002), 57.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus: New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 448.

concerns their gifts and the ability they have to strategically function in Christ; however, spiritual fathers are able to recognize those things and cultivate them for the use of the Kingdom of God.

Thirdly, spiritual fathers should ensure that their children are being fed with the Word of God accurately, and that they are also being developed spiritually and naturally in the proper manner. “Spiritually, fathers as well need to create a favorable environment for growth and development.”<sup>86</sup> When considering components needed for a person’s development, teaching and correction are vital for growth. It may be reasonable to believe that when being taught something, it can also come in the form of correction to align one’s position in the right manner. If one is corrected or as some may say rebuked on a matter, essentially, they are being trained to change what they are doing or the direction in which they are going. A good biblical example of being corrected, taught and humbly receiving is where Moses is being rebuked by his father-in-law, Jethro, for working too hard all alone (Exod. 18:18). Jethro told Moses to listen to him, and he would give him counsel (Exod. 18:19). Moses response was that he did all that Jethro had told him (Exod. 18:24) while not becoming defensive, resistant, or puffed up with pride.

Spiritual fathers can be valuable when teaching and correcting in the right spirit and manner because fundamental principles offered through the Word of God can be life changing. “Understanding what the Bible teaches is key because the Bible is the source of knowledge for the Christian and must inform and correct blind spots in ones’ worldview.”<sup>87</sup> Paul often taught his audience to imitate him and to follow the example that he set (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9), as well as urged both Timothy and Titus to be examples to the churches he sent them to (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7). While teaching, encouraging, and correction can all be

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<sup>86</sup> Kwanele Booi, *Importance of the Spiritual Father-Sons Relationships in the Advancement of God’s Kingdom* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2014), 4.

<sup>87</sup> Stacy Long, “Worldview,” *American Family Association Journal* (June 2017).

effective ways used in the development of a spiritual son, transparency from a spiritual father can also help reach areas that would impact spiritual growth of a son.

Learning can also come from personal observations and testimonies of another person's life. It could be used as an effective tool when a spiritual father becomes transparent about certain parts of their life. One writer stated, "Transparency is intentionally baring your soul to the world by showing your true self to others."<sup>88</sup> It may not be common that leaders such as spiritual fathers have the opportunity of exposing their most intimate, life challenges before their general audience. When both spiritual father and son become transparent with one another, it creates an environment and opportunity for deeper trust and accountability. The Bible clearly says that one's testimony, powered by the blood Christ, is very powerful (Rev. 12:11). For a spiritual father to offer his testimony of what he overcame and what God brought him through, it can be bring great hope to his spiritual children. If none of the character flaws and sins of a spiritual father were ever revealed or shared, it would be difficult for anyone to actually see what God did to pull him through victoriously.

King David openly confessed to the prophet, Nathan, that he sinned against God (2 Sam. 12:13) for taking the wife of another man to be his wife (2 Sam. 12:10). David did not hide how he was feeling or how the sin he committed impacted his life. One commentary stated, "This excessive mourning did not proceed simply from the fear of the loss of the child; but from a deep sense of his sin, and the divine displeasure manifested herein."<sup>89</sup> David's transparency and repentance was seen in the presence of his elders (2 Sam. 12:17). Transparency was also seen from son to father as illustrated with the parable of the prodigal son in the book of Luke. The

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<sup>88</sup> Tara Raj, "What Does Being Transparent Mean?," Liveauthentically's Blog, entry post May 5, 2010, <https://liveauthentically.wordpress.com/2010/05/20/what-does-being-transparent-mean/> (accessed January 5, 2019).

<sup>89</sup> John Wesley, *2 Samuel 12 Bible Commentary*, John Wesley's Explanatory Notes, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=10&c=12>.

young son gains possession of his inheritance and wastes it on reckless living (Luke 15:13).

When he realizes what he's done and after confessing to his father that he sinned against Heaven and him, the father blesses and restores him (Luke 15:17-24). Within this illustrated relationship, being transparent and vulnerable allows for true repentance and healing to take place. It also shows how a father's non-judgmental posture can have an impact on positive and healthy change for his son.

Through another form of transparency, getting to know one another as much as possible can also be quite effective in developing a healthy father and son relationship. This may not be as easy when a spiritual father may have several spiritual children, however, spending an amount of quality time to some degree helps in connecting to each other more. "Jesus took twelve men and became a spiritual father to them for three and a half years. He knew that Kingdom values were caught more than taught. Though He ministered to the multitudes, He spent most of His time with his disciples, who changed the world."<sup>90</sup> There is great value in spending time with one another. When spiritual fathers take interests in their children's personal desires and involvements, it sends the message they care about the whole person and not just their call and service in ministry. Much of a person's development is about character. It can be very powerful for a leader to share how they handle family issues and how they balance work and their personal life.<sup>91</sup> In this, spiritual children are able to learn things in these life's teaching moments that are not always visible or known to others. They not only gain insight from a professional view in which most people are accustomed to from a leader, but they are able to observe intimate matters where leaders face challenges that are not always in the forefront.

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<sup>90</sup> Larry Kreider, Third Leadership Principle: Become a Spiritual Father or Mother, entry posted April 25, 2011, <https://dcfi.org/2011/04/third-leadership-principle-biblical-mentoring/> (accessed on January 5, 2019).

<sup>91</sup> Thom S. Rainer, Training the Next Generation of Leaders," *Facts & Trends*, September 15, 2015.

Lastly, spiritual fathers should be able to release their spiritual sons into ministry or into the purpose that God has for them while on this earth. As mentioned in this project earlier, spiritual fathers demonstrate the ability to disciple and produce others in the same spirit in Christ. To do this, spiritual sons need to be released into the world and function in the capacity they were taught and brought up under. “A spiritual father reproduces spiritual children who have a passionate and intimate relationship with God the Father.”<sup>92</sup> Jesus commands all of His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations,” (Matt. 28:19) and having this trait as a spiritual father also increases the reproduction of other spiritual fathers. Spiritual fathers can purposely devote themselves to the lives of those they witness for Jesus Christ. They may not be able to spend enough time with every member of the church or even those they encounter outside of the walls of their church; therefore, they would need to multiply themselves. “They will need to make disciples who will make other disciples, and so multiply their efforts and grow their churches and God’s Kingdom.”<sup>93</sup> This concept along with the others previously mentioned provides for a model that could be demonstrated and utilized more in the Church of today. The following table is a proposed model that illustrates progressive dynamics between a spiritual father and son.

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<sup>92</sup> Dan Schaffer, *Spiritual Fathers: Restoring the Reproductive Church* (Manhattan: Building Brothers 2006), 6.

<sup>93</sup> Barry, Spiritual Reproduction, entry posted February 5, 2019, <https://faithlifeministries.net/author/admin/> (accessed February 6, 2019).



**Table 4.1 – The writer’s proposed model on the concepts of a spiritual father and son relationship based on the researched gathered for this project.**

<b>Model of Spiritual Father &amp; Son Relationship Concepts</b>		
<b><u>Relationship Principle</u></b>	<b><u>Father’s Role &amp; Position</u></b>	<b><u>Son’s Position &amp; Response</u></b>
<b>Seek God’s answer, guidance, &amp; direction</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek and confirm with God through prayer and meditation you are a spiritual father.</li> <li>2. Ask God to reveal your spiritual son to you.</li> <li>3. Consistently seek God on how to father in this relationship.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek and confirm with God through prayer and meditation if you have a spiritual father.</li> <li>2. Ask God to reveal your spiritual father to you.</li> </ol>
<b>Identify &amp; affirm purpose</b>	Help identify gifts and skills used for the Kingdom of God.	Be open to learning more about yourself and how your gifts & skills are used for the Kingdom of God.
<b>Spiritually feed &amp; develop</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure the constant teaching and understanding of the Word of God.</li> <li>2. Corrects and helps to align to the purpose God has for son.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Remain humble in gaining biblical knowledge &amp; apply principles.</li> <li>2. Remain teachable &amp; change what’s needed to grow accurately.</li> </ol>
<b>Transparency</b>	Reveals Truth on how to handle matters based on personal experiences.	Trust and be vulnerable enough to share challenges to gain victory over them.
<b>Spend quality time together</b>	Spend time aside to get to know the other personally & show care of personal interests.	Spend time getting to know the other and gain personal insights on their quality of life.
<b>Impart and release</b>	Pass on wisdom, knowledge, and lessons to have son apply into their purpose and ministry.	Receive the good fruit of this leadership and exercise same learned principles.

## Conclusion

Sonship is when the sons and daughters take on the message, mandate, and mantle of the father. It is a pattern that has been set and laid through the Word of God and by several people that the Scriptures reveal. When a father looks at his son, he's looking at a product of who he is and a hope to navigate through life effectively to his purpose and destiny. When God looks at those as His children, He has thoughts of peace and a purposeful future for His people (Jer. 29:11). Fatherhood is not something that man created but has been originated and designed by God. God created man but breathed His spirit into man's nostrils. Mankind is a spiritual being clothed in a fleshly body. As humankind tends to the natural things on earth to maintain the natural body, there is also the need to tend to the spiritual nature as well. God used men in the earth, starting with Abraham, to be the father of many nations. This served to set a pattern of what God wanted and how God wanted things to be done from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

This project served to illustrate the concept of sonship and reveal the need for spiritual father and son relationships for the purpose of effectively carrying out God's assignment and will in the earth. It carried the reader through the principles of fatherhood by the Heavenly Father, to illustrating his Fatherhood being patterned on earth through men of the Bible, to then how spiritual sons position themselves under the leading of their spiritual fathers, to lastly examining the current day understanding of the existence of this biblical concept. This may not be widely accepted or known among the Christian and non-Christian community, however, the principles cannot be ignored through the Scriptures. One author says, "Imagine a natural family in which the son has to earn his father's acceptance! Such a family would be quite dysfunctional. But should the father we look to be a human leader anyways? If we really believe God gave people

the “Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15) as His sons when they were born again, how can we accept such talk telling us we are orphans needing to earn acceptance from a human “spiritual father.”<sup>94</sup> This could also be noted that semantics at times can potentially mislead people or have them perceive an inaccurate interpretation of Scripture. As delineated through this project, the term spiritual father is more conceptual than it is a label or a title. The refute of a spiritual father mentioned above can be addressed through the following Scripture:

“Then the disciples came to Him and asked, “Why do You speak to the crowds in parables?” Jesus replied to them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has spiritual wisdom because he is receptive to God’s word, to him more will be given, and he will be richly and abundantly supplied; but whoever does not have spiritual wisdom because he has devalued God’s word, even what he has will be taken away from him. This is the reason I speak to the crowds in parables: because while having the power of seeing they do not see, and while having the power of hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand and grasp spiritual things” (Matt. 13:10-13).

Having a spiritual father is simply a concept that God illustrates through the Bible for mankind to have a pattern to follow in His ways. The Word of God doesn’t teach that people need to earn acceptance from a human spiritual father, but it does illustrate how spiritual sons pursued their leaders as spiritual fathers in efforts to receive what they had from God. Elisha and Timothy are great examples in their humble submission to their leaders, not to earn acceptance but to gain God’s approval to do the work by learning through their leaders.

The biblical mandate of male spiritual leadership is also highlighted through Abraham, “For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him” (Gen. 18:19). These passages also provide

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<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Brenneman, *Are You My Spiritual Father? Spiritual Fathers and Spiritual Sons...or Brothers?*, Propiv Press, Lancaster, Pa: 2017.

some understanding of the difference between secular leadership and spiritual leadership. Henry and Richard Blackaby write, “The key to spiritual leadership is for leaders to understand God’s will for them and their organizations. They then move people away from their own agendas and on to God’s agenda.”<sup>95</sup> According to the research data within this project, it is examined that Americans value learning and developing on their own. This puts barriers and limitations to those men who are called to be spiritual fathers to many men, women, boys, or girls. When a person shuts himself off from the person that God has called to their life as a spiritual father, they in turn shut themselves off from God as well.

Real spiritual fathers will always point their spiritual sons to Jesus Christ even if it means that their own sons will begin following Jesus more than they follow them. The goal of a true father is for Jesus' influence to increase in the life of a spiritual son, and their own influence to decrease. A father’s main desire is to see his son in an intimate relationship with Christ, in which the son is walking in complete obedience to the Lord. A father's goal should be to see his son transformed into the image and maturity of Christ, where the son can be a father and raise healthy spiritual children himself.<sup>96</sup> Ministry is not a competition and any leader should not treat it as such. A real father will encourage a son to follow another ministry if it will be beneficial to the son. The father will point to Jesus in another ministry, and freely allow the son to be a part of that ministry. Controlling fathers will never do this, because they do not want to give up any of their influence in a son's life. These fathers grab a hold of a son and keep him confined in their own ministry or church. These are some of pitfalls of spiritual fathers and sons. These

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<sup>95</sup> Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People onto God’s Agenda*, Nashville, TN: 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Ty Unruh, *Spiritual Fathers and Sons*, Flathead Valley, Montana, 2015.

relationships resort to control and manipulation which will ultimately pollute the people they are leading and the work that God is desiring to do.

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sat on Moses’ seat. All things therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do, but don’t do their works; for they say, and don’t do. For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad, enlarge the fringes of their garments, and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’ by men. But don’t you be called ‘Rabbi,’ for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all of you are brothers. Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:1-12).

First it is important to note that Jesus is speaking to His own disciples and the crowds of people in the above passage. Second, He is speaking about leadership who secretly in their hearts, enjoy being recognized by others; indicating that their hidden sin is the pride of life. Jesus tells His disciples and the people not to call a leader Rabbi or teacher. Jesus is not indicating that there are no teachers in the church, for this would contradict the scripture in Ephesians 4:11. The Scripture reveals that there are people in the church who function as teachers. Jesus is simply indicating not to call or title them teacher when talking to them. It also doesn’t indicate a person cannot say that a leader is a teacher when talking about their function; only that one is not to address them as teacher when speaking directly to them.<sup>97</sup>

Jesus also forbids His disciples from allowing people to call them father, daddy, or any other paternal nickname. There is only One who is worthy of that title, which is God the Heavenly Father. Jesus is not saying that a man cannot be a spiritual father. He is simply

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

illustrating that a person is not to call a man "father" or "papa" when speaking to that person; or allow someone to call them father under the pretense of removing that honor from God. A person can however, state that a certain man is a spiritual father when talking about them. This would only be describing a way that the person is functioning. Paul did function as a spiritual father to Timothy, and it is perfectly okay to state that. When examining the Scriptures, Timothy just did not approach Paul and call him "papa" to his face. He may, however, have referred to Paul as his spiritual father when speaking about Paul to the church. Ideologies like this one can be well intended and sincere in approach, however, it can put too much emphasis on notions that lead to idolatry. The purpose and goal of the body of Christ is to become more like Him and not worship the tools and people that He set in place to do so.

“The Church of Jesus Christ has normally understood the transformation of society to be an essential part of its mission task. While the focal point of missions has been to communicate the Good News of Christ, to call men and women to repentance and faith, and to baptize them into the church, it has also involved a process of teaching them to 'observe all things' that Jesus commanded. Christians have assumed that this obedience would lead to the transformation of their physical, social and spiritual lives. Sometimes this has been well done, sometimes poorly done.”<sup>98</sup>

One of the things that would help the Church shift into more utilization of the spiritual father and son concept is to start to look at things introspectively. When the Church focuses inwardly on what is occurring, it would start good ground for the work of spiritual fathers to function in their capacity and promote spiritual and natural growth. “Focusing inward means researching within one’s own existing congregation to see who they are, why they began attending the church, and what causes them to stay week after week. Church leaders have a wealth of information at their fingertips. That information can be used to help them make

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<sup>98</sup> Jerry Pillay, *The Church As a Transformation and Change Agent*, AOSIS Publishing, 2017.

decisions and plans, and then implement them in a way that creates a sense of ownership among their members. This inwardly-focused research is vital to the success of any church growth initiative and can be executed in a variety of ways.”<sup>99</sup>

Church leaders can conduct surveys of their church members. These surveys can be paper surveys administered in person or conducted online. Questions for the survey are carefully crafted to gather the specific information that will help church leaders make decisions. Demographic information is valuable, simple, and non-threatening to gather and should be among the first questions on any survey. Other questions can ask participants to rate their experiences at church, their satisfaction levels with programming, or the variety of church activities. Ample space can be given in the survey for open-ended questions that allow respondents to more clearly express their views.

Another effective method of researching the views of existing members is through personal interviews or focus groups. The chance to sit down with people to discuss and unpack their opinions can provide excellent information. These opportunities for discussion are excellent at producing a sense of ownership, as well as a feeling that church leaders are genuinely listening. Many times, these interviews and focus groups can be conducted by a third party or research firm to ensure that answers are forthcoming and honest. In certain situations, church leaders can view the group being interviewed and give instant feedback to the interviewer if the respondents’ answers provoke ideas for additional questions not originally planned for the session. One-on-one interviews can be in-depth and can help church leaders see into the heart of their congregants. These tools are simple ways that could open the door for opportunities in discipleship.

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<sup>99</sup> Meredith Mahon Morris, *Principles of Church Growth: Research*, ACS Technologies Group, 2018.

This research project also presented opportunities and implications for further research. During the interviews, some of the pastors referenced mentors and spiritual fathers being one in the same while others viewed them as different entities. As Paul made the distinction that teachers in Christ were different from fathers in Christ, it can be examined if there are also any distinctions between mentors and spiritual fathers. This project also focused on the utilization of spiritual fathers and sons within the Church, but it did not suggest any functions or use outside of the Church and in the marketplace. Discipleship is not exclusive to the Church because it is also a biblical concept that could be demonstrated anywhere on earth. In the first chapter of Ephesians it says, “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). Jesus wants Himself to be filled in all the earth that transcends beyond the four-walls of the church. It would be an insightful research project to conduct on the concept of spiritual fathers functioning in the marketplace. Lastly, this project also did not address or seek to answer the question whether everyone is in need of a spiritual father or should have one. This current research supports the findings that illustrate the need for spiritual father and son relationships but is it necessary that everyone require a spiritual father.

If done properly, the father and son relationship can be extremely rich, whole, and spiritually beneficial. If it is done in the flesh, it can destroy lives; for it is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63). It is important to be mindful when progressing in this revelation and grabbing a hold of the grace of God while only moving forward in Him. True fathers and sons bless one another abundantly. They serve one another, respect one another, and love one another. Real fathers and sons want the other to be fully successful in whatever the Lord has called them to. They give to each other so that they can both prosper. They come



together in unity because they realize that it is not about their own personal kingdoms, it is about their Heavenly Father's Kingdom. “True fathers and sons are about their Father's business. When fathers and sons are walking together in truth, freedom, and wholeness it truly is a manifestation of the Kingdom of God on the earth.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ty Unruh, *Spiritual Fathers and Sons*, Flathead Valley, Montana, 2015

APPENDIX A

CHURCH MEMBERS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Do you belong to a church as by being a member and having a church membership?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. What is the current denomination of the church you attend?
  - a. Baptist
  - b. A.M.E.
  - c. Reformed Episcopal
  - d. Episcopal
  - e. Catholic
  - f. Pentecostal
  - g. Non-denominational
  - h. Presbyterian
  - i. Lutheran
  - j. Church of Christ
  
3. Do you attend church regularly?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Are you a male or female?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
5. What age range are you in?
  - a. 18-33
  - b. 34-54
  - c. 55-71
  - d. 72-99
  
6. Are you a Christian by way of accepting Jesus Christ in your life as Lord and Savior?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

7. Do or did you have a person in your life that you consider a father to you?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Do or did you have a person in your life that you consider a mother to you?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
9. Would you consider to have had or have a positive and healthy relationship with your parent?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Do you know what it means to have a spiritual father?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I'm not really sure.
11. Do you believe that spiritual fathers exist in this current day?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
12. Do you think that a spiritual father is biblically applicable for today?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I'm not sure.
13. Do you think that it is important to have a spiritual father in your life?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I'm not sure.
14. Do you know the biblical purpose of a spiritual father?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Somewhat

15. Do you have a spiritual father?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know.

16. Do you believe that you have a spiritual mother?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I don't know.

17. Do you consider yourself a spiritual father/mother?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.

18. Do you believe that spiritual fathers are all pastors and preachers in the church?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.

19. Do you think it is possible to have more than one spiritual father?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.

20. Are spiritual fathers and mentors the same thing?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.

21. Do you think that spiritual fathers choose their spiritual sons and daughters?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.
- d. I don't believe there are such things as spiritual fathers, sons, and daughters

22. Do you think that spiritual sons and daughters choose their spiritual fathers?

- a. Yes

- b. No
- c. I'm not sure.
- d. I don't believe there are such things as spiritual fathers, sons, and daughters

23. Which race/ethnicity would best describe yourself?

- a. Native American Indian or American Indian
- b. Asian/Pacific Islander
- c. Black or African American
- d. White
- e. Hispanic or Latino
- f. Other
- g. Prefer Not to Answer

APPENDIX B

PASTORS/LEADERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How many members would you say that you have that attend your church?
- 2) Do you have any biological children or are a guardian to a child/children?
- 3) Do you believe in the existence of spiritual fathers?
- 4) What would you feel you understand about spiritual fathers? (*Principles, concepts, etc.*)
- 5) Would you consider yourself to be a spiritual father?
- 6) If you consider yourself to be a spiritual father, do you have sons and daughters outside of your church membership? Do you have any ideas on succession?
- 7) Do you have or had a spiritual father?
- 8) Do you have or had a mentor or someone that you look to for spiritual development? If so, do consider them to be a spiritual father?
- 9) Are you familiar with areas in Scripture where it illustrates patterns of a spiritual father or specifically addresses the dynamics of having that relationship?
- 10) Who would you consider in Scripture to have been a spiritual father other Jesus Christ if He was one of your answers? You can consider 1 to 3 people in Scripture.

## APPENDIX C



August 02, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

On this date, August 02, 2019, Religion News Service grants Anthony B. Thompson, Jr. permission to use the graph entitled "The Great Decline: Religiosity in the United States (1952-2013)" from the article "The Great Decline: 61 years of religiosity in one graph, 2013 hits a new low," by Tobin Grant, published on the Religion News Service website on August 05, 2014.

This graph may be included in Thompson's thesis, entitled "Sonship: Biblical Concepts and the Need for Spiritual Father and Son Relationships in the Church," in the Doctorate of Ministry program at Liberty University.

Thomas Gallagher  
CEO & Publisher  
Religion News Service



## APPENDIX D

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Aaron Earls  
LifeWay Communications

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6 HCSB*



## APPENDIX E

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## APPENDIX F

### **Barna**

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To whom it may concern,

On this date, July 26, 2019, Barna Group will grant Anthony Thompson permission to use the graph from "New Research On The State Of Discipleship," excerpted from State of Discipleship, copyright ©2015.

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## VITA

Anthony B. Thompson, Jr.

### PERSONAL

Born: December 7, 1976  
Hometown: Charleston, S.C.

### EDUCATIONAL

Florida A & M University, 1999.  
Florida State University, 2001.  
Liberty University, 2010.

### MINISTERIAL

Praise and Worship Leader  
Usher Team  
College Campus Outreach  
Church Newsletter Editor-in-Chief  
Worship and Performing Arts Coordinator  
God's Alignment to a Now Generation (G.A.N.G.) Founder  
Assistant to Pastor (Church Operations & Service) Impact Church International  
Sound & Media Director  
Church Program Coordinator  
Zion of the Performing Arts Founder

### PROFESSIONAL

Tri-County Area Supervisor, 2001-2005  
Master's Level Therapist, 2005-2006  
Rehabilitation Counselor, 2006-2007  
Area Case Services Manager, 2007-2009  
Director of Transitional Services, 2013-2016  
Counseling Case Manager, 2016 – Present  
Board Certified Biblical Counselor  
Board Certified Christian Counselor  
Registered Behavior Technician

### PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

White & Gold Honor Society  
Higher Education Case Managers Association (HECMA)  
National Association for Health Service Executives (NAHSE)



## IRB APPROVAL

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 22, 2017

Anthony B. Thompson, Jr.

IRB Exemption 1721.062217: Sonship: Biblical Concepts and the Need for Spiritual Father and Son Relationship in the Church

Dear Anthony B. Thompson, Jr.,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
  - (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**The Graduate School**

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