

Liberty University School of Divinity

**A Strategy for Transformation of Men through Implementing Principles from Wesley's
Class and Band Groups**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
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by
John J. Campbell

Lynchburg, Virginia

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

A STRATEGY FOR TRANSFORMATION OF MEN THROUGH IMPLEMENTING PRINCIPLES FROM WESLEY'S CLASS AND BAND GROUPS

John J. Campbell

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019

Mentor: Dr. Milioni

The purpose of this thesis project will be to implement certain principles from John Wesley's class and band groups into the men's ministry group meeting with the goal of the transformation of men. The research will occur at Grace Fellowship in Comstock Park, Michigan. The author of this project is the founding Pastor and Elder of the church who has been for five years and still is part of the men's ministry group. Through the use of questionnaires, surveys, personal interviews, and analysis of the information collected by these means, this study will compare information collected before the implementation of Wesley's principles and information collected after the application of such principles. The comparison and analysis of this information will be used to determine the effectiveness of the principles introduced in the spiritual transformation of men. This research may serve as a model to implement into the women's ministry or other small groups at Grace Fellowship, as well as other local churches, to maximize the spiritual growth of followers of Jesus Christ.

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A Strategy for Transformation of Men Through Implementing Principles from Wesley's Class and Band Groups

Chapter 1: Introduction

Can people change? Humanity has asked this question and grappled with the answer for centuries. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah posed the question this way in Jeremiah 13:23a, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?” Many people have concluded that the answer is no. They often come to this conclusion either through observation of others or their personal experience with themselves. Yet the Bible clearly states that change is possible and that God desires change, that is, transformation in his people. Spiritual transformation is an ongoing part of the Christian life. The biblical passages that call for the transformation of followers of Christ are many. In the book of Romans, we find two passages calling for the transformation of God’s people. Romans 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (NIV)¹. Commenting on this verse, John MacArthur writes,

From before time began, God chose to save believers from their sins in order that they might become conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Consequently, every true believer moves inexorably toward perfection in righteousness, as God makes for Himself a people recreated into the likeness of His own divine Son who will dwell and reign with Him in heaven throughout all eternity. God is redeeming for Himself an eternally holy and Christlike race, to be citizens in His divine Kingdom and children in His divine family.²

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 2005.)

² MacArthur, John F. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1–8*, Chicago, ILL., The Moody Press, 1991, p. 490.

One of God's purposes for saving people to Himself is to transform them into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The same theme occurs again in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will." Paul teaches in this verse that such transformation occurs through the renewing of our minds. Instead of allowing the world to conform us to its evil ways, believers are to experience transformation through the renewal of their minds. However, as all believing men and women experience, this is no easy assignment. It would be an impossible assignment, if not for the provision of God in the lives of those redeemed by Jesus Christ. God has given to Christians what is needed to progress in His purpose for our lives, and that is, the Holy Spirit of God. For we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." It is the Holy Spirit of God who indwells believers that accomplishes this transformation by the renewing of our minds.

According to these verses, God's purpose for every believer is their transformation into Christlikeness. Such a transformation into the likeness of Christ requires that believers be radically changed. Such changes may be seen in believers' attitudes and actions, as the characteristics of Christ's life become manifest in their life. We can see a list of such virtues in Galatians 5:22–23, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law." This transformation is also manifest in a hunger, a desire for righteousness as Jesus states in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." It will

also include doing good works of service towards others in accord with fulfilling the will of God, as stated in Ephesians 2:10, ‘For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’ Therefore, spiritual growth, being transformed into the likeness of Christ to the glory of God the Father, is one of the main purposes in the life of every believer.

However, the path of transformation toward maturity is full of many struggles. The apostle Paul writes about these struggles within all believers in Galatians 5:17, ‘‘For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other so that you are not to do not do whatever you want.’’ Other opposing forces complicate the conflict going on inside or believers with their sinful natures. The world, and Satan, along with his demonic cohorts, are forces constantly tempting believers to follow a path contrary to the principles of the Kingdom of God, which lead to transformation.

In the time of John Wesley, societal changes, in particular, the Industrial Revolution, were bringing pressure to bear on men and their families. John Wesley designed an interlocking system of small groups to help believers connect in relationship with each other and openly discuss struggles in their lives. In light of a changing society during the Industrial Revolution, which was changing the family dynamics, this was a much-needed opportunity for men and women to talk and help one another. Davies writing about the impact of Wesley’s small groups wrote,

Wesley accurately emphasized the functional nature of the church based on his respective culture’s needs. He realized the primacy of personal inward reality and consequently accented the living relationships of believers over formal tradition. This emphasis met the need of the populace during Wesley’s lifetime. Hundreds of thousands of people became true believers. Social climate similarities between our present generation and the Industrial Revolution upheaval in England have been documented by scholars (loneliness, isolation, despair, alienation, changes in

family patterns, rapid advances in technology, etc.). These similarities make the ground ripe for the present-day church to again place major emphasis on the relationship aspect.³

Nate Pyle writes, “In America, men are taught to climb the corporate ladder, conquer foes, and then celebrate their victories. But Jesus descended, denied himself, and died for others.”⁴ It may be that much of the reason men do not experience transformation in their lives to the likeness of Christ is the influence the world has had on men. True humility is severely lacking in the world in which we presently live. Without such humility, men will struggle and experience failure at becoming who God has planned for them to become. Wiersbe comments on the lack of humility when he writes, “The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge but not in grace.”⁵ Andrew Murray writes, “Humility is the only soil in which the graces root, the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defeat and failure.”⁶

Another example of the influence of American culture on men, Edward Gilbreath, who wrote an article on Promise Keepers included the following:

Oliver, who wrote the book, *Real Men Have Feelings Too*, believes the Industrial Revolution is at the heart of the present dilemma. “It changed the meaning of manhood in America,” he explains. “men left their homes and farms to work in factories and offices. Through much of our history, child-rearing was shared by men and women. With industrialization,

³ Davies, James A. “Small Groups: Are They Really So New?” p. 16.

⁴ Smietana, Bob. (Mending Men’s Ministry: How to Disciple in an Era of Male Floundering), *Christianity Today*, June 2018, pgs. 26–32.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Transformed: Christ’s Triumph Means Your Transformation*, Wheaton, ILL., Victor Books, a division of Scripture Publications, 1986, p. 16.

⁶ Murray, Andrew. *Humility: The Journey Toward Holiness*, (Bloomington, MN., Bethany House Publishers). 2001. p. 89.

child-rearing became a “feminine thing.” Boys no longer had their father’s physical presence as a model and a source for their ideals and identity.⁷

Before the Industrial Revolution, families experienced an agrarian culture. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century brought significant change to that culture. Those changes affected the dynamic of families. Families were now separated for many hours in a day, as fathers went out of the home for work. The culture of the United States of America, like any culture in the world, influences and shapes the people living in that culture. The influence of the culture in America is toward values and character qualities that are often contrary to biblical values and character. Young boys are raised to be independent, self-sufficient, competitive, detached from their feelings (boys don’t cry), not to admit their struggles and various other qualities, because this would be a sign of weakness.

The culture of American society has had a devastating impact on men’s perceptions of manhood. Men need to not only hear biblical truths taught from the pulpit, but they also need to be taught how to deal with their self-worth, feelings of inadequacy, and isolation from others.

God calls men not to be conformed to the mindset and patterns of this world but to be transformed, to be renewed in their thinking. In the church, men are stuck in the rut of masculinity promoted by our culture, crippling their spiritual growth and transformation. The church has, for the most part, been ineffective in many cases to disciple men to maturity in Christ. Despite bible study after bible study, more work still needs to be done to help men stand firm against the influences of our culture, our sinful nature, and our enemy. Evidence of the impact of American culture on church-going men is found across church ministries. Women still

⁷ Gilbreath, Edward. “Manhood’s great awakening: Promise Keeper’s ambitious agenda for transforming Christian men,” Christianity Today Feb. 6, 1995, p.20+

outnumber men in evangelical churches fifty-five percent to forty-five percent, according to Pew Research.⁸ Large scale men's ministries have almost disappeared in America while large women's ministries are flourishing. Bob Smietana writes, "It's not that men have found other ways to connect outside their churches. Social isolation is rampant in America and other wealthy nations, fueling a loneliness epidemic that is hitting middle-aged men especially hard. Many men are floundering both inside and outside the church."⁹

In today's culture, women are by far outpacing men in college completion, women in their twenties are increasingly out-earning their male peers, and the labor market is quickly shifting away from male-dominated industries like manufacturing. Chuck DeGroat, a professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary, says, "The sense of not being enough fuels workaholism, perfectionism, moralism, and more. As a result, many men resort to adolescent coping mechanisms, which prevent them from loving those around them well."¹⁰ DeGroat goes on to point out that research indicates a strong connection between loneliness, feelings of failure, and bad male behavior.¹¹

What can the church do to help men cope with these influences and feelings? The church can provide a place where men can connect in real, meaningful relationships instead of casual superficial ones. The answer to this question is one of the reasons for this research paper.

⁸ Smietana, Bob. "Mending Men's Ministry: How to Disciple in an Era of Male Floundering," *Christianity Today*, June 2018, p. 29.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30

¹¹ Ibid.

Ministry Context and Problem Presented

Grace Fellowship is a small non-denominational church of 100 consistent attendees. Approximately eighty percent of the attendees are members. The church is in a small, predominately white middle-class suburb of Grand Rapids, Michigan, called Comstock Park. The church consists primarily of married couples in an age range from the early thirties to mid-seventies. The average attendee is in the late fifties age category. There is a balanced number of male and female attendees. The author of this paper is the founding pastor of Grace Fellowship in 1998 and remains the current pastor of the church. The church has small groups, a women's ministry, and men's ministry to aid in the discipleship of adults. These ministries have as their core focus the teaching of God's Word either through material put together by the leader or the purchase of small group study materials. The teaching of biblical doctrine and principles have been at the core of these ministries since their inception. Small groups have also been a part of the ministry since the beginning of the church.

The women's ministry began in 2004 and has been highly attended, until the last couple of years. At Grace Fellowship, men were conspicuously outnumbered or absent as leaders or participants in the ministries of the church. The leaders and servants of most of the ministries at Grace Fellowship were filled by the women of the church. Whereas the women were passionately involved in various church ministries, the men were passionately involved with their jobs, following or participating in sports, and various recreational activities, but not the ministries of the church, nor the fellowship of the church. Consequently, the men of Grace were not being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual growth was not evident in the lives of most men at Grace Fellowship.

Noticing the lack of spiritual growth and ministry involvement of the men, one individual approached the elders with the suggestion of beginning a men's ministry of which he proposed he would gladly be the leader of this ministry. The elders agreed that this was a need and would have the potential to encourage and equip the men of this church toward spiritual maturity. The Men's Ministry at Grace Fellowship began six years ago with the stated purpose of helping men to move on to maturity in their spiritual lives. The meeting times for this small group of men were set for the first and third Saturday of each month from 8–10 a.m. The format for this group was to have about the first thirty to forty–five minutes for breakfast, followed by a lesson prepared by the leader or one of the elders. These lessons were taken directly from Scripture as chosen by the leader or the elder. The elder, at times, would incorporate a video lesson by a well-known teacher or pastor. The lessons were generally well done, although at times disjointed or without much direct application to the men's lives. This men's ministry small group met only during the school year; therefore, during the summer months, there were no Men's Ministry meetings. The main reason given for not meeting in the summer was because the majority felt they did not want to meet during the summer due to other priorities. They saw the summer months, particularly the weekends, as an opportunity to spend more time with family. Summer enabled time to travel, camp, vacation, and in general, spend more quality time with their families compared to the available time during the school year.

Hopeful that the newly formed men's ministry would be used by God as a trigger that ignited a passion for the Lord and doing His will, we began our men's ministry with ten people six years ago. The ten went down to eight at the very next meeting. Attendance fluctuated over time, but it was in a downward trend. Those who attended consistently from the beginning were two elders, the author of this research and two other men from the congregation. The age range

was from the early fifties to mid-seventies. However, the main problem was not in numbers, but there seemed to be a lack of spiritual growth. There wasn't any apparent spiritual transformation occurring in the lives of the men. In an attempt to give opportunities for men to engage with other men concerning their spiritual lives, implementation of an annual men's retreat occurred. This retreat would be a time for men to get away and spend time with the Lord as well as get to know one another a little better by spending the weekend with other men from Grace Fellowship. The first retreat was highly attended but still did not seem to have an impact on the spiritual dynamic of men's lives.

Over the six years, the Men's Ministry Group, which began with eight consistent attendees, dwindled to five consistent attendees. Through conversations with these men, both with those who were consistent and the others who were not, the same theme heard from most of the men was that they did not feel like they were making any progress in their spiritual growth. They were not experiencing any transformation in their lives. Some of the men said that most of the lessons were familiar subject matter to them.

This problem of a lack of spiritual growth in the lives of the men at Grace Fellowship is the subject to be addressed by this research project. As the men struggled to grow spiritually, the author of this project was taking classes at Liberty University in pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree in discipleship. One of the required readings was a book titled, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, by D. Michael Henderson. The book covered John Wesley's approach to discipleship and the methods he incorporated to help in the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ. After reading this book, a couple of men from the Men's Ministry Group asked to meet with the elders and talk about the men's ministry group. Listening to their concerns about the men's ministry and what they would like to happen in this ministry, it

seemed there were many elements that John Wesley had incorporated into his small groups that were very close to what these men were describing. It was determined that some principles from Wesley's Class and Band groups would be incorporated into the men's ministry at Grace Fellowship and see if these made a positive difference in the spiritual transformation and spiritual trajectory of the men's ministry.

The call for all believers to move on to maturity, to be transformed and grow in progressive sanctification, is not singularly a struggle for the Christian men at Grace Fellowship, but Christian people everywhere in every place and every period of church history. Therefore, this thesis project addresses an issue pertinent to all believers in any part of the world.

The Purpose Statement

In talking with the leaders of the Men's Ministry Group, it was decided changes were needed to be more effective in helping men experience transformation. The following were some of the changes to the Men's Ministry group meeting desired by the leaders and in harmony with Wesley's principles. First, it was determined not to have a curriculum or lesson planned for the group, for this often did not meet the needs of what the guys were going through or the issues they were struggling with in their lives. Secondly, in accord with Wesley's small groups, there would be a switch in emphasis from knowledge-based discipleship to community relation-based discipleship. A third change determined to be made was to meet weekly, every Saturday from 8–10 a.m., instead of only twice a month, as well as to convene all year round, not just during the school year. The next change to be made is to have an environment of confidentiality, acceptance, and support where men can openly share their life struggles or confess their sins without receiving condemnation from others and without fearing what they say getting passed on

to others outside the men's group. A fifth additional change to the Men's Ministry Group, is to provide voluntary accountability for each man to one another. Contact through the week is encouraged, as well as ongoing prayer for one another throughout the week. Each man is on a group text list to share prayer requests. A sixth and final change determined to be a beneficial one for this ministry is to open each meeting with prayer and to close each meeting with prayer and to pray anytime during the meeting for one another.

The Men's Ministry group adopted as the key verse for this ministry, Proverbs 27:17, "As iron sharpens iron. So, one man sharpens another." As can be seen, by these changes in the men's ministry, it is a community-driven model. This emphasis on community is a vital difference and an important change to the Men's Ministry group. It is as James Howard writes in His book, *Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification*,

As individuals participate in the new humanity, they are incorporated into a new community that is being transformed into the image of Christ for the purpose of reflecting God's glory. As such, the individual can only experience this unity and transformation as they live and obey the biblical commands within community. Transformation – progressive sanctification – is a community function.¹²

Additionally, this implies that walking in the Spirit so as not to carry out the desires of the sinful nature, necessitates community. It is in community that the New Commandment to love one another as Jesus has loved us (John 13:35) is carried out. This can also be seen in that five of Paul's approximately fifty "one another" commands occur in the passage of walking in the Spirit found in Galatians 5:13-26.

¹² Howard, James M., "Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification" (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., N.Y., New York, 2007), p. 122.

As previously stated, the researcher had recently read a book titled *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* by D. Michael Henderson. The researcher was struck by the success of Wesley's groups, particularly the class and band groups, in helping believers experience transformation in their lives. As the leaders of the men's ministry conversed, it seemed much of the change desired was contained in Henderson's book about John Wesley and his methods. The formation of class and band groups by Wesley gave valuable insight to help with transformation in the lives of male and female believers in eighteenth-century England.

Wesley insisted that there is "no holiness but social holiness." By this, Wesley meant that people best grow in love for God and neighbor by gathering together to "watch over one another in love."¹³ In other words, spiritual transformation occurs best in community. Wesley put together a system of interlocking groups that were designed to help people grow toward the likeness of Christ. A great strength of Wesley was his organizational ability. He paid close attention to detail. Each one of Wesley's small groups related to one of their major theological concepts of grace.¹⁴ What one could call the beginning small group or as Wesley named it, the trial band, was a small group for people who were casually curious about God. Most, if not all, were not believers but had a sincere desire to know more about God. The trial band explored and experienced prevenient grace, the grace that goes before belief.¹⁵ The people in this group were on trial to see if they wanted to know God. In this group, a sincere seeker could find guidance and instruction about God.

¹³ Kevin M. Watson, "John Wesley's Structure and Theology of Discipleship." *OxfordScholarshipOnline*, 2017), p. 1.

¹⁴ Stafford, Tim. "Finding God in Small Groups." An Interview with Tom Albin. *Christianity Today*, August 200. p.42

¹⁵ Ibid.

After this band group, there were a series of interlocking groups, which were called the society meetings, the class meetings, and the band meetings. Each group had a specific function. The primary larger group was called a society meeting. The term “society” is nearly synonymous with the word “congregation.”¹⁶ A person who was consistent in the trial group for a few months would be invited to a society meeting. Also, people who were curious or had heard Methodist field preaching or were invited by a friend were then introduced to the teachings of Methodism at the society meetings. Wesley stated that his society was a place for those who “wanted to flee from the wrath to come.”¹⁷ This group was comprised of all the Methodists in any given specified area. The society was the hub of all other functions; it was the “umbrella” group of the Methodist organization in that all other related groups came under its jurisdiction.¹⁸ The society meetings were designed to be focused mainly on the cognitive mode of education. In the Rules of the United Societies, John Wesley gave his definition of Society Meetings:

Such a society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their own salvation.¹⁹

This larger group of people usually met in the Methodist Chapel, which was a plain building with no musical instruments. The protocol was for seating to separate men and women into different sections. This group usually consisted of fifty or more people who would listen to a

¹⁶ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 81–82.

¹⁷ John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist,” *Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1872), 14:250.

¹⁸ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

speaker present a prepared message. There was no structured time for response, feedback, or interaction. These meetings, which usually meet in a Methodist chapel, were filled on a first come first serve basis so that there was no partiality shown due to social distinctions. The Methodist societies met for worship and doctrinal instruction several times a week. By far, the most popular and highest attended meetings were the Sunday night meetings. Another favorite meeting time for the society meetings was early in the morning, before work.²⁰

The next group in the interlocking system was a small group called the class meeting. The class was a group of about ten to twelve people, both men and women who met weekly to encourage each other and hold one another accountable. This group dealt mainly with the behavioral mode of education. These class meetings were grouped primarily by where people lived. The class meeting became the most influential of all the sessions. Henry Ward Beecher said, “The greatest thing John Wesley gave to the world is the Methodist class meeting.”²¹ Dwight Moody also offered high praise of the class meeting when he said, “The Methodist class-meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw.”²² The class meeting was a subdivision of the society meeting. All Methodists who were in the society meetings were placed into a class meeting and were expected to attend it regularly, or else they were no longer a society member.²³

²⁰ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 88.

²¹ Goodall, Charles L. *The Drillmaster of Methodism: Principles and Methods for the Class Leader and Pastor*. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902, p.15

²² Ibid.

²³ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*. p.93.

The society meeting was a tool for cognitive learning of Methodist doctrine. The class meetings were an avenue to help people change behavior. The rules for the class meetings specified the process as “inquiry” and the subject matter as “how their souls prospered.”²⁴ The meeting was not preaching or teaching, but a testimony of spiritual condition or one’s personal growth watched over by a lay leader, not a professional person. Class membership was very diverse, including a mixture of different sexes, marital statuses, ages, social standing, and spiritual maturity.²⁵ There was also diversity in the leadership of a class meeting, as it could be either male or female leaders. Wesley’s vision for the class meeting was as a point of entry into Methodism. He desired the group be a warm, friendly fellowship of fellow strugglers that represented the broad diversity of the people of England.

Henderson commenting on the class meeting and its diversity said, “Looking back from the perspective of the twentieth century, the Wesleyan class meeting seems to have been the first and probably the most powerful leveling agent which helped break up the rigid British caste system and provide upward social mobility.”²⁶ The power of the class meeting in breaking down long-standing social barriers can be seen in this quote from an analysis of class rolls of early societies:

There is complete absence of class distinction in these lists. They represent a “family” whose spiritual kinship was recognized by each member. They came together in an intimacy that could not recognize social barriers, and the names of the people who met on perfect equality each appear side by side whether they are described as gentlemen or laborers, yeoman or apothecaries. Those who could enter a Methodist society must first abandon all idea of caste.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ David Werner. John Wesley’s Question: “How is Your Doing?” *The Asbury Journal* 65/2 (2010), p. 70.

²⁶ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*. p. 96

²⁷ Church, Leslie F. *More About the Early Methodist People*. London: The Epworth Press, 1949, pp. 2–3.

That the class meetings would have such an impact on the caste system that separated people is a testimony to the pervasive influence of Wesley's interlocking systems of groups. The class meeting was the most popular and diverse of the groups, as well as the most influential in the lives of believers and on society.

The class meetings were usually once a week for about an hour. They most often met in the homes of the leader. The class meetings were usually closed to outsiders, due to the members sharing personal information about themselves or their families. However, those who had a desire to join a class were allowed to observe two meetings and then they would receive a trial membership at the next quarterly meeting.²⁸ If they were faithful participants during the three month trial period, they were granted full membership status at the next quarterly meeting, officially becoming a "Methodist."²⁹

The format of a class meeting was members sharing personal experience of their struggles and victories in living the life of faith throughout the previous week. But before the sharing time, each meeting was opened up with a short hymn. The leader of the meeting would then share their personal story first, and then each member was asked by the leader to participate by sharing their personal experience. The leader would specifically ask about the state of their soul since the last meeting. This subject gets to what was most important to Wesley, namely spiritual growth and maturity. A question often asked of members was, "How is your doing?" or "How is it going with what you are doing?" The reason this was an important question in Wesley's mind was that he believed sharing with others how well you were living out your faith

²⁸ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*. p. 96

²⁹ Ibid.

in actions pushed you to live a changed life.³⁰ In other words, it was Wesley's strong belief that spiritual growth is further promoted by not only disciplining yourself inwardly but also by disciplining one's behavior. Wesley believed that spiritual growth is both inward and outward, both of heart and mind.³¹ This belief led Wesley to structure these interlocking groups the way he did. In the society meetings with the teaching of the Word of God and doctrines of Methodism, the mind and heart were impacted and directly experienced the grace of God. Then in the class meetings which focused not on doctrinal lessons but behavioral change, this inward faith of new believers was strengthened and nurtured. The mutual accountability of the class meetings was a powerful tool for transformation. The effectiveness of this accountability is explained by this insight written by Watson and Lowes; "By telling one another what they were actually doing to follow the teachings of Jesus, our forebears made obedience their watchword, and thereby avoided the pitfall of self-deception in the Christian life. In contrast, when faith is made the priority of discipleship, the Christian life becomes fraught with self-deception."³² This insightful comment is helpful in cautioning believers to not make the priority of their spiritual lives the relationships with one another in small groups. Obedience to Jesus is the measure of our love for Him. This principle Jesus Himself taught His disciples in John 14:21, 23, which reads, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me, and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. Jesus answered

³⁰ John Wesley's Question, p.68.

³¹ John Wesley's Question, p.69.

³² Watson, Davis Lowes. *Class Leaders and Class Meetings: Recovering a Methodist Tradition for a Changing Church, Doctrines and Disciplines*, Vol. 3. Nashville, Abington Press, p. 250.

and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

The leaders of the class meetings did more than begin with their testimony. They served as sub-pastors in Methodism and assumed the duties of spiritual oversight and pastoral care for others. One of the unique aspects of leadership in Methodism was that being a leader did not require education, wealth, or professional expertise. Anyone who wanted to become a class leader had to exhibit honesty, faithfulness, and concern for people. Anyone who demonstrated these qualities could rise to higher levels of leadership, but without them, it was impossible to be a Methodist leader, no matter how educated or wealthy or talented.³³

Those who were a part of a class meeting usually stayed together for years and often became close friends. There was a real experience of love, grace, and acceptance between those in a class meeting. This kind of environment was most favorable for the spiritual growth of people into mature Christians. The biblical word which describes this emphasis is *koinonia* and carries the connotation of intimate fellowship and loving concern. The *koinonia* concept was the germinal idea behind the small group experiments which Wesley (and others) undertook in an attempt to experience the inwardness of the true Church, the fellowship of genuine believers.³⁴

Another group was called the band meeting, which focused on the affective aspect of education. The band meetings consisted of a homogenous group, not only by sex, but also by age and marital status; the married men met together, the single women, and so on.³⁵ These three

³³ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁵ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting* , p. 110.

interlocking groups covered the cognitive growth in knowledge of God (society meetings), behavioral change (class meetings), and redirection of feelings, emotions, and attitudes (band meetings). In covering these various aspects of men and women, there occurred considerable spiritual growth in the lives of Methodists during this time.

The band meeting, Wesley's favorite meeting, never became as popular or well attended as the class meetings, but served an important function. The bands were voluntary groups of people who professed a clear Christian commitment and who desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention.³⁶ The band meeting was the original mode from which all other modes eventually came. It was the first small group John Wesley started after a return from visiting the Moravians in Herrnhut. There he experienced a band meeting with the Moravians, and he came away astonished at the level of intimacy and depth of the relationships in that group.³⁷ So it was in Herrnhut, amongst the Moravians, that these meetings which the Moravians called band meetings were first experienced by Wesley. Upon his return to England, Wesley began band meetings in England, imitating the focus and goal of the Moravians.

At the first Methodist Conference in 1744, the conference drew up a set of rules specifically for the bands. Wesley's Scriptural foundation for the bands was James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that you may be healed." The following is their list of rules for bands:

To this end, we intend:

1. To meet once week, at the least.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 111.

2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.³⁸

The band meeting did not have as a central focus of the meeting, the leader of the small group, as the class meeting did. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the participants in the band meetings to take the initiative to share their spiritual journey in the past week with the group. The members of the band were maybe more spiritually mature, ahead of some of the others in their walk of faith, and were more prepared to share their feelings, struggles, and thoughts.

This group was so important to Wesley that he constantly encouraged all the Methodist preachers to begin a band group as soon as there were four men or four women who were interested in being in such a group. Wesley to protect the group, since there was such frankness in the group, wrote some questions that were given to those considering entering a band group to give them an idea of the openness of the group. These questions were the following:

Some of the questions proposed to each one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect:

1. Have you the forgiveness of sins?

³⁸ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p. 115.

2. Have you peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire that we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?
10. Do you desire that in doing this, we should come as close as possible; that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be, on this and all other occasions, entire open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise and without reserve?³⁹

The direct nature of these questions Wesley designed for the band meetings reveals the depths of honest soul-searching and desire to remain close to Christ that was required to be a part of this small group. These are questions posed to people before they are admitted into the group. Once they were in the group participating in discussions, there were, at times, a hesitancy for some in the group to be transparent and forthcoming in opening up and sharing their struggles in their walk of faith. For such times, Wesley designed other questions to prod the people to openly share and not quench the purpose for which they were meeting. Wesley's questions for those in

³⁹ Jackson, Thomas, ed. *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley A.M.* London: John Mason, 1830. VIII; p. 272–273.

the band meetings that may encourage and help restart conversations and lead to talking about one's feelings, and attitudes are as follows:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you anything you desire to keep secret?⁴⁰

As can be seen from these questions, honestly answering them puts a person in a vulnerable position. Putting oneself in a position of discomfort may be too difficult for some people, and possibly one reason the band groups never became as popular as the class meetings. Although God knows everything about our lives, people often do not trust other people with knowing such personal information about themselves. The very personal nature of these questions led some people to accuse John Wesley of reviving “popery” or the Roman Catholic confessional, even some of his friends doubted the use of such personal questions.⁴¹

Even though the band meetings were not as popular as the class meetings, they remained Wesley's favorite meeting, for he felt this was getting as close to true koinonia as people can get. The benefits of experiencing such trusting, confessing, encouraging relationships are beneficial relationally, spiritually, and emotionally for believers. The relational and emotional impact of being authentically known by others and loved and accepted as such is powerful. But possibly the most benefit is found spiritually. In Romans 6:12-22 Paul tells believers that since Christ has

⁴⁰ *The Works of John Wesley*, VIII, pp. 272-273

⁴¹ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p. 116.

set them free from sin, they are to present their bodies as slaves to righteousness, which leads to holiness. And in Romans 8:12–13, we are encouraged and commanded to put to death the evil deeds of the body. These encouragements and commands are to be obeyed by believers. And in the context of a small group community, like band meetings, believers find accountability, encouragement, and strength to help them live as overcomers. In short, there is growth in holiness with the support of one another in such band meetings.

Wesley had two other groups that were part of his interlocking groups to help in making disciples. However, neither received much attention in later writings of his methods. One group was called the select society. This was the uppermost group in the Methodist system. It was comprised of men and women handpicked by Wesley as being among the most faithful Methodists.⁴² This group was to be an example to people of what Methodism was all about. He stated that the inner dynamics of this group of people were to be a model of how all the modes of Methodism should function: open, honest, committed to each other, caring, and concerned for each other's welfare.⁴³

A final mode in Wesley's interlocking system of groups for discipleship was called the penitent bands. These groups were specifically designed for those who lacked the will power or personal discipline to live up to the behavioral demands of the class meeting but still had a desire to overcome their personal problems.⁴⁴ The primary goal of this group was to restore these individuals to mainstream society and regular means of discipleship. The most common moral

⁴² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, pp. 118–119.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁴ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p. 122.

problem in this group was alcoholism, and the format is very similar to Alcoholics Anonymous today.⁴⁵

In discussing the convergence of principles from Wesley's groups and the desired goal of men experiencing an actual change in their lives, the leaders of the Men's Ministry group are beginning to implement some of the principles from the class and band meetings. The principles taken from Wesley's class meetings that will be applied in the context of the Men's Ministry Group are the four previously mentioned. They are as follows: no planned lesson, meetings once a week every week, acceptance of every person, and open sharing with confidentiality. There were several principles from the bands that were incorporated into the men's ministry. They are the following: group to be the same gender, only men, begin the meeting and end the meeting with prayer, openly share their feelings, attitudes, and failures without fear, to pray for one another consistently, to hold one another accountable for progress in their spiritual growth and transformation, and to be a self-funding group with offerings received each week.

There is agreement among the leaders that if these principles are successfully incorporated into the men's ministry, there will be a noticeable difference in the transformation of men's lives. The possible tangible benefits of such a change in the lives of men are various. It is believed that there will occur in this group a closer bond between the men as they share from their hearts their struggles to change, to overcome that which is holding them back from real transformation. It is believed that the men in this group will spend more time in prayer and God's Word as a result of these changes. It is also believed that the men in this group will be better servant leaders in their homes and their church. This author believes the men will experience

⁴⁵ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p. 123.

brotherly love and encouragement in their desire to be transformed, as opposed to going through the struggles of their lives alone with no support. The leaders also believe that men will become more involved in serving others and sharing their faith with their unbelieving friends.

The transformation of men will involve, as previously mentioned, inward character qualities such as the fruit of the Spirit stated in Galatians 5:22–23, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law.’ It will also include outward changes in good works of service towards others in accord with fulfilling the will of God as stated in Ephesians 2:10, ‘For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’

Surveys, questionnaires, and personal interviews with men involved with this ministry will be conducted and focus on the impact of the Men’s Ministry in their spiritual lives after the implementation of these principles from Wesley’s class and band groups. A comparison and analysis of this information will be used to determine if there was any significant difference in their transformation and growth to Christlikeness. The leaders hope and believe that there will be a significant difference in the transforming of men at Grace Fellowship into the men God desires them to be for His glory. Such a change will be both inward and outward in nature. Inwardly changes in character and attitudes and outwardly changes in acts of service done to others for the glory of God.

Limitations

This research project will be limited in the following ways. First, this study is on the transformation of men in the Men’s Ministry Group at Grace Fellowship. Therefore, it will be

limited in participation by gender. Second, it will be limited in number, that is, to only those men who were participating in the group before and after the implementation of the changes made from incorporating principles out of John Wesley's class groups and band groups. Those who join the group after the application of these principles will not aid in determining the effectiveness in their lives from the changes made. Third, the period of this study will be over approximately seven months. Sometimes a significant difference in a person's life may require a more extended period before the transformation occurs or is noticeable and understandable by the subject.

Delimitations

There may be those who are asked to participate but decline, thus imposing a limitation on this study. A smaller sample size may not give the researcher as accurate a finding as a larger one. Secondly, the research may be limited by participants changing their mind and backing out of the research process at any given point in time. Another limitation may be the willingness or unwillingness of a participant to be open and honest in their answers on surveys or questionnaires and in particular during a face to face interview. This possible lack of transparency would affect the quality of the findings of this study, as the unwillingness to be open and honest would impact the ability to discover if any transformation has occurred or not. Finally, the preconceived notions of the researcher may inadvertently contain bias about a participant, which may skew the interpretation of the research findings to some degree.

Thesis Statement

The struggle for believers to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, specifically male believers, is real and hampered by various factors. One of the factors relative to the author's experience in ministry is the tendency of the church to equate knowledge with spiritual growth. Bible studies are mainly concerned with teaching doctrine. Biblical principles are taught in a class setting or a small group setting. Upon completion of the bible study, it is believed that people have been provided with what is necessary to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Namely, they have been provided with knowledge, and it is assumed that such knowledge is sufficient to cause transformation. What has often been the result of such a process is believers do not experience transformation in their lives. This lack of transformation has been the experience at Grace Fellowship in the Men's Ministry Group.

This research project contends that if the principles that John Wesley used in his class and band groups are implemented into the Men's Ministry Group at Grace Fellowship, men will begin to experience transformation in their lives. Wesley's class small groups were geared more toward behavioral discussions, and in the band, small group meetings, feelings, and emotions were shared and discussed. Wesley's societal meetings were geared more toward the cognitive with the format being teaching as opposed to discussion and sharing experiences. D. Michael Henderson writes about the substance and goal of the small groups called classes.

The subject matter of a class meeting was personal experience, not doctrinal ideology or biblical information. The only place where conceptual data impinged upon the class process was the struggle which individuals went in internalizing or applying or incorporating some biblical ideal into their lives. The collective goal

toward which the classes pulled was the attainment of personal holiness or what Wesley called “perfect love,” or the character of Christ.⁴⁶

Incorporating into the Men’s Ministry Group meetings at Grace Fellowship this aspect of Wesley’s class group meetings will enable men to openly share their struggles, confess their sins, talk about their temptations, and weak areas in their walk with Christ that may be preventing them from moving forward in their transformation.

Wesley’s band, small group meetings focused on the active area of a believer’s life. The central function of band methodology was what Wesley termed “close conversation,” by which he meant soul-searching examination, not so much of behavior and ideas, but motives and deep impressions.⁴⁷ The group environment was one of ruthless honesty and frank openness, in which its members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections.⁴⁸ Principles from Wesley’s band small groups will aid the men at Grace Fellowship to experience the friendships and close comraderies that may be lacking in their spiritual life. A sense of close community will be developed in which the biblical “one another” commands of Scripture can be obeyed, resulting in the transformation of the lives of men. Such close fellowship amongst men will more closely parallel the relationships of the early church which dynamically affected the spiritual growth of believers, who in turn transformed their communities and the culture in which they lived.

⁴⁶ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 97–98.

⁴⁷ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 110.

⁴⁸ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 110.

The importance and necessity of a community of believers involved in the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ is not only seen in the obedience to the “one another” commands of Scripture but also in the description of the church as we read in Ephesians 2:20–22, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too, are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

Howard commenting on this passage writes, “The emphasis here is on the people of God as community rather than individuals. Here is an example of a community text that meets criterion 1 - it can only be fulfilled in community.”⁴⁹

The believers of the early church were devoted to the community of believers, the fellowship, and it is in that context that their transformation into the likeness of Christ occurred. This is verified in Scripture through such passages as Acts 2:42-47, where their devotion to the community of believers and the subsequent results of favor with people and experience of God’s many blessings occurs. The early disciples now rejoiced when they suffered persecution for the name of Christ. They counted it a privilege to be counted worthy to suffer for His name. This is far from where they were in strength of character before the formation of the church in Acts chapter two. Previously, any such persecution caused them to be fearful and to withdraw into hiding (John 20:19).

The need for men to be living out their walk of faith in the context of community for transformation into the likeness of Christ in deeds and character has not changed

⁴⁹ Howard, James M., “Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification” (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., N.Y., New York, 2007), p. 125.

through the generations. Incorporating the biblical principles Wesley used in his discipling groups into the Men's Ministry Group at Grace Fellowship will be a tremendous help in the progress of transformation so vital to reaching maturity in Christ.

Chapter 2

Theological and Theoretical Foundations

Theological Foundations

The concept of the transformation of the people of God is seen in both the Old and the New Testaments. This call to be changed, transformed, to become more like Christ comes to God's people in the context of community. Joseph Hellerman in his book, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus's Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, wrote;

The historical event that the Israelites most dearly associated with the idea of salvation-deliverance from Egypt—was the very act that established them as the people of God. What this means is that salvation in the Old Testament is a community-creating event. God saved the Israelites not just so they could relate to Him as individuals but, most importantly, “to be the people of His inheritance” (Deut. 4:20). God saved the Israelites to community.⁵⁰

The people of God today are called to grow in their salvation, to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. We are to grow in sanctification into the likeness of Christ. Such growth takes place in the context of community. In Acts 2, Peter preaches a message to Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover. We read about the response of the people in Acts 2:37-41,

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.

With many other words, he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

⁵⁰ Hellerman, Joseph A. *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, Nashville TN., B&H Publishing Group, 2009, p. 128.

An interesting comment made by Hellerman regarding salvation in this passage and the role of community in the transformation of God’s people has been overlooked for the most part in many churches. He writes,

Notice the result of this individual repentance in verses 40–41. We read nothing of a personal relationship with God that results from conversion. This does not exclude the reality of relating to God at the individual level. It just shows us that Peter and Luke are concerned to highlight another, more immediately relevant (for them) aspect of salvation. The text shows that for early Christianity, individual salvation was understood as deliverance from one group to another—from “this corrupt generation” to the family of God.⁵¹

The work of Jesus Christ on the cross brought together Jew and Gentile into one new man, one body, that is, the church. The church is now the family of God. And it is in this family that we are to grow to maturity, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ as a holy people, set apart for Him. We read such an emphasis in Ephesians 2:19-22.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you, too, are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The people of the church together are built into a holy temple, that is a place where He dwells by His Spirit. We are becoming progressively sanctified, holy, set apart for God’s use.

The apostle Peter quoted Leviticus 11:44 when he wrote in 1 Peter 1:15-16, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: “Be holy because I am holy.”

⁵¹ Hellerman, Joseph A. *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, Nashville TN., B&H Publishing Group, 2009, p. 129.

J.I. Packer writes, “Holiness, we should realize is a weighty biblical term. Having at its root the thought of separation or apartness, it signifies, first, all that marks out God as set apart from men, and second, all that should mark out Christians as set apart for God.”⁵² These two passages, along with others found in Scripture, “show us at once that holiness is both God’s gift and His command; we should, therefore, pray for it and seek to practice it each day of our lives. Holiness was the goal of our election and redemption, and holiness remains God’s basic requirement of us and the goal of all His providential dealings with us.”⁵³ It is because of God’s nature, his holiness, that God’s people are called to be holy. Therefore, the need for the people of God to be transformed rests on the unchanging nature of God. “Every biblical statement about God carries with it an implied demand upon men to imitate Him in daily living.⁵⁴” Believers’ lives, in character, words, and actions, are to reflect their God. In the New Testament, believers are called to become like Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. Romans 8:29 reads, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son that He might become the first-born of many brethren.”

This call to holiness stems from the reality that all men and women are created in the image of God. We read in Gen. 1:27 that men and women were created in the image of God. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and the result was the fall of humanity. God had previously told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden that they would surely die (Gen. 2:17). Physical, as well as spiritual

⁵² Packer J.I., *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, Old Tappan, N.J., (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984, p.94–95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Clements R.E., *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 2:51, Nashville, The Broadman Press, 1969, p 26.

death, were the resulting consequences of their sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the image of God in man was corrupted, and all humanity is now born with a sinful nature and therefore separated from a relationship with their holy God. They are spiritually dead. Millard J. Erickson puts it in the following words: “Human nature needs transformation. The human being is spiritually dead and, therefore, needs new birth or spiritual birth.”⁵⁵ But God had planned, before the world began, for the redemption of humanity. He planned to restore the relationship between man and Himself that was lost through humanity’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden.

This plan for the salvation of man was accomplished through the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into this world to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). God’s plan of salvation and the promise of eternal life with God is at the very core of the Christian faith. Concerning this salvation, Titus 3:3-7 reads, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God, our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Because of the completed work of Jesus Christ, dying on the cross for the sins of the world and rising from the grave in victory over sin and death, humanity is offered forgiveness of sins and eternal life with God. All those who repent and by faith trust in Christ Jesus alone for the forgiveness of sins are saved. But having been saved by grace through faith, God’s work in a

⁵⁵ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*, Vol. 3. p. 942.

believer's life is not finished. Having begun his work of transformation, he continues and completes it.⁵⁶

In the New Testament, believers are called to become conformed into the likeness of his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Rom. 8:29). As has already been stated, the apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will." This passage teaches just how integral the Word of God is in the process of sanctification. As Christians study, meditate and incorporate the truths of God's Word into their lives, their minds are transformed, renewed by the truth. Jesus spoke of this role of truth, God's Word, in the process of sanctification when he said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by the truth, your Word is truth."

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her holy. In this context, "holy" means "bearing an actual likeness to God."⁵⁷ J.I Packer quoted Puritan John Owen's writing, "With rumbling rhetoric, the Puritan John Owen explicates this by defining sanctification as the work of the Christian's God transforming him and holiness as the lifestyle of the person being transformed."⁵⁸ Packer then quoted Owen and his definition and view of man's sanctification when he writes, "

Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according to the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus

⁵⁶ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*, Vol. 3. p. 967.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Packer, J.I. *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, (Fleming H. Revell Company), Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1984, p. 96.

Christ. . . . Hence it follows that our holiness, which is the fruit and effect of this work, the work as terminated in us, as it compriseth the new principle of image of God wrought in us, so it consists in a holy obedience unto God by Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the covenant of grace, from the principle of a new nature.”⁵⁹

The Holy Spirit of God is integral in the process of transformation. It is the Spirit of God that produces the fruit of God, described in Galatians 5:22-23 as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This fruit, character qualities, are produced in a believer as they remain in Christ (John 15:4), as they live by the Spirit of God. Scripture instructs believers with these words in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Sanctification is a process that continues one’s entire lifetime, and even then, is not complete until we see the Lord face to face and are glorified. Also, sanctification is a work accomplished by God; people are unable to perform it on their own.

Although God accomplishes transformation in the life of a believer, a believer does have responsibilities in this process if it is to occur. This principle can be seen in passages such as 1 Tim. 4:7b, “On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness,” as well as Philippians 2:12b “. . . work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” both of which emphasize the responsibility of individual believers in their spiritual growth. For transformation to occur in a believer’s life, there must be discipline on the part of the believer to participate in those practices that God uses to bring about the change to Christ-likeness that God desires.

⁵⁹ Owen, John. *Works*, ed. W. Goold, (*London: Banner of Truth, 1966*), 3:386

The practices or spiritual disciplines that aid the transformation of a man into becoming more like Christ are various. These practices are ways God has given us to remain in close relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of these practices are prayer, fasting, bible reading, studying, meditating on God's word, solitude, fellowship, confession of sins one to another, journaling, giving of praise and thanksgiving to God, simplicity, service, submission, and self-denial. Obeying the Lord's commands, being surrendered to the Lord, and keeping in step with the Spirit of God who indwells believers are other avenues that aid in helping believers stay connected to Jesus. Staying connected to Him helps believers' lives to be progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ. Since God is faithful and true to all His promises, including His purpose to transform his people to Christ-likeness, and since God cannot fail, then an individual must pay close attention to himself or herself as the reason for any lack of noticeable transformation.

Despite this understanding of transformation as being God's purpose for their lives, the men in many churches are not being transformed, but instead, are being conformed to the world and its ways. Since God is faithful and cannot fail, His role in the process of transformation is sure; the breakdown comes with people, who for a variety of reasons, are disengaged in some aspect of the process of change. Therefore, this failure must be addressed with men. Many men today are more concerned with their jobs and providing a "decent income" for their families, than they are about becoming the man God desires them to be and accomplishing God's purposes and will for their life. Many men today are more concerned with their job and providing a "decent" income for their families, which is in and of itself a positive and biblical goal. We read in 1 Timothy 5:8, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." However, many

men have allowed money and the things of this world, such as material possessions, sports, and recreation, to become a priority and focal point of their lives as opposed to a growing, dynamic relationship with the Lord. Often it is the women who are the most engaged in this journey of spiritual growth and maturity.

Men at Grace Fellowship were no exception to this reality. This lack of spiritual growth in the lives of men results in negative consequences in their lives, their families, and their church. This thesis project attempts to provide an avenue for men to engage, which may or may not lead them into experiencing the spiritual transformation God desires for them. But it is believed that the changes made in the Men's Ministry group will increase the possibility for men to experience transformation in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and with others. This possibility will come by putting into practice many of the principles of Wesley's band and class group meetings that transformed the lives of thousands of men and women in eighteenth-century England.

This project desires to implement some of the principles of Wesley's band and class groups of honest sharing of personal struggles and faults in the context of a supportive group of men. These meetings will also incorporate prayer at the beginning and close of the sessions, as well as opportunities to gather around a brother in prayer during the session. In the book of James 5:16 are the following words, "Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." This will require transparency, honesty, and humility as men openly share with other men in the group the various problems, struggles, temptations, they are experiencing in their lives, where they are at in their relationship with the Lord, and what areas need attention in their lives for them to experience the transformation God desires. This openness will be a new experience for many men and will allow for the potential of real

transformation. However, there is still the potential for men not to engage in this process and experience no change, nor growth in their relationship with their Lord and Savior. This lack of engagement, at its most basic theological level, is the propensity of man to hide from God due to his sin. Immediately after Adam and Eve fell into sin, by disobeying God's command, they are confronted by God about their actions in Genesis 3:7-11.

Commenting on this passage, Dr. J. Grant Howard writes, "Their eyes were opened. Their perception of themselves and each other was changed. They are ill at ease with each other. They can no longer be open and honest with each other. From that moment on, they began to hide from one another as persons. Man began to wear a mask. To fashion a façade."⁶⁰

Commenting on the propensity of men to wear masks, Dr. Frederick Grosse writes,

"Many American men are trained from birth to be individualists and self-contained units of control. Nothing could be more detrimental to a union with God and the opposite of spiritual growth than this mindset. So, our work is before us. American men are in desperate need of ministry from the church. Men need community."⁶¹

For men to remove masks and be transparent before God and one another, they will need to recognize the negative influence of cultural expectations that many men have believed and incorporated into their lives. Some of these, according to Grosse, may be the following:

- Real men should not express their feelings.
- A man should not have spiritual longings for union with God.
- A man never feels, let alone admits fear.

⁶⁰ Howard J. Grant. *The Trauma of Transparency: A Biblical Approach to Inter-Personal Communication*, (Multnomah Press, Portland Oregon, 1979), p. 26

⁶¹ Gross, Frederick. *The Eight Masks of Men: A Practical Guide in Spiritual Growth for Men of the Christian Faith*. New York, NY., The Haworth Pastoral Press, Co. 1998, pgs. 4-5.

- If you fail at anything as a man, you are a failure.
- A man is only as important as his income.
- Spirituality is a woman's matter.
- A real man always has the answer.
- Men do not grieve wounds of rejection or abandonment.
- Sadness and hurt are not manly emotions.
- A man is put on earth to produce and perform.⁶²

The consequences of sin are a tendency in man to hide from God and hide from others as well. Accompanying this tendency to hide behind various masks, is the tendency of humanity to shift the blame and not take responsibility for one's actions. This lack of taking responsibility for one's works has been the case since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the garden, after both Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, both immediately shifted the blame to another when confronted by God. Adam said to God in Gen. 3:12, "The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Eve's response to God when confronted is in Gen. 3:13 was, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Therefore, if men are going to grow spiritually, if they are to mature in their walk with the Lord, there must be a place where they can be real about their spiritual condition. A place where they feel safe to open themselves up and confess their struggles and sins to one another, pray for one another, and encourage one another. This place needs to prioritize confidentiality and accountability to be victorious over man's tendencies to wear masks, to hide their sins, and blame others. These principles are an integral part of the new principles put into place in the Men's Ministry at Grace Fellowship. Feeling free and safe to reveal oneself to others in a group may take some time to come to fruition. But if a safe, encouraging, accountable environment is developed, the potential for transformation is significantly increased. If someone says or does

⁶² Ibid., p.8.

something to another man in a way that violates God's commands and words, then they are gently and humbly confronted by a brother or two in the spirit of love and restoration. These principles derived from Wesley's small groups are being applied in the Men's Ministry Group. These principles will help the men in this group to grow spiritually in their relationship with God and one another. It will give them the experience of biblical fellowship amongst brothers in Christ. These changes are the pathway to spiritual maturity. It will take time, effort, and the love and help of God in the context of a supportive group of men.

The words of Proverbs 27:17 are, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." The process of transformation occurs in community and fellowship with other men, not living solo independent lives. Spiritual growth, as portrayed in the Scriptures, occurs in the context of community. A community of believers seeking the Lord for the transformation He desires in their lives. Community with other men is a necessity if they are to become and do all that their God has planned for them. It is in the context of community that all the "one another" commands are exercised and where men learn to love, respect, honor, encourage, forgive, live in unity with and pray for those who are different from themselves. It is in community that men learn to die to self. It is in community that men are transformed into the likeness of Christ. Hebrews 10:24–25 reads, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Howard in his book, "Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification," discussing Ephesians 4:1–16 writes, "Paul is exhorting his readers that while the foundation to unity is located in the work of Christ, the practical outworking of that unity is located in relationship within the community."⁶³ It is in the context of the relationships within the

⁶³ Howard, James M. *Paul, the Community, and Progressive Sanctification: An Exploration into*

community of believers that the unity Christ's work on the cross accomplished is demonstrated to humanity. Howard continues with the importance of community in the spiritual growth of believers to maturity when he writes,

Paul concludes that unity in Christ will result as believers practice the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15). The reason is that of the work of Christ: 'From him, the whole body grows, fitted and held together by every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body grows in love' (Eph. 4:16). Paul is clear that Christ himself is the center that makes everything possible. However, unity in Christ is once again balanced between his present and finished work and the body which Christ causes to build itself up in love. For Paul, while Christ is the center, the members are the instruments of growth in each other's lives.⁶⁴

Theoretical Foundations

The topic of the transformation of men is a broad subject that is considerably narrowed when applying the principles of Wesley's class and band meetings to a group of men. Having read Henderson's book on John Wesley, this researcher was burdened with discovering how to bring similar principles into the lives of the men at Grace Fellowship. There was a lack of involvement on the part of men in bible studies and ministries at church. The men were visibly absent and seemingly lacking the desire for spiritual growth. There was no noticeable change in the inner character qualities, as described in Galatians 5:22-23. The men at Grace Fellowship appeared to stagnate in the progression of their spiritual lives. However, most, if not all, of the opportunities for men to grow spiritually at Grace Fellowship, consisted of teaching biblical truth and doctrine either in the Sunday morning service, or in a class setting at church, or a small

Community-Based Transformation within Pauline Theology, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, NY, 2007. p. 160.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

group bible study in homes. Biblical truth, from the basics of salvation to the more complex doctrines of eschatology, was offered in some format for the men of Grace.

However, attendance by men was sparse. Upon reading this book about John Wesley's approach for spiritual growth and transformation, there was a compulsion to offer something more to inspire men to grow and be changed. It seemed like much of what was provided at Grace Fellowship was only engaging and appealing to the cognitive aspect of the men. Such an emphasis on the cognitive element is what the society meetings focused on in Wesley's system. It was not the focus of the class and band meetings.

Anthony Hoekema, in his book, *Created in God's Image*, makes this point when he writes, "The understanding of man as a whole, as developed in this chapter, has important practical implications. First, the church must be concerned about the whole person. In its preaching and teaching, the church must address not only the minds of those to whom it ministers but also their emotions and wills."⁶⁵

Missing at Grace Fellowship was any focused attention and discussion in the area of men's affective and behavioral aspects of their life. There was no opportunity except in the small groups in homes for discussing the behavioral and emotional issues in the struggles of life. The home groups were not exclusively men but included husbands and wives, along with a few singles. The men tended not to open themselves up and share their struggles in the presence of their spouse or the other females.

Wesley's model of transformation and spiritual growth included all aspects of a person, that is, the cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions in a small, supportive community of

⁶⁵ Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986. pgs. 222–223.

believers. The transformation into Christ-likeness is for the whole man, not merely the cognitive. It is also behavioral, as Scripture challenges and commands believers to put off the old self with its practices and put on the new self. Ephesians 4:25-32 commands and exhorts believers to put off certain behaviors and to get rid of certain emotional responses to people and life's circumstances.

“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:25-32).

These verses instruct believers that God commands them to put off certain behaviors, attitudes, and feelings and to put on other kinds of actions, attitudes, and emotions. Therefore, all three of these areas must be addressed and discussed with men to get out in the open the areas that need to change in all men. Wesley's system of small groups included dealing with all these areas in men's lives to facilitate their transformation. Therefore, the principles from Wesley's class and band small groups were implemented into the Men's Ministry Group at Grace Fellowship.

This study will be conducted to discover the effectiveness of these new principles in transforming men's lives. Will these changes facilitate transformation and spiritual growth in the individuals in this men's small group community? Will the minds of the

men be renewed? Will attitudes and behaviors be changed to come into conformity with Jesus Christ? Will the fruit of the Spirit, as described in Gal. 5:22-23, be visibly apparent in the actions of the men and become the growing dominant reality? Or will the works of the flesh continue to be the repeated pattern of their lives? Will there be an increasing desire to be a part of the ministries of the church and to discover where they fit in ministering to others with their spiritual gifts and talents? Or will many continue to be uninvolved in any ministries?

The earliest disciples of Christ were radically transformed with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The apostle Peter, who had recently denied even knowing the Lord Jesus Christ to a young girl and others out of fear for his life, was then able to boldly preach a message about Christ. The bold message resulted in 3,000 people coming into the kingdom of God through God's Son, Jesus Christ. The early church was filled and empowered to be bold witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. And the impact of the early church continued as they devoted themselves to those things which bring transformation and maturity. We read in Acts 2:42-27,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The believers in the early church devoted themselves to the teaching of God's Word, to prayer, to the fellowship, that is, to each other, to communion, to meeting together in a large group in the temple and meeting in small groups in one another's homes. It is apparent from these verses that the early believers met in a large group (temple courts), as well as small groups (homes). They also devoted themselves to learning the Word of God, prayer, observing communion, and fellowship one with another. The favor of the Lord was upon them as God was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

We can continue reading all through Acts and discover the growing impact believers were having on others. The early believers were being transformed in powerful ways that impacted their community.

The difficulty inherent in this research is finding agreement about the measurable results of transformation and what that should look like in a person. Keith Essex in his article, "Sanctification: The Biblically Identifiable Fruit," writes,

However, even in past centuries, from the sixteenth-century reformers to the nineteenth-century Evangelical expositors when 'the highway to holiness was clearly marked out for the believers,' there was no agreement concerning exactly what the visible evidences of progressive sanctification were.⁶⁶

Dr. Gene Getz wrote a book entitled *The Measure of a Man: Twenty Attributes of a Godly Man*. Discussing the passages in Titus 1:5-10 and 1 Tim. 3:1-7, where Paul lists the qualifications for a man desiring to be an elder or overseer, Getz writes the following:

⁶⁶ Essex, Keith H. *Sanctification: The Biblically Identifiable Fruit*. MSJ 21/2 (Fall 2010), p. 195.

When you first look at the list of spiritual qualifications in Paul's two letters, you might conclude that Paul was exclusively outlining qualifications for men who served in pastoral and teaching positions in the Church. Not so! While Paul was outlining criteria for selecting leaders, he was, in essence, saying, 'Timothy, if a man wants to become a spiritual leader, that's great. Just make sure he's a mature man, and here's how you can determine if he measures up to God's standards as a Christian.'

In other words, some men will possess these qualities to serve as spiritual leaders. Some men will feel called to carry on this kind of ministry, and others will not. The qualities, however, are goals for every Christian man. Paul simply pulled together several qualities he and other authors mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament and then compiled a marvelous profile for measuring our maturity levels in Christ.⁶⁷

Gene Getz is claiming that these traits, necessary for one to be considered for the position of overseer (elder) in the church, are the same qualities necessary to determine if men are maturing as Christians. Getz summarizes these verses into twenty characteristics. Are these twenty characteristics the measurable outcomes of transformation in men? Is this what change should look like in all Christian men? Again, the existing differences concerning what the quantifiable results of spiritual growth and change in men look like in their lives is apparent.

Five Views of Sanctification is a book that discusses five various views of sanctification, which are the Wesleyan, Keswick, Reformed, Pentecostal, and Augustinian-Dispensational views. Each had its distinct differences, which again may lead to confusion over precisely what a transformed life of a man should resemble.

For this study, criteria that reveal a growing, changing, maturing believer are the fruit of the Spirit in their daily living. The fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, should be

⁶⁷ Getz, Gene. *The Measure of a Man: Twenty Attributes of a Godly Man*, Ventura CA., Regal Books, 2004, p. 21

growing and evident in their lives. If these attributes are increasing in a believer's life, as well as an increased desire for knowing God and obeying his commands, then these will be considered the evidence and proof of men being transformed into the likeness of His Son.

The transformation of Jesus' disciples after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked a noticeable difference in their progress towards Christ-likeness. Therefore, the indwelling, filling, empowering, and transforming work of the Holy Spirit is the significant difference in the pre-ascension transformation and the post-ascension transformation in the disciples' lives. It is with the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in and fill men and women with His presence and power that transformation in all areas of a person's life may take place.

Hoekema, commenting on the freedom that Christ has brought to man through his death and resurrection writes,

In context of the epistle to the Galatians, this freedom means not only freedom from the need to keep God's law in order to earn our salvation but also freedom to live by the Spirit in such a way as to stop gratifying the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Paul also ties in true freedom with the work of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. That freedom Paul goes on to say means progressive transformation into the likeness of Christ: 'And we, who with unveiled face all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (v.18).'⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, pgs. 234-235.

Many churches have a men's ministry program available for men to participate in and get connected to other men. Amazingly, there are a few large churches in the Grand Rapids area that do not have a men's ministry, but rather encourage small group participation by members and attendees. These groups, however, are not comprised of men only. There are various men's ministry organizations that offer materials and guidance to churches to help them implement a men's ministry. The goals most often found in these men's ministries are to connect men, connect them to Christ, and reach out to the community in acts of service. Various opportunities are identified to connect men through events such as retreats or some outdoor games or activities men would enjoy. Connecting them to Christ occurs through small groups that may have a combination of Bible study, prayer, and worship. Connecting to the community often involves spearheading neighborhood projects or something similar.

The relationship of this thesis topic with much of the current practices in men's ministry intersects at the point of the transformation of men into the likeness of Christ through honest, authentic transparency and accountability between men. The openness between believers leading to change was the focus of Wesley's class and band groups. Bunton writes about the purpose of Wesley's class and band groups, "Although the primary purposes of class meetings were discipleship and discipline, they also served Wesley's evangelistic vision. There were more professed conversions in-class meetings than in the preaching service."⁶⁹ The motivation for the implementation of small groups was to encourage continued spiritual growth so as not to experience regression in one's spiritual life after conversion. Bunton writes concerning the band groups in Wesley's methodology;

⁶⁹ Bunton, Peter. "300 Years of Small Groups-The European Church from Luther to Wesley," *Christian Education Journal*, series 3, vol. 11, no. 1, copyright 2014. p. 97.

The goal of bands was to address the inner issues of purity and holiness. Unlike the classes, they were not compulsory; their purpose was the honest divulging of sins and temptations. It was in the bands that Wesley's famous questions, published in 1738, were asked:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met this week?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it is a sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

Through confession and discussion of Christian truths, believers grew in holiness.⁷⁰

The ministry to men at Grace Fellowship, which this thesis project centers on, does not include a doctrinal or biblical study, but rather the sharing of experiences with one another about their personal spiritual life and growth. The open sharing occurs in an environment of trust, prayer, and voluntary accountability. Using the term "voluntary" accountability means that the members of Grace Fellowship Men's Group are urged to hold themselves accountable and allow other brothers in the Lord to hold them responsible for maintaining a healthy relationship with the Lord and with the other men. However, it is a voluntary choice, not something forced upon them. The voluntary nature of accountability brings an inner motivation, which is a stronger motivating force than external rules, which one must conform to or suffer the predetermined consequences established by the group's leadership. Commenting on this, Tom Albin writes, "Voluntary accountability is essential to me because the difference between a cult and what I'm describing is exactly the issue of voluntary. It's not the church telling me to do this or else . . . I respond to the call of God when I'm ready."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Bunton, Peter. "300 Years of Small Groups-The European Church from Luther to Wesley," *Christian Education Journal*, series 3, vol. 11, no. 1, copyright 2014. p. 97.

⁷¹ Albin, Tom. "Finding God in Small Groups," EBSCO Publishing. *Christianity Today*, August 2003, p. 44.

The men in this group are allowed to bring their struggles into the light with other supportive men and not hide those struggles in the dark while being prayed for and encouraged. Accountability is, as described previously, voluntary accountability, which the men choose to put themselves under as opposed to forced accountability to be a part of this group.

Wesley's class and band groups eventually declined and then ceased altogether. What was the reason this powerful ministry concept became ineffective and finally out of existence? Some believe it was due to two things. John Wesley was a tireless worker that met with and talked to all the class groups to keep an eye on how they were progressing. The first reason for the decline was upon his death; there was no one with his same devotion to follow-up on all the groups. This powerful ingredient was missing. Secondly, after Wesley's death, there was a decline in training and producing leaders for the class meetings. Whatever the various reasons may have been, the reduction in leaders led to the decline of the effectiveness of this small group and, eventually, its' demise.

A well-known ministry geared exclusively to men in our day has been the Promise Keepers Movement, which began in 1990 and was soon drawing tens of thousands of men to rallies in various stadiums across the country. It started as a local fellowship of men joining for prayer, fasting, and mutual encouragement.⁷² The goal of Promise Keepers was to change men. This movement seemed to gain traction and popularity during its first seven to eight years, as men were challenged to commit themselves to seven promises. These promises were:

1. Honor Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to his Word.
2. Pursue vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that a man needs brothers to help him keep his promises.

⁷² Gilbreath, Edward. "Manhood's Great Awakening: Promise Keepers Ambitious Agenda for Transforming Men," Christianity Today. 39.2, Feb. 6, 1995, pgs. 20–28.

3. Practice spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.
4. Build strong marriages and families.
5. Support the mission of the church by honoring and praying for one's pastor and by actively giving of one's time and resources.
6. Reach beyond racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.
7. Influence the world by being obedient to the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission Matt. 28:19-20).⁷³

After beginning with fast numerical growth, Promise Keepers then began a significant decline in attendance at Promise Keeper events. Numerous reasons have been postulated as to why, but it seems finances were a substantial part of the drop. The leaders decided to do away with the sixty-dollar entrance fee to reach those who may not be able to come because of cost. One thing noticeably absent in the seven commitments, as well as at the events, was a lack of emphasis on the transforming power of the indwelling Spirit of God to change a man from the inside out. The seven promises were all outward actions with no actual inner indicators to determine if real transformation was taking place. Change in men was and is the goal of Promise Keepers. Therefore, the conversion of one's inner character qualities should be accounted for in their plan of spiritual growth.

Bunton, in his article summary of the history of small groups from Luther to Wesley, gives the reader some potential lessons for today's contemporary small groups and a conclusion concerning the history of small groups. An interesting statement was made in his conclusion: "Throughout history, when there are renewal movements and those desiring of following God in

⁷³ Gilbreath, Edward. "Manhood's Great Awakening: Promise Keepers Ambitious Agenda for Transforming Men," *Christianity Today*. 39.2, Feb. 6, 1995, pgs. 20–28.

earnest, some form of small group ministry is established to assist people to attain that objective.”⁷⁴

The goal of this project is for men to begin to experience transformation in their lives towards the likeness of Christ. This model and the principles followed, could be applied in other ministry contexts to assist people in reaching closer to God’s desired purpose for their lives, which is to conform them into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. If transformation occurs, then this project will be successful and may be useful in enabling others to overcome barriers that may be preventing them from growing into the person God desires them to be.

Literature Review

The number of sources specific to this thesis project is limited, but when you combine literature on John Wesley’s class and band meetings together with the current books and articles written for developing an effective men’s ministry, then there are many more writings available for a researcher.

A foundational, helpful book on the class and band meetings of John Wesley is written by D. Michael Henderson, who is the author of *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. This book gives valuable insight into the system of discipleship that John Wesley brought to England in the eighteenth century and how it impacted the spiritual revival of a nation. Wesley developed an educational system with practical principles and methods to accomplish the Great Commission given to the church in Matthew 28:18-20 to go and make

⁷⁴ Bunton, Peter. “300 Years of Small Groups-The European Church from Luther to Wesley,” *Christian Education Journal*, series 3, vol. 11, no. 1, copyright 2014. pgs. 103–104

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded.⁷⁵

This book describes in detail how Wesley developed three interlocking systems; the society meetings, the class meetings, and the band meetings to help men become mature disciples of Jesus Christ. The society meetings were mainly focused on the cognitive aspect of people, with a teacher giving a message from Scripture to challenge them to understand, believe, and apply it to their lives. The class meetings dealt mainly with the behavioral aspect of man, while the band meetings were focused on the affective dimension. The class and band meetings gave a voice to all, most of whom would otherwise not have a voice into spiritual matters. There was open, honest sharing of the condition of their spiritual lives in an atmosphere of acceptance, encouragement, and prayer (James 5:16). These groups recaptured the fellowship, the intimate community, experienced by the early church. There was not a set curriculum or passage of scripture that would be studied in these two groups, the class, or the band, but rather an open sharing of the actual condition of one's life in an atmosphere of unity and trust.

The impact these meetings had on the spiritual transformation in the life of the attendees was immense. Such self-disclosure in the presence of others and speaking of one's struggles with the group in such an atmosphere led to trust, authentic fellowship, and intimacy, which in turn led to the transformation of their spiritual lives. The spiritual impact of the experience of these meetings led Wesley to say, "I have found by experience that one of these (people) has learned more from one hour's close discourse than ten years public preaching."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Wilmore, Kentucky: Rafiki Books, 2016, p. 13.

⁷⁶ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Wilmore, Kentucky: Rafiki Books, 2016, p. 118.

Another helpful book on this topic was authored by John Atkinson entitled *The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It*.⁷⁷ This book helps detail the responsibilities that the class meeting leader should adopt, so that all may experience the real, honest, loving fellowship and support that leads to spiritual growth. The class leader was responsible for setting the tone and for being an example by voluntarily sharing his struggles (Phil. 3:17; 1 Tim. 4:12). By making himself vulnerable before the group, a leader will foster an environment of authentic, open, honest confession from others of their real spiritual condition. This book is valuable by providing insight into what it takes to be a successful leader of a ministry that transforms men's souls to be Christ-like.

The book titled, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley's Thought and Popular Methodist Practice*, is a book that investigates the band meeting, its purpose, and major components, such as confessing sins to one another. This book also discusses the interconnection of all the small groups Wesley formed and the requirements for a person to transition into another group. Also emphasized in the book is Wesley's view of the importance of the community of the saints being a necessary component to pursuing spiritual holiness (Heb. 10:24).

Samuel Rogal wrote an article titled, "John Wesley's Journal: Prescriptions for the Social, Spiritual, and Intellectual Ills of Britain's Middle Class," about Wesley's journals. In this article, he described what he learned about Wesley's purpose, prejudices and strong personal convictions, descriptive ability, and attention to detail. This article gives various insights into the

⁷⁷ John Atkinson, *The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It*. New York, N.Y: Phillips and Hunt, 1974), p. 23.

man, John Wesley, which helps write a research paper about his contribution to the spiritual formation of men through small groups.

An article titled, “300 Years of Small Groups – The European Church from Luther to Wesley,” is a summary of the implementation and use of different types of small groups from the time of the Reformation through John Wesley. The book gives insight into the various purposes of small groups as well as the different elements included in the small groups throughout the three-hundred-year-time frame of this book. This book is helpful in the research of small groups and their transforming impact on the lives of men and women, as well as how one group influenced another, albeit in different places and times.

Another helpful resource was an article written by Kevin Watson, which is titled “Forerunners of the Early Methodist Band Meeting.” This article investigates the various aspects of previous small groups, before Wesley’s, and how they may have influenced Wesley’s thinking and the start of the band groups. The relevance of this article for researching the transformation of men through application of principles from Wesley’s class and bands groups is apparent in this statement written by Watson, “Wesley’s synthesis of these traditions brought together the Anglicans Religious Societies’ concern for rules and a disciplined pursuit of holiness through a reliance on the means of grace with the emphasis of the Moravian *Banden* on confession of sin and searching one another’s hearts through spiritual conversation.”⁷⁸

A more contemporary book, published in 1998, concerning ministry to men that will be helpful to this thesis project is entitled, *The Eight Masks of Men: A Practical Guide in Spiritual Growth for Men of the Christian Faith* by Rev. Frederick G. Grosse. The author of this book is

⁷⁸ Kevin M. Watson, “Forerunners of the Early Methodist Band Meeting,” *Methodist Review*, Vol. 2, 2010, pgs. 1–31.

addressing the central theme of this research project, which is the transformation of men, as seen in the title with the words, “a practical guide in spiritual growth for men of the Christian faith.” This book is a nine-week program for helping men grow in their Christian faith. It discusses the societal pressures on men that often result in men wearing masks to hide or cover their real needs. The book deals with eight masks men wear in life that keep them from discovering the path to freedom, which leads to transformation and living the life God intends for men to live. The eight masks discussed in this book are the masks of loneliness, rage, and anger, compulsions, performance, control, producing, competition, and the mask of religion.⁷⁹ Grosse discusses how men can remove these masks that prevent them from experiencing real transformation in their lives. He examines thirteen Christian spiritual disciplines revealed in Scripture that when applied, help men remove their masks. The thirteen spiritual disciplines the author addresses are worship, prayer, service, solitude, financial commitment, body self-care, human sexuality, fasting, surrender, confession/forgiveness, simplicity, friendship, and community. The value of this book to the research project is found in its’ focus, which is the transformation of men through the application of spiritual disciplines. It gives insight into the mask’s men hide behind, which will surely resonate with men as they learn about a mask that may be a part of their life and how to break through the avoidance occurring in their lives that keep them from growing.

Another contemporary book that will be valuable to this project is *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Maintain a Thriving, Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your*

⁷⁹ Rev. Frederick Grosse, *The Eight Masks of Men: A Practical Guide in Spiritual Growth for Men of the Christian Faith* (The Hawthorne Pastoral Press, 1998), p. 23.

Church.⁸⁰ This book is valuable in that it focuses on building a men's ministry in one's church around the biblical principle of discipleship, as opposed to other peripheral possibilities (Matt. 28:19). It also does not give a set formula or steps that every church should follow. Instead, the authors help you discover who your men are and their needs so that your church may build a thriving ministry to men. Principles are given to guide this process that serves as a basic structure with each church filling in the details specifically for their men. This plan has the benefit of being done with success in other churches. The three main components are a church's philosophy of ministry, which is called in this book, the Portal Priority. The second basic component is to build a resolutely masculine environment for the men, which is named the Man Code in this book. The third component is called The Three Strand of Leadership and is comprised of the involvement of the senior pastor, a committed men's ministry leader, and an active and renewed leadership team.⁸¹ The structure taught in this book from which to build an effective men's ministry has been successfully implemented at the church Brett Clemmer attends. His pastor, Pete Alwinson, passionately pursued the men of his church, which resulted in a 75% involvement rate in both spiritual growth and serving the Lord among the men of the church.⁸²

Some helpful articles containing insights to help build a successful men's ministry will also be examined. One article is called "The Decline of the Class Meeting" by Charles Edward White. He traces some of the reasons or causes of the downfall of Wesley's class meetings, which led to their eventual demise altogether. This information will help avoid as much as

⁸⁰ Patrick Morley, David Delk, Brett Klemmer, *No Man Left Behind: How to Build and Maintain a Thriving, Disciple-Making Ministry for Every Man in Your Church* (Moody Publishers, 2006), p. 97.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 11.

possible the same problems that caused the class meetings to stumble and fall. Precautions can be made to avoid them through preventative means. Some of the elements which led to the undoing of the class meetings were inadequate leaders hastily appointed who were not equipped to handle the responsibilities of leadership (1 Tim. 3:6, 10).

Another problem that surfaced were tensions that arose between leaders in different social positions. These struggles lasted some two years and led to hundreds leaving the class meetings.⁸³ Another problem encountered was the rapid growth of the Methodist movement, which resulted in class meetings going from an average size of twelve in Wesley's day to twenty and then to over seventy.⁸⁴ A final cause of the decline was the increase in the settled preacher who preached in the Sunday morning worship service, which eventually replaced the class meetings.⁸⁵ There is much to be learned from the struggles and failings of a ministry, as well as the successes. Understanding the potential reasons for the decline of the class meeting gives the possibility of strategic planning to avoid such pitfalls.

A helpful article, "Finding God in Small Groups," published in *Christianity Today*, is an interview with Dr. Tom Albin, who did his research on why Wesley's system of small groups worked so well. Albin discusses the various kinds of small groups in Wesley's system and what the distinction of each group is that makes it different from the other groups. For example, he identifies prevenient grace, convincing grace, and sanctifying grace and which small groups were related to those distinctive categories of grace (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:3; John 6:44). Albin's

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

distinctions are directly relevant to the research of this author, as it is dealing with principles in Wesley's small groups.

Another article that addresses the issue of the spiritual transformation of men comes from a Catholic publication. The title of the article is "Man Up" by Brian Baker. This article addresses the problem of the increase in the number of men who seem not to be growing to spiritual maturity. Believing the church has dropped the ball in this regard, this article looks at the new men's movements that are being formed to fill that void, to meet the spiritual needs of men that have gone unnoticed or have been put on the back shelf and forgotten or ignored. Some of the spiritual needs addressed in this article are the need for men to connect, to bond with one another in their pursuit of spiritual maturity. Men need more than just attending a church service once a week or even a small group once a week; they need to connect with other men and be able to share and discuss their struggles to grow in their faith. One sentence from this article seems to sum up the main point of the article, "Successful approaches to spirituality for men rely on the idea that God is revealed not only through theology but also through personal connections and bonding with other men."⁸⁶ This article proposes that churches have not taught men how to deal with the pain and suffering they have experienced in life by getting knocked down by divorce, illness, or loss of a job. Men will drop out of something that just sugar coats life experiences without allowing discussion with other men and addressing those kinds of issues (Eph. 4:15; Prov. 27:17). The revealing of one's scars begins the process of healing in a man's life. This article helps evaluate the reason men are passive in church and what can be changed to engage them with God and what He wants to do in their life.

⁸⁶ Brian Baker, "Man Up," in U.S. Catholic. March 2015, Vol. 80 Issue 3, p. 2.

Steve Raby addresses the question in his article in *Christianity Today*, “Where is the Christian Men’s Movement Headed?” The men’s movement he is referring to in the report, is the Promise Keeper’s Movement. The article touches on some of the possible reasons for the explosion of this men’s ministry. Raby discusses some Christian leaders who embraced the movement and others who are wary of it and why. The article also cites other men’s ministry groups that have been birthed in various places because of the impact of Promise Keepers or in response to the message of the movement. He concludes the article wondering if Promise Keepers will be short-lived or whether it will bring significant change to the church. This article is relevant to this study as it deals with men’s ministry issues and how to reach men with the transforming message of Christianity in such a way that it has a sustained impact on transforming men’s lives.

Another helpful article with the title, “Mending Men’s Ministry: How to Disciple in an Era of Male Floundering,” describes the rampant isolation and loneliness that most men are experiencing today. It addresses the lack of male involvement in churches across America, as well as the lack of spiritual formation. This article offers some suggestions and ideas on how to structure and carry out an effective men’s ministry that leads to the transformation of men (Rom. 8:29; 12:1-2). There are too many unhealthy models of manhood, according to this article. Nate Pyle writes, “Men are taught to climb the corporate ladder, conquer foes, and then celebrate their victories. But Jesus descended, denied himself, and dies for others.”⁸⁷ The goal for believers is to be conformed to the image of Christ, and that runs contrary to what culture is teaching men.

An article that appeared in *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, entitled, “Sanctification: The Biblically Identifiable Fruit,” discusses the visible “fruit” of a man being transformed into the

⁸⁷ Bob Smietana, “Mending Men’s Ministry: How to Disciple in an Era of Male Floundering,” *Christianity Today*, June 2012, p. 31.

likeness of Christ. The primary biblical passages addressed in this article are from Romans 6:1-7:6 and Galatians 5:22-23. The passage in Galatians lists the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in a believer's life that becomes visible, that is, seen by others as a man is transformed. The passage in the book of Romans associates "fruit" with sanctification. This article is relevant to this thesis project as it discusses verifiers that demonstrate a man is being transformed by the work of the triune God.

Promise Keepers, a ministry to men, burst on the scene in the early 1990s. The article, "Manhood's Great Awakening: Promise Keepers Ambitious Agenda for Transforming Men," touches on the need for this men's ministry movement and why it gained so much traction so quickly. This article is helpful and relevant in that it points out where the church missed addressing the societal pressures men face and how it impacts them in every aspect of their lives.

The article states,

"There has been a vacuum of men doing what God has called them to do in the church. The vacuum can be explained, in part, by sociological changes in the nineteenth century. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, men went from work that revolved around the home to the factory and office jobs that physically removed them from their families. This change brought about by the Industrial Revolution ultimately spelled bad news for the spiritual lives of men and, consequently, society."⁸⁸

An article found in *Pastoral Psychology* titled "Man-infestation of the Spirit: An Investigation on the Impact of a Curriculum and Small Group Spiritual Direction on the Spiritual Formation of Protestant Men" was an interesting study done with a men's small group with the desired goal of spiritual formation. The relevance of this article is found in that it is research on the same desired outcome as this thesis, that is, spiritual formation, although different means

⁸⁸ Edward Gilbreath, "Manhood's great awakening: Promise Keeper's ambitious agenda for transforming Christian men," in *Christianity Today*, 6 Feb. 1995, p.20+

were used to help foster the spiritual transformation. This research used the understanding and application of the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23, as verification of transformation in men.

Another helpful resource was an article written by Kevin Watson, which is titled “Forerunners of the Early Methodist Band Meeting.” This article investigates the various aspects of previous small groups, before Wesley’s, and how they may have influenced Wesley’s thinking and the start of the band groups. The relevance of this article for researching the transformation of men through application of principles from Wesley’s class and bands groups is evident in this statement written by Watson, “Wesley’s synthesis of these traditions brought together the Anglicans Religious Societies’ concern for rules and a disciplined pursuit of holiness through a reliance on the means of grace with the emphasis of the Moravian *Banden* on confession of sin and searching one another’s hearts through spiritual conversation.”⁸⁹

These books and articles will help shape this thesis project into a strategy for bringing about the transformation of men at Grace Fellowship. Incorporating some of Wesley’s principles from the class and band meetings into the Men’s Ministry at Grace Fellowship in Comstock Park, Michigan, will provide the opportunity for the spiritual transformation of men to maturity in Christ. If the men of Grace Fellowship follow these principles, they will experience victory in their struggle to be changed into the likeness of Christ.

⁸⁹ Kevin M. Watson, “Forerunners of the Early Methodist Band Meeting,” *Methodist Review*, Vol. 2, 2010, pgs. 1-31.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Results

Intervention Design

The problem addressed in this research is the struggle of spiritual growth and transformation in the lives of the men at Grace Fellowship. This problem often results in a waning passion for God and his Kingdom, as evidenced by the lack of transformation of men into the likeness of Christ and their minimal involvement in the ministries of the church. What can be done to help the men at Grace Fellowship move from their current spiritual condition into a thriving, growing faith that is transformative in their lives? This question was on the mind and heart of the pastor of Grace Fellowship as he read a book written by D. Michael Henderson entitled *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*.

This book presents John Wesley's system of interlocking groups that God used to bring a spiritual revitalization and awakening to the people of eighteenth-century England. The class groups were the most popular and effective of Wesley's small groups. While the Society meetings, which were larger Sunday meetings, focused on the cognitive aspect of an individual's understanding of Bible teaching, the class groups focused on the behavioral aspect of the Christian life.⁹⁰ The band groups focused on the affective mode or the moods, feelings, and attitudinal aspects of living the Christian life.⁹¹

Grace Fellowship has provided many opportunities for learning the Christian beliefs and doctrines of the Bible. These opportunities range from the Sunday morning services down to the

⁹⁰ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 91.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

small group meetings that take place in individual homes of Grace members as well as various classes offered throughout the year. The small groups that meet in homes have always been co-ed and have used a study guide or a Christian book to guide the group through a biblical topic, a book of the Bible, or Christian doctrine. As such, the cognitive aspect of the Christian life was the main target of Sunday morning as well as the small groups. Growing in the knowledge of God is a positive goal. However, there is a genuine danger that such learning will merely remain head knowledge and not transition into a person's day to day living. Stated differently, a believer can become only a hearer, as James warns in James 1:22, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." When an individual grows in knowledge, there is the danger of equating education with maturity without the transformation in actions and attitudes. Another risk of such a focus is boredom with instructional material which focuses on information without actual transformation. A person may develop an attitude of already knowing this information, allowing themselves to disengage from hearing, receiving, and applying the knowledge to their daily lives.

Wesley's class and band groups brought into the process of spiritual growth the other dimensions of human beings, which are the behavioral and emotional or attitudinal aspects of the men's lives. Through the implementation of some of Wesley's principles from these two groups, the class, and the band groups, all three areas of a person, the cognitive, behavioral, and affective, are involved in the small group discussion. The implementation of these principles will hopefully result in spiritual growth and transformation in the lives of the men at Grace Fellowship.

Some of the principles of Wesley's two groups to be incorporated into Grace Fellowship's Men's Ministry are as follows:

1. To not have a curriculum or lesson planned for the group, as it often did not connect with the struggles the men were currently going through in their lives. Wesley's class meetings had as its' subject matter, "how their souls prospered."⁹² In the men's meeting, one of the leaders will share the struggles and challenges they faced during the week or a continuous challenge in their walk of faith. The leaders will also share their victories over the troubles of this life.
2. To switch emphasis from knowledge-based discipleship to community relation-based discipleship.
3. To meet weekly, every Saturday from 8 to 10 am., instead of only twice a month. To meet year-round, not just during the school year. Wesley's class and band meetings met weekly.
4. To have an environment of confidentiality, acceptance, and support where men can openly share their life struggles or confess their sins without receiving condemnation from others and without fearing what they say will be passed on to others outside the men's group. In Wesley's class meetings, Henderson writes, "One of the roles of the class leader was to establish a climate of acceptance and commitment. As each member reported his or her progress, there was to be an atmosphere of trust and understanding generated by the others and stoked by the leader."⁹³
5. To provide voluntary accountability for every man to encourage growth. Contact through the week is encouraged, as well as ongoing prayer for one another throughout the week. Each man is on a group text list to share prayer requests.

⁹² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Rafiki Books, 2016), p. 94.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 99.

6. To open each meeting with prayer and to close each meeting with prayer and to pray anytime during the meeting for one another.

A related comment written by a class leader in Wesley's system affirms this sentiment,

“If you would be useful, you must “bear all things.” Let nothing offend or move you, though it comes from your dearest friend . . . Give none up who have the least spark of spiritual life in them. Remember what they cost Him who hates putting away. . .”⁹⁴

The band meetings in Wesley's system were more focused on the affective, that is, the attitudes, feelings, emotions, and intentions going on inside a believer in his daily spiritual life. Henderson writes, “The central function of the band methodology was what Wesley termed, “close conversation,” by which he meant soul-searching examination, not so much of behavior and ideas, but motives and heartfelt impressions.”⁹⁵

The purpose of making these various changes to the Men's Ministry Group was to aid and encourage men to experience transformation into Christ-likeness. The objective was to see a positive change in the spiritual condition of the men at Grace Fellowship. This objective was the main reason for the changes made in the Men's Ministry group.

The steps taken to incorporate these changes began with a discussion with two key men in the Men's Ministry small group who were desiring change. These men met with the elder board of the church to discuss their ideas, concerns, and possible changes. After the meeting, the elders weighed the matter over in their minds and discussed the merits of the proposed changes.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Rafiki Books, 2016). P. 110.

After much prayer and consideration of the future of the Men's Ministry Group, a decision was reached to implement the changes for the benefit of the men and this ministry. The two men who came to talk with the elders about the needed change were told of the elder's decision and asked if they were willing to lead this new format for the men's ministry.

At the next men's meeting, the new changes were announced and discussed with the group, who agreed to make these changes for the spiritual benefit of the men at Grace Fellowship. The Men's Ministry Group began its' new format in March of 2018. The group began with six men. A year later, the average attendance is fourteen. The author of this research has been and continues to be an attendee and participant of this Men's Ministry group.

The group meetings begin each Saturday at approximately 8 A.M. with prayer. The prayer time sets our hearts and our focus on the Lord. After the prayer time, the men eat breakfast. During breakfast, numerous conversations are occurring, as men are connecting to men, getting to know one another for the first time, or getting to know each other better. This time is important as men sit with each other and spend time talking together, for it does not happen in any other context. The time spent together at breakfast provides a non-threatening environment where men can share a meal and talk to one another. It gives opportunities for men to begin building friendships. After breakfast, there is an open time of sharing any struggles, victories, challenges, or whatever may be going on in their lives. This part of the meeting goes about an hour to an hour and a quarter. This meeting takes place in the large narthex of the church close in proximity to the kitchen.

The men that will be involved in this research project are volunteers and range in age from mid-thirties to mid-seventies. The author of this paper talked to the leaders of the men's small group and asked permission to speak with the men about voluntarily participating in this

research project at a regularly scheduled Saturday meeting. An agreement was reached by the elders, and the researcher presented to the Men's Ministry Group the title, theme, purpose, and the process that would take place to conduct the research study. He also asked if the men would volunteer to participate. The consent forms were handed out and explained. At this time, an observation opt-out form was also presented, passed out, and explained to the men, as well as the questionnaire. The men were asked to return to the consent forms to me, personally, if they were willing to be a participant in this research project. The following Saturday was designated as the deadline to return the consent forms and the opt-out observation forms.

All the men present, thirteen, were given a questionnaire and asked to answer the questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible. They were given two weeks to complete the questionnaires and return them to me personally. They were instructed, as a way of reminder, not to put their names on the questionnaires as this research was to be confidential. Also, the author advised the men that it would take them approximately one hour to complete the survey. During the Saturday morning presentation, they were also informed about the audio-taped interview and asked if they were willing to participate. If so, they were told contact would occur by the researcher via text or email to set up a time to meet with them for this interview. The interview would take place in a church office, which is isolated from other rooms in the church. There would be no way for anyone to overhear the conversation, and it would take about an hour as well to complete the interview. The men were informed that they would be contacted over the next three weeks to schedule the interview.

All the men returned the consent forms the following week; none chose to use the observation opt-out form. By the following Saturday, however, only half of the men returned the questionnaire they were given two weeks to complete. The researcher, desiring to have a larger

sample size, contacted the men in the group via text and encouraged them to complete the questionnaire, and extended the deadline for another two weeks. Within two days, three more questionnaires were turned in, and appointments for interviews continued to be scheduled.

When all the questionnaires have been completed and turned in, as well as all the interviews have been completed, the author will look at the data to evaluate the impact of the changes to the Men's Ministry group on the lives of the participant. The responses of the participants will reveal if any positive spiritual transformation has occurred in their lives as a result of the changes made. The information, which will be analyzed to determine the results of the implementation of principles from Wesley's class and band groups, are the men's written answers to the questionnaire, as well as their verbal answers from their interviews.

Information in their written and verbal responses in specific areas of their lives will help determine if transformation is occurring in those areas. The researcher will be looking for certain markers or verifiers, indicating that transformation is occurring in the lives of the men involved in Grace Fellowship's Men's Ministry. The markers that would verify a transformation in the spiritual lives of men at Grace Fellowship would include:

1. They feel changes have positively impacted spiritual transformation in their lives.
2. They are growing closer in their relationship with God since the changes were implemented.
3. They are growing closer in their relationships with other men in the group since the changes were implemented.
4. They are reading God's Word more often since the changes implemented.
5. They are praying more often since the changes were implemented.

6. They are sharing their faith with others more since the changes were implemented.
7. Their character is growing more Christ-like (increasing fruit of the Spirit).
8. They have increased their service to others by using their gifts, talents, and time since the changes were implemented.
9. They have increased accountability in their spiritual life since the changes were implemented.
10. They have increased faith, are depending more on God and seeing the Lord work in others and themselves, trusting that God will work in the circumstances of their life.

The researcher acknowledges that the results contain a certain degree of subjectivity, which is inherent in the process of answering questionnaires, analyzing results, and coming to conclusions, as these come from a finite human perspective.

Results

The researcher, analyzing the various data collected from observations, questionnaires, and interviews, believes the desired goal of increasing the spiritual transformation of men involved in the Men's Ministry small group at Grace Fellowship was attained. There were patterns from all three sources of data collection that corroborate this conclusion. The patterns and conclusion will be presented in various ways to demonstrate and highlight the positive results, which was the goal of implementing the changes to the Men's Ministry.

Observations

Throughout implementing changes in the Men's Ministry Group this past year, the researcher had written some observations down that provide insight into some of the dynamics

that occur in the Men's Ministry Group. A few of these observations will be shared with the researcher's comments.

On one of the Saturday morning Men's Ministry Group meetings, there occurred some open sharing of the impact of certain childhood experiences on the men, even through adulthood. One man related his experience with his mother, who was very nurturing and caring to her children. She would also do special little things for them that she knew were some of their favorite things to do. One example was she would sometimes wake up the boys to watch one of their favorite shows, which was aired after their bedtime. This show happened to be one that she also enjoyed. She would have them go to bed at their designated hour, but then wake them up later and then send them back to bed. The gentleman who shared this story and other stories similar to that commented that even now, as a retired man, he and his mother have a strong, close relationship and still do things together that they both enjoy.

Upon hearing this story, another gentleman in the group who is also retired responded by saying, "Wow, I never experienced anything like that; it sounds like you had wonderful parents." He continued and shared with the group that his parents were very harsh to him, and he was often confined to his room and couldn't leave it. He said that he had never heard the words, "I love you," from his parents. As a result, he explained, he had a hard time loving other people because he did not experience it during his lifetime from his parents. He was not given an example of how to be loving, kind, and considerate of others. Therefore, he found it extremely difficult to love people in his life. He continued by saying that the guys in this group, sharing their stories, and sharing God's Word are used by the Holy Spirit to help him in his life. It is causing him to grow in this area of expressing and showing love to others.

The openness resulted in another man sharing with the group his story. He went on to tell the group that he was raised by a father who drank a lot and got involved in many brawls. This father taught his son from a young age that brawling is the way you often settle problems with another person. Due to this influence, he resorted to handling anger and conflict through physically pummeling people for many years. When he came to faith in Christ as his Lord and Savior, he knew that this needed to change. But it was a struggle to handle his anger in a God-honoring way. He said through learning God's Word, with God's help, the help of mentors, and the help of his wife, he has learned to overcome his previous behavior.

In response to this, another man said his anger issues have to do with words, not physicality. He often unleashes hurtful words on someone he is angry with and then regrets it. Others shared how they handle their anger before it gets to the point of exploding on someone. At the end of this discussion, there was a prayer offered for one another and for those wrestling with the issues they shared with the group. Over the next few weeks, the men shared how much strength and help they received by talking over these issues with the group. Throughout their week, the men reflect on the conversations, which enable them to experience more self-control, and change how they handle such situations.

Another observational example that demonstrates the transformation going on in the men's life occurred on another Saturday. One of the men was sharing his struggle with knowing how to respond to his oldest daughter, who is living outside of God's moral will. She has asked him for his help on a project in her house, and he was reluctant to give her any help because he is at odds with what she is doing. At this point, another man shared his dealings with treating a daughter's date with disrespect and the negative impact it had on his relationship with his daughter. Then, two men ended up sharing God's goodness to them when they did not deserve it.

Another man brought up Matthew 5:45, and how God causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous, and we are supposed to be imitators of God.

At the following Saturday Men's Ministry meeting, one father shared how much he had been convicted by the discussion the prior week about how to treat those who are not living in the light of God's Word or according to your standards. The discussion has changed the way he is dealing with and speaking to others. He is also doing a personal Bible study on dealing with anger properly. All this came out of the previous week's open discussion at the Men's Ministry small group meeting.

These few examples are indicative of the transformative nature the Men's Ministry Group is experiencing. Although there is not a lesson planned for these meetings, the open sharing, and conversation between the men regarding their day to day issues has helped them. They feel better equipped to face and deal with them in a Christ-like manner. Such conversations are resulting in men sharpening one another in their spiritual lives.

However, not exactly all the men had positive feedback about the implementation of John Wesley's principles into the context of the church's Men's Ministry Group. One gentleman in his early fifties approached the researcher at church during the week and asked some questions about one of the co-leaders of the Men's Ministry Group. The questions pertained to whether or not this leader had seminary training. The researcher replied that this leader did not attend seminary, but he did graduate from a Christian University. The researcher then asked him if he thought it necessary for a leader in the Men's Ministry Group to have a seminary degree. His response was, "No, not really, but it would probably have been beneficial." Then another reason for his displeasure surfaced. He thought that when this leader would talk, he would go on too long about his struggles in living the Christian life. Secondly, he said when encouragement and possibly a

challenge was offered by this leader to help other men who had shared their struggles to live the Christian life, he did not trust the suggestions offered. This man summarized it all by saying, “Who is he to offer me advice on how I should live my Christian life when he has no credentials behind him.”

The researcher explained to him the nature of this meeting was to talk amongst ourselves about our struggles and to pray for one another and encourage one another in our Christian life, not to teach Christian doctrine in the usual format. An attempt was made to explain to him that discussing life experiences with one another does not require a seminary degree. All the men and women of the church are to do the work of the ministry, not just those with religious degrees. The Men’s Ministry Group gives opportunities for men to confess their sins to one another, to pray for one another, and to bear one another’s burdens just as the Word of God instructs us to do. The researcher also tried to assure him that there were elders present at every meeting. They would, if necessary, correct any biblical misinformation. The answer was not satisfactory for him, and he quit attending the Men’s Ministry Group. The researcher encouraged him to attend one of the small groups that meet in homes where the format he seems to prefer occurs. He did attend a few small group meetings, but not consistently. It should be noted that this individual did not attend Men’s Ministry Group before the implementation of the changes, but afterward. So, his negative response is not because he liked what the previous format was, and it changed, but this transparent discussion format is not what he prefers.

One other negative response from one of the men in the Men’s Ministry Group was concerning participation. He thought that more men should participate in honestly sharing their struggles. He believes there are too few men that open up about their Christian life. Additionally, it is the same men who open up most often. He was offering more of an observation rather than a

criticism of anyone in particular or of the new format of the Men's Ministry Group. He is still a consistent attendee and continues to be real about his Christian life with its struggles. This opinion resonated with the researcher and the co-leader of the ministry. There are plans to discuss what can be done to help improve this situation. It is apparent that when key leaders are absent from the group meeting, the purpose of this ministry often does not take place. Men at this point often get sidetracked in their conversations when the co-leaders are not present. The researcher, elders, and Men's Ministry Group co-leaders will meet to discuss how to involve more men in sharing their hearts about their struggles and relationship with the Lord. Possibly implementing some of the questions, John Wesley used to jump-start a band meeting that seemed to wander or began to experience hesitancy in transparency would be beneficial for the group. This meeting will be essential for the future. If more, or even all the men would start to talk about their struggles and weak areas, then this group will be even more dynamic and spiritually beneficial for all.

These were the only two negatives that were offered about the Men's Ministry Group. This researcher believes that the positive impact almost across the board of the attenders of Men's Ministry group has to do with the new principles introduced through John Wesley's structure. It was a significant, noticeable change, and it appears the men wanted and needed such changes to experience transformation in their spiritual lives.

Questionnaires

Fourteen questionnaires were handed out to the men with eleven being completed and returned to the researcher. There were nine men from the group that went through the interview process and answered the questions while being recorded. The next step in the process will be for

the researcher to organize the answers from the questionnaires and determine if any common answers are indicative of a transformation in the men's spiritual lives due to the changes in the Men's Ministry group.

The ten categories used as indicators or verifiers of transformation were stated previously. They are an increase in serving others with time, talents, and spiritual gifts, an increase in faith, and an increase in accountability. Then, there is an increase in time spent in God's Word, in prayer, as well as growing closer to God and closer to the men in the group. Another indicator is an increased burden to share their faith and the gospel with others regularly. A final verifier is if men are growing in the character qualities of the fruit of the Spirit.

The second question on the survey is, "How has the change from meeting twice a month to every Saturday impacted positively or negatively your spiritual life?" All eleven men answered that it has resulted in a positive impact on their spiritual life, although how it has impacted them differs.

Another key change, maybe the most impactful, was stated in question three, which reads as follows: "A change was made to move from a prepared lesson to an open time of men sharing their struggles and questions they may be experiencing in their day to day lives. Do you like the change? Why or why not? Has it helped in your spiritual growth/transformation? Why or why not?" A few of the answers will be shared, as this was a significant change in the Men's Ministry small group, which is a major component of Wesley's class and band groups.

One man answered the following way. "When people share from their hearts, everyone gets to hear that they are not alone in their struggles. We also get the opportunity to share each other's burdens, and we begin to understand how to pray for one another. I love this change."

Another man answered, "I like the change because it allows us to seek Biblical solutions to the real struggles that we experience daily, many of which are common to most men. Then we find Scripture to relate to the struggle rather than starting with Scripture and trying to match a struggle to it. The new method is more direct and immediately important in a member's life."

Another response to question three was the following; "Yes, I like the change from a prepared lesson to an open format of men sharing their struggles and questions they may be experiencing in their day to day lives. The reason I like the new format is when I am struggling, I can explain my struggle to other brothers, and get some of their opinions on my situation. Yes, it has helped my spiritual growth. It helps me grow every Saturday. I see growth in me as the Spirit reveals something to me through my brothers sharing every week."

Still, another man answered the question with the following: "Yes, I like the change. It has removed the stress of homework. Now there is time to be informal, open, and build relationships with others. The sharing is like the saying, 'misery loves company,' not that we are miserable, but many base concerns are common to individuals, and that reinforced knowledge has value. We can draw on experiences of others, and again, knowing that we are not alone and others face the same dilemmas is encouraging."

A final response to question three with a similar answer to the preceding one came from one of the leaders of the group. He said, "I like the change because it allows us to seek biblical solutions to the real struggles we have every day, at least a current one, and find Scripture to relate to it, rather than starting with a Scripture and trying to match a struggle with it. The new method is more direct and important immediately in a group member's life."

These four examples are characteristic of the other seven questionnaires. The changes in the Men's Ministry small group were seen and experienced as having a positive impact on the spiritual growth and transformation of the participants. The researcher has graphed these ten markers showing the percentage of men who experienced positive spiritual transformation relative to those specific areas of their lives.

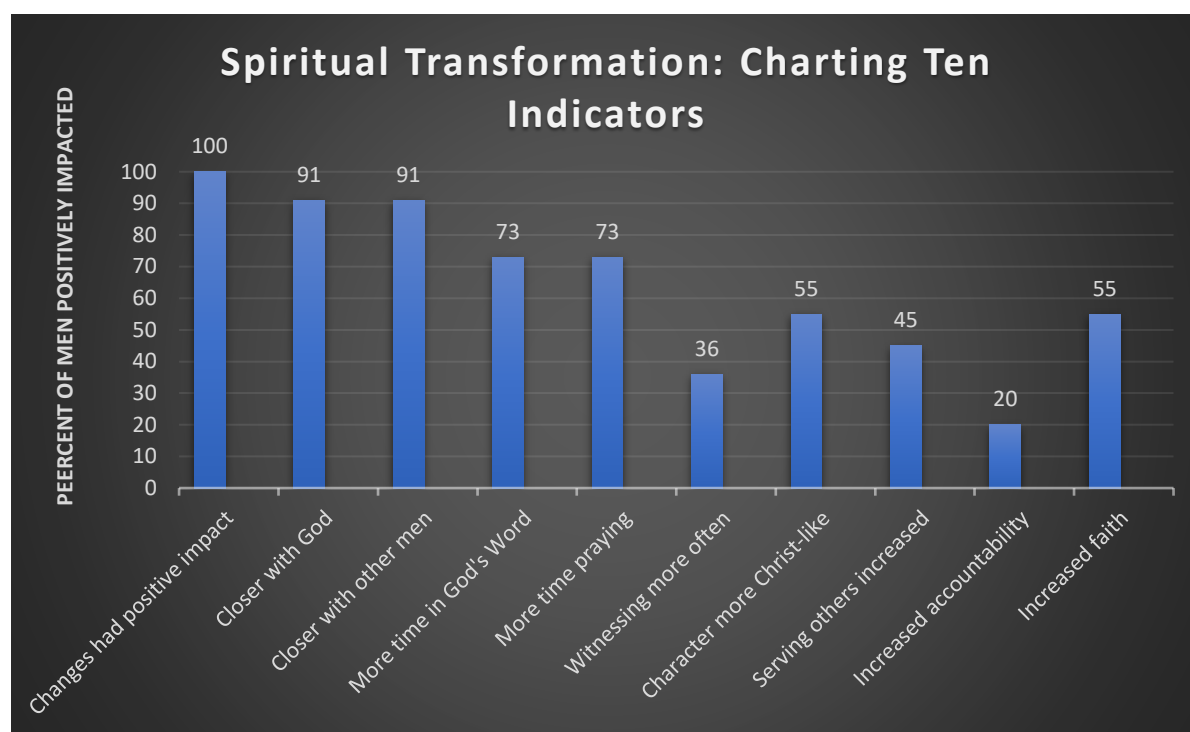


Table 1.1

The chart above came from the eleven questionnaires that were turned in by the participants of this study. It verifies the transformative nature the application of some of the principles from John Wesley's class and band groups had on the Grace Fellowship's Men's Ministry Group. At the high end, 100% of the men that answered the questionnaire wrote that the changes had a positive transformational impact on their spiritual lives. There was a noticeable

number of men who wrote of an increase in reading God's Word and a corresponding increase of time in prayer. These together then inform and clarify the 91% of men who wrote they were closer with God since the changes were implemented. The 91% of men who wrote that they feel closer to the other men than previous to the changes, including growing in their love for their brothers, may be attributed to the authentic, vulnerable, nature of the men talking about their struggles in living the Christian life in a way that honors God in front of one another.

Another category that the researcher found very encouraging was fifty-five percent of men are experiencing a change toward Christ-like character. These men are noticing a change in their character as it relates to the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. The men particularly noted that the areas they have consistently struggled with are now changing, whether it is patience, love, faithfulness, joy, self-control, or peace, all of these were stated as increasing in their lives due to the positive impact the strategic changes have made in their spiritual lives. One man stated it this way, "This new group format has been significantly influential in ending the roller coaster ride that was my spiritual walk with the Lord. I am now much more consistent in the Word, in prayer, in sharing my faith with others, and have more awareness of the need to die to self and be led by the Holy Spirit."

The interview questions were completed by nine of the men, and the answers are also revealing regarding the impact of the application of principles from Wesley's class and band groups. There were only five interview questions. The first three of those five questions were used to chart the impact of the changes that were made to the Men's Ministry. The first question was, "How important is the new Men's Ministry Group to your spiritual life and growth." The second question was, "What has been the most impactful aspect of the Men's Ministry Group on your life." A third question posed to the men interviewed was, "How have the changes made in

the group increased their commitment to change, that is, to allow God to change you from the inside out?”

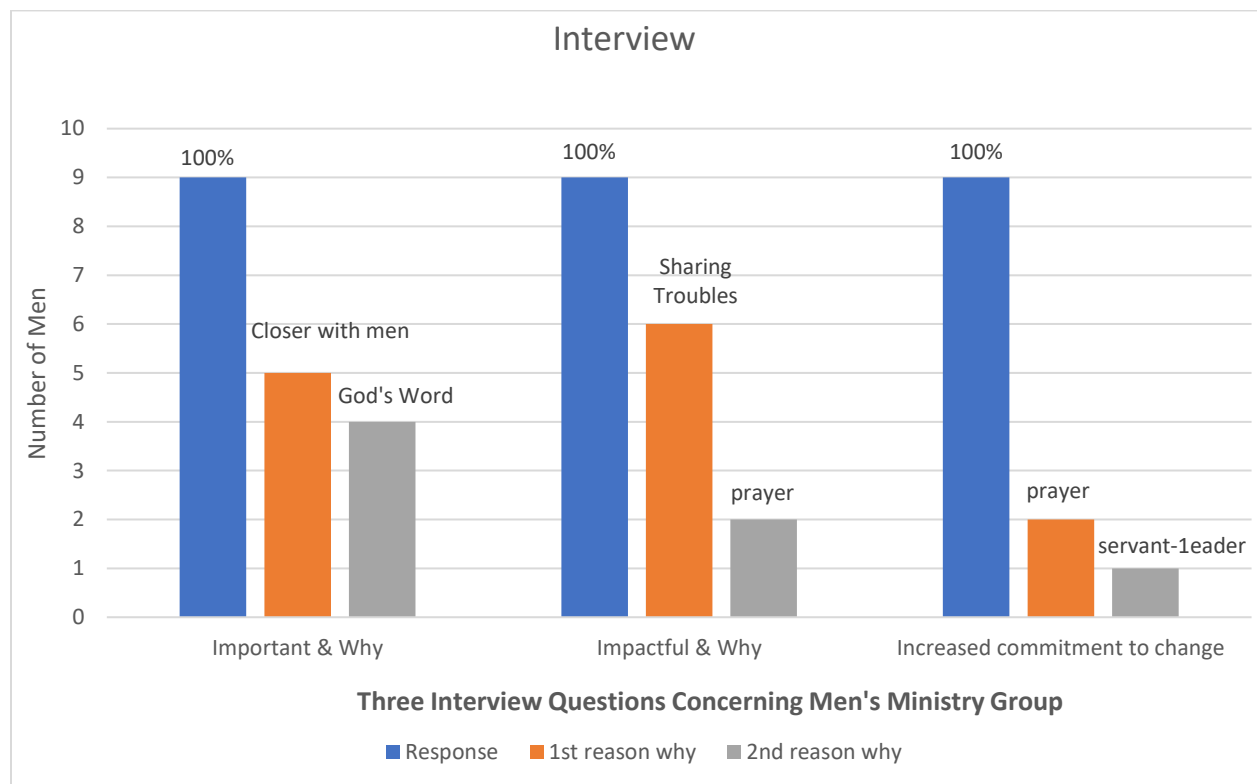


Table 1.2

The answers to the first question regarding the importance of the Men’s Ministry Group in their spiritual life and growth, resulted in 100% of them saying, “very important.” There were various reasons given as to why they thought it was very important. Five out of the nine said it was very important because it enabled them to bond with the other men. In no other context in the church did they find this opportunity to bond so closely with other men. The busyness of life often prevents men from spending time together to get to know one another, and the struggles

each man faces on a day to day basis. The Men's Ministry small group weekly meetings enables this to occur. Some said it was the only safe place for them to let down their guard and be real.

One man shared it is very important because it has helped him stop the tremendous roller coaster ride that was his spiritual life. Another man answered that it was very important because, as he listened to the stories of others, it enabled him to have a better understanding of the men. When he heard men share their background, family upbringing, children, and other things of that nature, he had more insight into their personhood. For two men, the most important aspect of the changes in the Men's Ministry Group was the strong encouragement to spend more time in the Word and more time in prayer. The encouragement came as men talked about their struggles and victories, and how prayer and God's Word have made a life-changing difference in their lives.

For two other men, the most important aspect was learning from the stories the men shared regarding their struggles and how to handle those circumstances in a way that is more honoring to God. There were two who answered the first question by saying that seeing the growth in others, seeing God at work in them and through them, is building up their faith in God. They believe God will work in their lives and struggles as they hear how God is working in the lives and struggles of others. Also, they expressed that seeing what God is doing in men's lives causes them to depend on God and to let go of things, and to allow God to have more control over their lives.

By far the most common answer to the second question: "What has been the most impactful aspect of the Men's Ministry small group?" according to the nine interviewed, has been the safe place it has provided for men to share their struggles, and then experience verbal support and prayer support when they do share those struggles. In addition, the men felt that they

were able to glean helpful lessons from others as they shared their struggles, defeats, and victories.

The second most common response to what has been most impactful has been a positive change in the area of prayer. The men have seen the power of prayer with numerous answers from the Lord. They have learned the extreme importance of prayer and staying closely connected with the Lord at all times. These lessons have been life-changing, according to some men. One participant who struggles with ailing health problems, mostly respiratory, has found the Lord has called him to a new ministry of prayer. With his limited mobilities, the Lord is now using him in the ministry of prayer. In his own words, "I have always prayed in my Christian walk, but now it has become my ministry. I am constantly interceding for others and seeing God answer many, many prayers. It has become a joyful experience in my life. It is even impacting my wife as she sees this new ministry and joy in my life; she is motivated to serve the Lord in new ways."

The third question in this interview process focused on the impact the changes have had on the men in their commitment to being transformed into the likeness of Christ. A full 100% of the respondents said that these changes increased their commitment to being transformed into the likeness of Christ. One man said his commitment to be transformed, increased in large part due to the men sharing their struggles. Their desire to respond in Christ-like fashion to the problems of life rather than being reactionary was a point of commonality. He continued to say, "Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead, and not my flesh has resulted in victories in crisis times, which is a monumental change for me. I feel like it is becoming second nature to allow the Holy Spirit to lead my life now instead of me. The leading of the Holy Spirit is a major change in my life."

Another area where God is at work, changing men's lives, is in the area of accountability. One man explained that he likes the voluntary accountability as opposed to forced. Being forced, he said, would have turned him away from the group. But being allowed to listen to what God was doing in the lives of other men without being forced to share what was going on in my life until I felt ready, was vital for me." He continued to say, "Then, as the Holy Spirit started nudging me to share some things from my life, I felt like God was doing this in me. It was not being forced from an outside source but the inner working of God's Spirit."

One man said, concerning the change in his life, that as he listens to men share their burdens and struggles and then hears and sees how God comes through in their life, it has increased his faith, his trust in God. He now finds himself letting go of control and depending more on God. He also said that seeing what God is doing in the men's lives has caused him to increase his thanksgiving and appreciation to God for all His good works in their lives.

The observations, questionnaires, and the one-on-one interviews all show indications of men being challenged, encouraged, and transformed in their spiritual lives as a result of the changes to the Men's Ministry Group. This researcher believes the answers to the questionnaires alone, demonstrates the positive impact these changes have brought to the lives of many men at Grace Fellowship.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This research project was an attempt to help the men at Grace Fellowship resolve their problems of being disconnected, uninvolved, and uninterested in growing spiritually, with the end goal of being transformed into the likeness of Christ Jesus. The general attitude of the men, manifested itself in a lack of involvement in serving in the ministries of the church, as well as inconsistent attendance or non-attendance at church services, small groups, and even the Men's Ministry small group. Men appeared to keep their distance from involvement in the ministries at Grace Fellowship. They remained uninvolved in most areas of the spiritual life of this church family.

The spiritual condition of men at Grace Fellowship is common amongst believers everywhere in current times. Elton Trueblood wrote the following about this widespread lukewarm spiritual life many are living, resulting in a lack of involvement with and commitment to the church and its' ministries.

Perhaps the greatest single weakness of the contemporary Christian Church is that millions of supposed members are not really involved at all and, what is worse, do not think it strange that they are not. As soon as we recognize Christ's intention to make His Church a militant company, we understand at once that the conventional arrangement cannot suffice. There is not a real chance of victory in a campaign if ninety percent of the soldiers are untrained and uninvolved, but that is exactly where we stand now.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Gallaty, Robby. *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 2015, p. 109.

Therefore, a strategy to change this spiritual malaise of the men at Grace Fellowship was designed and implemented based on some of the principles John Wesley employed in his class and band groups back in the eighteenth century. Wesley's small groups transformed not only the Christian men and women of eighteenth-century England, but these groups also reached many unbelievers who were also transformed by the grace of God.

Some of the principles from Wesley's small groups that were incorporated into the Men's Ministry small group were weekly meetings throughout the year where there was not a teaching curriculum that would be adhered to, but rather an emphasis on sharing the struggles of the Christian life that men were failing to overcome. In Henderson's book, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, he writes: "The rules specified the basic process as "inquiry" and the subject matter as 'how their souls prospered. There was no room here for lecturing or preaching; the emphasis was clearly on present and personal growth, presided over, not by a professional trainer, but by a fellow seeker."⁹⁷ This emphasis on personal growth meant dealing not only with the cognitive aspect of learning the truths and principles of Scripture, but also incorporating the behavioral aspects of living the Christian life. The affective area of a man's life of faith with God, that is, the emotional, feeling, attitudinal aspects of a man's spiritual journey, will also be a part of the new Men's Ministry changes. This was a principle that was the focus of Wesley's band groups. "The bands were voluntary cells of people who professed a clear Christian commitment and who desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of

⁹⁷ Henderson, Michael D. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Wilmore, Kentucky, Rafiki Books, 2016, p. 94.

intention. The group environment was one of ruthless honesty and frank openness, in which its members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections.”⁹⁸

Grace Fellowship is not alone in the reality of men’s casual attitude toward or indifference to church involvement. Many churches across the country are faced with the same attitude. Various reasons have been proposed for the alienation of men from the Christian church. This alienation from church, in part, may be why a large Christian men’s movement was started and gained momentum in the 1990s called Promise Keepers. Author of “Nine Character Traits Separating the Men from the Boys,” Nate Adams, is quoted by Edward Gilbreath in an article about the Promise Keepers movement,

Beyond the challenging messages on marriage and accountability, much of the fascination with Promise Keepers lies in the fact that it is something Christian men can do together. Indeed, at times the Boulder crowd seems excited not so much by what is being said, as by the opportunity to “hang” with other men – perhaps an indication that something is askew in the American Church, which tends to provide an abundance of gathering options for men and women or for women and women, but few geared specifically for men.⁹⁹

A couple of the reasons given by the two men who came to talk to the elders of the church for making changes to the Men’s Ministry Group were the format and content of the group. Doctrine, books of the Bible, and topical lessons were the norm for small groups at Grace Fellowship. People were very familiar with the Bible teaching that occurs in those groups. They felt like doctrinal information was taught with little application to their lives. If the application was made, the subject matter was often not currently something they were experiencing. Some men expressed a desire for more interaction and discussion that related directly to real issues

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹⁹ Gilbreath, Edward. “Manhood’s great awakening: Promise Keeper’s ambitious agenda for transforming Christian men,” *Christianity Today* Feb. 6, 1995, p. 23.

they were presently facing in their lives. What the church leadership learned from this meeting was that men felt stifled in their spiritual lives due to topics or lessons not addressing the issues that faced them in life. The result was the lessons seemed irrelevant. It did not generate a lot of discussions if none of the men were going through a situation directly related to the teaching. The decision was made to not have a prepared formal lesson, video lesson, or a small group Bible study guide. Instead, there would be open sharing of what difficulties the men were presently going through in their lives and how to handle or respond in such a way as to glorify and honor God. Not only does this enable discussion on the immediate issues facing men, but it also involves more than the cognitive aspect of men. The behavioral and affective areas of men's lives will be discussed and examined, as well as the doctrinal. The affective area of a man includes his feelings, emotions, attitudes, and motivations. It is vital to cover all these areas that make up a man, for we are called in the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. God calls everyone to love Him with every part of us, not only our minds but also our affections.

However, realizing there was a real spiritual need for men to talk about issues in the Christian life where they were struggling, did not mean that all the men would participate in such an open, vulnerable discussion in front of other men. Men tend to hide those struggles for various reasons. Possibly two of the reasons that weigh heaviest on men are the fear of one's struggles becoming known by other men and how that may change their perception of you. A man may be fearful that he may lose the respect of other men if he openly shares his struggles. One of the highest felt needs of men is respect. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs writes, "Women need to learn how

to understand and use the word respect because, in truth, respect is a man's deepest value."¹⁰⁰

Eggerichs writes that he wanted to test this idea to see if it would hold up under statistical analysis. He discovered that it did, and he cited a national study done by a top-notch research group that demonstrated this reality.

He writes,

In one national study, four hundred men were given a choice between going through two different negative experiences. If they were forced to choose one of the following, which would they prefer to endure?

- a) to be left alone and unloved in the world
- b) to feel inadequate and disrespected by everyone

Seventy-four percent of these men said that if they were forced to choose, they would prefer being alone and unloved in the world.¹⁰¹

This study indicates, by a large percentage, that men view respect as a top felt need in their lives.

Dr. Willard Harley, Jr. in his book, *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, wrote that in a survey taken of some two thousand men who were asked to list their top ten needs, making the top five in this survey was respect and admiration. Such a desire for men to be respected would be motivational in a man's life. Therefore, anything or any situation that may lead to the circumstance of being disrespected would be something men would want to avoid at all costs. This strongly felt need in men may be one of the main reasons some men find it difficult to share their struggles openly.

Secondly, there may be a hesitancy on the part of many men in opening up to others in the group for fear that what is shared would not stay within the men's group. They are afraid it might get out into the congregation through someone telling someone else outside the group

¹⁰⁰ Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, The Respect He Desperately Needs*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee. 2004, p. 49

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

what a particular person shared. Bill Donahue writes about the importance of this in a small group, which he calls a table.

When a table is characterized by mutual trust among its members, we can reveal the most tender and vulnerable parts of ourselves without fear or worry. When I share feelings, fears, disappointments, and desires with others, I am offering a gift, and that gift is my life story. In effect, I am asking others to steward that story with love, care, and respect. I am placing the most fragile, yet vulnerable parts of myself in their hands. I am hoping that trust will not be broken. Proverbs 11:13 declares, “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. . . . Gossip produces shame in the victim, arrogance in the tattletale, and division in the group.”¹⁰²

Consequently, the principle of confidentiality used in Wesley’s small groups was adopted, but only by spoken commitments from the men, as opposed to Wesley’s written confidentiality statements. All the men in Grace Fellowships Men’s Ministry small group verbally agreed to the confidentiality of any personal things that were shared. So far, there has been no known breach of this confidentiality. The verbal agreement of confidentiality has built confidence in everyone that what is talked over and shared in this group stays in this group, resulting in more openness from many men.

An issue that is related to the need for confidentiality, as well as other areas, is that of accountability. Accountability in Grace Fellowship’s Men’s Ministry Group means that the men are to hold themselves and each other accountable for their spiritual transformation into Christlikeness. The implication is that each man has a personal responsibility to grow in his relationship with God and with one another. Also, the men are to take responsibility in encouraging each other in their walk of faith, which may mean to lovingly confront someone

¹⁰² Donahue, Bill. *The Irresistible Community: An Invitation of Life Together*. Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Books. 2015, p. 47.

who is failing in some manner in their relationship with God or with other men in the group. The leadership of the church decided to implement “voluntary accountability.” Voluntary accountability means the decision to be held accountable by another man for spiritual growth and transformation was left to the men to choose whether or not to be accountable to other men. There would be no accountability requirement to participate in the Men’s Ministry Group. This freedom of choice to put themselves into accountable relationships resulted in numerous men doing so and experiencing a deeper relationship with other men in the group than they had ever experienced before. Some men shared in the group meetings that they were in an accountable relationship with others in the group. And it resulted in not only being closer to their brothers in Christ but also in experiencing a closer relationship with the Lord. The voluntary accountability has motivated them to seek God, obey and honor their Lord as never before.

This experience of new, closer relationships with other Christian men, is in this author’s opinion, a core reason for the current success of the Men’s Ministry small group. Many of the men in this small group have given testimony to the value of the relationships that have been built in it. Statements such as, “You guys and the things we discuss are with me all week. When I come face to face with a situation at work where I could easily lose my temper or give in to temptation, I see your faces and hear your words. The relationships we have formed give me strength throughout the week to keep Christ front and center. The bonds of friendship have more than helped me grow stronger in my day to day relationship with the Lord. You guys are my brothers, and I draw strength from your words and your prayers. I can feel it every day. I thank God for you guys.”

Klaus Issler writes these words about close friendships,

God crafted our humanity, especially as indwelt by the Holy Spirit, for the potential of a profound relational intimacy and mutual indwelling with others and with God. (Jn. 17:21-23). Various factors are involved, but it's more than just showing up at group meetings. Even participating in group activities will not grow the kind of community Jesus talks about. An important missing ingredient in our strategy for community building is valuing close friendships.¹⁰³

Issler points out that Jesus' own life is an example of close friendships. He chose twelve disciples with whom he spent three years of his life with daily. Among the twelve, Jesus developed a close relationship with three men, Peter, James, and John. Issler writes, "In fact, our close relationships provide a context in which to grow into that kind of love to share with others. With close friends, we can practice the various "one another" passages (e.g., be devoted to one another, Rom. 12:10; be patient, bearing with one another, Col. 3:12-13; submit to one another, Eph. 5:21)."¹⁰⁴

He then quotes Gilbert Meilander, when he writes, "Attachment to friends is a school in which we are trained for that greater (heavenly) community. . . . Life is a journey, a pilgrimage toward that community in which friends love one another in God, and time no longer inflicts its wounds on friendship. Along the way, friendship is a school, training us in the meaning and enactment of love."¹⁰⁵

The men involved in the Men's Ministry Group have become good friends. These relationships have allowed men to experience the spiritual strength that comes through having a

¹⁰³ Issler, Klaus. *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character*. IVP Books, Downer's Grove, Illinois. 2012, p. 176.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Meilander, Gilbert. *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1985), p. 66.

brother in Christ who is there for them through whatever life may bring their way. Issler gives what he believes are two key components of a good friendship. He writes,

“Confession represents the side of transparent self-disclosure, a willingness to share with another who is in confidence one’s own weaknesses and besetting sins (James 5:16). On the other hand, candor represents the freedom to speak the truth into another’s life for their good, offering feedback about another’s blind spots or “planks in the eye” of which they are unaware (Matt. 7:3-5).¹⁰⁶

Such friendships become a vital component in aiding the transformation of men because God designed us to live in community with others to benefit from one another. “Jesus prays for our unity, which testifies to the world that Jesus is Messiah (Jn. 17:21-23). This quest toward family unity will require us to deepen relationships with our close Christian friends.”¹⁰⁷

Another aspect of the men’s group that many did not like was the lack of a consistent weekly meeting. Frustration was expressed that the Men’s Ministry small group met only every other week. It was the first and third Saturday of each month, and then they did not meet during the summer. The men felt that such a schedule was adversely affecting them. It resulted in causing not only a lack of consistency and frequency in meeting together, only twice a month, but also led to some dropping out. As an example, if a man missed the third Saturday and then the first Saturday of the next month, it would be a full month of not meeting with other men. Missing meetings caused some frustration, which led some to drop out as they were behind or lost as far as the lessons, and they were not able to get to know other men due to the infrequency of getting together. So, a decision was reached that the Men’s Ministry Group would meet every

¹⁰⁶ Issler, Klaus. *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character*. IVP Books, Downer’s Grove, Illinois. 2012, p. 180.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Saturday all year round, as did Wesley's small groups. Having meetings every Saturday provided for consistency and more opportunity to grow friendships. It also eliminated the potential for missing fellowship for long periods if a couple of meetings were missed.

These changes resulted in men getting to know one another in a new and deeper way than they ever experienced before. Most of the relational experiences men have had in their lives with other men were fairly superficial. Conversations were often along the lines of sports, hobbies, interests, recreational activities, and sometimes spiritual discussions. However, when spirituality was the subject, most men admitted to just talking beliefs and doctrine, which kept the conversations comfortably impersonal. Incorporating some of the principles from Wesley's class and band small groups put men in the position of taking a chance to move out of their comfort zones and talk with other men about their spiritual lives. Particularly, to talk about what areas of the Christian life may be a struggle for them. To take a step of faith in this area was challenging for some of the men who either had been previously hurt through such transparency with others or who are inherently more guarded and cautious about what they share in a group of men, many of whom they do not know very well. However, after the changes were made, most of the men opened themselves up within the group and talked candidly about their struggles in living the Christian life. A couple of the men have not yet openly shared the struggles and challenges in their Christian life. However, they are still consistently attending the Men's Ministry Group meetings.

It is hoped that with encouragement, through the example of others, through the building of friendships, and through prayer that everyone will open up to each other and confess, discuss, and help one another to be transformed, to mature spiritually, becoming more like our Savior.

This project has resulted in some very positive occurrences in the lives of most of the men in Grace Fellowship's Men's Ministry Group. Through participation, observation, questionnaires, and interviews, the changes made to the Men's Ministry Group have had an overall positive impact on the transformation of men. It has resulted in closer friendships, increased desire and time spent praying, more time in God's Word, more involvement in the ministries of the church, and reignited a passion in men to know their Lord and Savior better.

The changes that are occurring in the lives of men have been noticed by their spouses, as well as others in the church family, who have communicated positive comments to the elders. The Women's Ministry small group was one of those who noticed. As a result of the positive impact of the changes to the Men's Ministry Group, the Women's Ministry will be meeting shortly to discuss incorporating into a women's small group the same principles that the men incorporated. There appears to be initial excitement about having the new men's format in a new Women's Ministry small group; however, this is only in preliminary stages of discussion with the leaders. Therefore, a decision has not yet been reached. If the Women's Ministry team applies the same changes to their small group and a similar transformation takes place, then there will be significant spiritual growth amongst the men and women of Grace Fellowship, which may transform families as well as the entire church.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Questions

1. How long have you been attending the Men's Ministry Group Meetings on Saturday mornings at Grace Fellowship?
2. Some changes were implemented in the structure and format of the Men's Ministry Group. One change was going from twice a month meetings to meeting every week. Has this change impacted your spiritual life positively or negatively? Explain.
3. A change was also made to move from a prepared lesson to an open time of men sharing their struggles and questions they may be experiencing in their day to day lives. Do you like the change of format? Why or why not? Has it helped you in your spiritual growth/transformation? Why or why not?

4. Do you feel you can safely share your heart and soul with your brothers in the group, and how has this impacted your relationship with your brothers in Christ?

5. How have these changes in the Men's Ministry Group helped you in your spiritual transformation? In what areas do you feel it has been transformative in your life?

6. Do you feel these changes have caused you to grow closer and stronger in your relationship with the Lord? In what ways?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

(Audio-recorded)

1. Can you tell me how important the Men's Ministry Group is in your spiritual life and growth?
2. What has been the most impactful aspect of the Men's Ministry Group on your life?
3. Transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ is a life long process. Will you share how the changes in the Men's Ministry Group increased your commitment to become all God desires for you to be and to do what He has planned for your life to do? Why do you think this has happened?
4. How have the changes in the Men's Ministry Group helped you as a servant leader at home and church? Can you tell me what changes you have noticed?
5. What else may you be able to share with me concerning the impact on your spiritual life these changes in the Men's Ministry Group have had for you?