

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

The Single Fathers in the Christian Church
and Their Struggles

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This thesis project is about a severe but unseen problem in the church. The single fathers in the Christian church have been quietly struggling because many do not seek help. Caretakers of this single-father ministry identify and are aware of the struggle affiliated with single fathers, summarized from personal experience in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, this research elucidates the severity of the problem related to children separated from either parent, possibly leading to behavioral concerns in school, the community, and the home. The fundamental principles of this research derives from gathering data relevant to this research to support this study in the literature review chapter. This project shows a paradigm shift in single fathers' thinking associated with fatherhood, spiritual discipline, and moral principles in Chapters Three and Four.

This research aims to equip the church with practical steps that develop a comprehensive single men's ministry. This research does not ignore previous findings but builds upon an interactive pattern for discussion, guiding the independent roles of single fathers and the conclusion in Chapter Five. The discovery is based on the ministry's mission, vision, philosophy, and theology while supporting the morality and struggles of single fathers and fatherhood. A single father's stewardship and spiritual covering for his children does not diminish but grows in stature and spiritual discipline.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
CDC	<i>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</i>
FIRA	<i>Father Involvement Research Alliance</i>
PFBC	<i>Philadelphia Fellowship Baptist Church</i>
OT	<i>Old Testament</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We have often heard, and some of us have been told, that ministry starts at home. While that is true, a learning church grows in the knowledge and celebration of Jesus Christ. The church puts its proclamation of Christianity into practice from the historical perspective of social, ethical, spiritual, and biblical principles garnered by God's authority. This proclamation exhibits the fundamental principles relating to outreach and the perception of the church's holistic ministry. Therefore, this research welcomes all participants with various religious beliefs and focuses on effectively communicating with single fathers to strengthen their children.

Many years and a great deal of gratitude, enlightenment, and encouragement from my deceased parents led me to dedicate this project to them. My parents mentored me and gave instructions on the essential values of maintaining the position of fatherhood, even as a single father within a home fractured and in disarray. Then, especially, family values become paramount. Their wisdom adjusted my attitude while transitioning the heart to the relevance and importance of this research today.

Encouraging words from my parents helped when considering this advice given by Gregory L. Jones. "The call to conversion and new life, is an invitation to discover ourselves, not as something to be possessed or obsessively concerned about, but as people called out of our obsession with ourselves by the One who invites us to friendship with God and with one another in Christians community"¹ When an individual self-evaluates and discovers areas in life in need of spiritual growth, that discovery becomes linked to accepting challenges and responsibilities. The single father who self-evaluates must embrace a willingness to set aside the cause and work

¹Gregory L. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing 1995), 47.

toward a future relationship with their children. The cognitive results from self-evaluation can lead to and support an emotionally healthy learning process regarding temperamental behaviors that affect not only the single father but also the children and their emotional development.

Single fathers must see life, relationships, and family from a unique perspective. Through it, personal discussion and action broaden when associated with a shared relationship, whether the father has sole custody of the children or not. The father must acknowledge the need for these adjustments to emotionally prepare for fundamental issues that may arise. As new issues emerge, the father should learn from the experience of becoming and being a single father. The thesis project aims to bring clarity and understanding to single fathers' circumstances, challenges, and struggles in the church associated with this study. From this understanding, the ministry and vision can extend into the community. Therefore, the church should not overlook the need for ministry to single fathers, given its potential impact within and beyond the church doors.

Sharing their struggles, single fathers, including myself, served as participants in this project. In addition, descriptive theory provided a framework for this study. Together, participant interviews and research for the project supported the development of a ministry for single fathers. The life of a single father consists of various responsibilities, from gaining employment and attending to financial obligations to spending quality time with the children. These actions significantly impact the children's perceptions of their father and their understanding of the responsibilities of fatherhood. The thesis project expresses a philosophy that single fathers must not accept a predetermined worldview about themselves but should use their role as an opportunity to find healthy discipline within responsibilities relating to fatherhood. The church must take the initiative to minister and teach the importance of a single father's position in God's eyes. While guiding single fathers, the church should encourage them to earnestly communicate

with their children to strengthen their relationships, spiritual growth, and emotions for the greater good of the family. A benefit of this ministry is that the single father will be with peers who can relate to the struggle of adjusting to life as a single father.

Ministry Context

The ministry context is affiliated with the Philadelphia Fellowship Baptist Church (PFBC), located at First Baptist Church Youth Campus, 500 E. Bute Street in Norfolk, Virginia. On June 7, 2000, Dr. Ronnie D. Joyner organized the church in a predominantly black community. Even with some cultural diversity in the community, the membership of PFBC remains African American. A small church, it has sixty members: thirty women, fifteen children and youth combined, and fifteen men. These men have a measurable desire for missionary ministry within the community. PFBC is a typical church, as it follows the membership covenant responsibility of the church, leaving the choice to the individual to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and to become a member of PFBC. At PFBC, overcomers can be made whole through the Word of God. The church hosts a variety of ministries, including a new single father's ministry with three members that attended the church, a women's ministry, a children's ministry, a men's ministry, a youth ministry, and a young adult ministry. Additionally, the church supports two media-based ministries: a radio ministry led by the pastor entitled The Priesthood of Prayer and a recently established podcast entitled The Teaching Forum with Elder Abbott.

A vision for the single father ministry began in a group discussion in a classroom setting while the coordinator pursued a master's degree in divinity at Virginia Union University. Speaking about personal experiences as a single father, the coordinator realized the need for the ministry. Thereafter, the coordinator shared the idea for the ministry with the pastor of PFBC. The pastor supported the ministry, but the coordinator developed the ministry concept, as

discussed in the methodology section of this project. Today, the coordinator informs the pastor of progress and welcomes his advice in growing the ministry. To develop a vision for the ministry, the coordinator researched sound biblical principles and scholarly literature, as accounted in chapters two and three. The research exposed modern-day social issues, showing the need for this ministry in the church. Furthermore, throughout the development process, the coordinator planned to welcome ministry participants who may hold beliefs other than Christianity. Therefore, any single father who believes this ministry can impact their life and relationship with their children may become a member.

Single Father Ministry

The ministry's fundamental principles go beyond the church's four walls. While outreach for the ministry had some relevance to the church, the commitment, mission, and witness of Jesus Christ drove the narrative. This philosophy contributed to the ministry alongside the research concerning single fathers. This research also included literature relating to the challenges and struggles of single fathers from the following authors. The following authors inform and support the multifaceted aspect of this research for the coordinator to effectively teach the written work of this ministry. The material provided contributes to the fundamental issues that can arise associated with the church, family values, and shared experiences of single fathers. To teach freely from this material without a preconceived opinion contrary to learning from this research.

- Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*
- Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems*
- Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective System to Serve People*

- Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp, *Single-Parent Families: Past, Present, and Future*
- Richard M. Smith and Craig W. Smith, "*Child Rearing and Single-Parent Fathers*," *Family Relations*
- Michael Byron Smith, *The Power of Dadhood: How to Become the Father Your Child Needs*
- How to Handle Adversity by Charles Stanley, and Annice D. Yarber, and Paul M. Sharp, *Single-Parent Families: Past, Present, and Future*, to name a few authors that contributed to this literature.

From this literature, teaching encouraged a closer look at a father's personal and spiritual growth. Together, these elements helped single fathers understand the importance of maintaining a relationship with their children for their emotional development. The ministry also worked with single fathers to effectively communicate their leadership visions that would honor Christ and their relationships with their children. Participants engaged with printed materials during the ministry and research. Printing literature from the research, the coordinator emailed small portions to participants for open discussion. The readings provided participants a chance to understand the ministry's objectives as they sought to learn the importance of family values. Critical thinking from this shared research material processed in their spare time supported the fundamental needs they sought from the ministry. The coordinator also printed a questionnaire as a follow-up for participants. It allowed them to revisit their initial ideas prior to engaging in the ministry, contrasting those initial ideas with changes in their thinking. This contrast became helpful to the single fathers because they acknowledged growth in understanding. The coordinator alone carried the financial responsibility of printing costs for the ministry.

Single fathers need to understand why they must remain active in their children's lives. Jones L. Gregory reasons that action stems from morality: "When people ask and are ask for [sic]

descriptions of actions, it is often because a moral matter is at stake."² This moral concern informed the research and the ministry's initiative. For example, single fathers should come to an understanding that while fatherhood begins at a child's conception, growing in its responsibility is a learned action. However, some single fathers have multiple children with multiple mothers. These fathers should establish positive relationships with their children, even when a father's children have different mothers. The ministry and mission did not overlook such a scenario. The ministry also included a period for Bible study during group participation. However, the coordinator understood all fathers may not have decided to participate because of their beliefs. Nevertheless, this study continued to help willing participants see the need for the Lord in their lives. Therefore, the study focused on the fathers growing in the Lord with the knowledge that God's Word honors the service of fatherhood.

During the interview phase and group participation of the research, participants gained confidence in the coordinator. This confidence allowed the coordinator to help the fathers realize dispositional struggles they needed to re-examine in their personal lives. According to Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, "Identifying the target behavior(s) and corresponding goals is the first step to create and evaluate a behavioral intervention."³ Identifying the target behavior and its cause does not remove the behavior but could encourage the single father to think critically about personal growth and having a healthy relationship with the children. Along with feeling downtrodden and emotionally drained, a single father can become discouraged. These emotions may draw single fathers away from their real purposes of maintaining a relationship with their

² L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2008), 46.

³ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publisher, 2011), 117.

children and the responsibility of fatherhood. Furthermore, emotional struggles may increase if a father avoids financial responsibilities, which could weaken their efforts to exercise faith.

Accepting responsibility for emotions, finances, and other responsibilities requires all family members—father, mother, and children—to set aside personal differences.

The single father ministry aimed to assist fathers in identifying unhealthy behaviors and emotions to set appropriate goals for addressing such concerns. A single father should confront life's fundamental realities and relationships with their children. Through this approach, critical thinking can support mental health as the father processes the past and moves forward to an adjusted life with the children. The ministry also sought to prevent the single father from avoiding self-actualization. As Tim Sensing notes, within a ministerial context, leaders should engage in the "ethnographic process of gathering information about the participants' experience and perspectives."⁴ Therefore, the ministry encouraged fathers to understand themselves through doctrine, discovery, experience, and observation, giving them self-confidence and self-worth. Moreover, this research sought to understand the worldview when placed in proper perspective but did not encourage the worldview if it conflicted with the spiritual narrative of the ministry.

Jesus Christ desires for His church to realize the spiritual need for single father ministries. Elder Kennedy Abbott believes this local ministry should align with the principles gathered from this research model and inspired by the gifts given to the church. This Christ-centered ministry continues to teach the necessary connection between fatherhood and salvation. 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV) says, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."⁵

⁴ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2011), 13.

Work of the Ministry

PFBC is comprised of a community of believers who practice Christianity. The members of this community are committed to the collective calling of intentionally maintaining a covenant relationship with God. This mindset places all ministries under Christ's leadership, and these ministries hold their members to a higher standard in their pursuit of spiritual goals. These commitments aid church members and families in their growth and understanding of God's Word. The single father ministry exists to empower single fathers effectively in embracing Christian teachings, benefits, and service. During each group meeting, willing single fathers partake in the Lord's Supper as a symbolic gesture, signifying their acceptance of the Lord as their Savior. Single fathers who have not been baptized or received the Lord's Supper may choose to do so but are not obligated. Through this open approach, the ministry encourages participants to freely accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The ministry educates single fathers about growing within the body of Christ, aligning with the teachings of the church and scripture. With this perspective, the ministry supports single fathers in various challenges, whether in their relationships with their children or in managing financial responsibilities. Even as the church and the ministry evolve in structure and action, they remain aligned with Christian teachings. Single fathers can thus learn to identify areas of concern. For instance, the ministry context encourages participants to engage in critical thinking guided by biblical principles and Christian values. Without these principles and values shaping a single father's thought processes, their actions might be driven by confusion and a denial of their responsibilities as fathers. As time passes and the ministry grows, this process becomes a model for both the ministry and its participants. Additionally, PFBC aims to highlight the achievements of its ministries facilitating their growth as they continue to assist single fathers.

By bridging the gap between single fathers and their children, the ministry establishes a theological foundation for generational vision and teaching. Avery Cardinal Dulles underscores the importance of passing on Christian teaching, stating, "It calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to direct it through his spirit."⁶ Equally important is the notion that Christian teaching can motivate single fathers to make positive changes for themselves and their families. For example, during group discussions, Christian teachings may manifest in a single father's focus on maintaining their spiritual well-being. As their time in the ministry progresses, their growing spiritual health positively impacts their relationships with their children, reinforcing their commitment to fatherhood and responsibilities.

These effects directly relate to the ministry's context, and the outcomes are substantial. Positive spiritual growth enhances the ministry's ability to help more single fathers counter the negative effects of a worldview perspective on single fatherhood. This research enhances the ministry's effectiveness in strategizing and further assisting single fathers. While change can be challenging, as the single father grows in leadership, the ministry commits to assisting them in growing within God's grace. This research also contributes to a spiritual worldview conducive to the growth of single fathers through group discussion. For instance, in a group setting, a father may be encouraged to keep his word when committing to spending quality time with his children. Moreover, participating in parent-teacher conferences and other social activities aimed at a child's development not only strengthens father-child relationships but also supports the emotional well-being of the single father and their children.

⁶ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, New York: DoubleDay Publisher, 2002), 198.

Group Participation

This ministry context marks a fresh beginning for single fathers, whether inside or outside the church. Through the support of this project, they have engaged with concepts guiding them to embracing fatherhood. The ministry promises to sow, teach, and nurture new ground to change the single father's perception of stewardship as confirmed in scripture. This perception should reflect the father's renewed commitment to learning from the teaching associated with the framework needed to transform the family environment and relationship with the children.

The ministry's teaching is designed to instill humility in the group as they learn to become disciples of Jesus Christ. The focus of this teaching lies more in group participation than lecturing. Through question and response, single fathers are encouraged to use an active voice to grasp the concept presented in this ministry context. The fathers will review instructional literature for personal use, such as passages in the questionnaire shared during group sessions. Emotional Intelligence 2.0 by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves supports this research, assisting participants in addressing unproductive behaviors that directly affect their relationships with their children. This literature should enhance the group's understanding of fatherhood.

Furthermore, the coordinator cannot overlook the lessons learned from the group within this ministry context, as no one situation is identical. The group's evolution proves valuable for the coordinator as they grow and collaborate with the group regarding the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Single fathers can break free from a worldview that assumes they are driven by a desire for personal satisfaction at the expense of their families. However, the ministry supports the father in seeing themselves as the Lord does rather than as the world perceives them. Convincing them of such an achievement within their spiritual growth diminishes the influence of secular opinions they may have encountered.

Beyond spiritual struggles, some single fathers do not take their financial accountability or emotional support for their children seriously. However, this thesis project offers single fathers a profound understanding not defined by laws or secular opinions. By delving into the father's spiritual character, the ministry can alter their perceptions of themselves and their views on family values. Importantly, the ministry had to navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic placed the country, the church, and its single fathers in a deliberate and gradual manner. Due to health concerns, meticulous attention to volunteers and group discussions presented difficulties. Nevertheless, single fathers can now view their time, interests, and activities differently when considering their children. As the ministry moves forward, the coordinator will align its methodology and teaching objectives with fatherhood. In association with this thesis project, the ministry context encourages critical thinking that aligns with biblical principles and Christian values.

The Church's Commitment

PFBC desires its members to express their desire to become disciples of Jesus Christ and remains committed to developing comprehensive ministry objectives. The church holds its leaders accountable, expecting them to partake in baptism and the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, recognizing leaders' strength and growth inspires the congregation to develop, build, and fulfill their commitment to Jesus Christ. The church also encourages its members to engage in Christian practices such as prayer and daily worship. According to Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, "A congregation must not try to do everything at the expense of quality. It is far better to be excellent in one thing than mediocre in everything."⁷ PFBC commits to each ministry, including the single father ministry, by allowing them to excel in their specialized

⁷ Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective System to Serve People* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1996), 95.

areas. Moreover, the church emphasizes biblical literacy as an opportunity for the entire congregation to grow collectively in the practical application of Christian education. PFBC remains dedicated to fostering a binding relationship between people and God.

Problem Presented

The problem addressed by this action research project was how to effectively minister to single fathers at PFBC in Norfolk, Virginia. The research centered on the growth and development of the single father ministry concerning the functional and relational aspects of fatherhood. Single fathers require support rooted in spiritual principles to nurture their stewardship, foster their children's spiritual development, and promote their children's success in life. Many single fathers may feel that the church does not understand their needs or that the church lacks relevant ministries to address their concerns. While this research may apply more to certain single father demographics than others in terms of a financial and social aspects, the project's findings do not represent an increase in the demographics of single fathers in society. The findings of this project will contribute to the development of a ministerial approach dedicated to family values, not only for PFBC but for other churches as well.

This teaching ministry aims to bring clarity and understanding to the circumstances, challenges, and struggles faced by single fathers within the church. Furthermore, the ministry seeks to extend this vision to the wider community. Proverbs 16:1(NLT) states, "We can make our own plans, but the Lord gives the right answers." Similarly, the coordinator of the ministry had plans that diverged from the Lord's, and these experiences became foundational to the ministry. Therefore, a formal introduction is imperative before delving into why the church needs this ministry. In *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*,⁸ Parker J.

⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York, NY. HarperCollins Publisher 1993).

Palmer encourages readers to acknowledge areas in their lives that require correction. Embracing that truth gave the coordinator the willingness to understand the concept and problems presented in this research.

Specifically, the coordinator has experienced single fatherhood firsthand, and this ministry emerged from their personal life experiences. Through their struggles, the coordinator underwent a humbling process, seeking to be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than their flesh desires, a battle within itself. Therefore, if the research helps others make progress, the coordinator will achieve personal and academic goals. This DMIN action research project aims to bring awareness and attention to the often unnoticed problems and struggles faced by single fathers within the church.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to utilize a ministerial context to nurture spiritual growth among single fathers as they embrace their responsibilities in fatherhood. Single fathers within the church often experience isolation, feeling like they have no one to turn to for support. While the circumstances of each single father vary, the coordinator of the single father ministry aims to share experiences of willing participants and relevant research material and statistics. Together, these experiences and research findings will shed light on the extent of the challenges faced by single fathers and underscore the need for ministries dedicated to supporting them within the church. The project is grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which calls individuals to repent and believe. It assists single fathers in their spiritual growth and in developing effective communication with their children. For those fathers who have joined the church, spiritual principles have led to increased faith and strengthened relationships with their children. For single fathers who do not profess Christianity, the ministry serves as a resource to

help them build healthier relationships with their children. Group discussions and relevant literature aid non-Christian single father in understanding family values supported by the church.

The ministry guides all single fathers to consistently communicate and spend quality time with their children, fostering lasting growth in their relationships. A notable dynamic emerged during group discussions due to the diversity of participants' beliefs. Through their shared purpose, they acknowledged the potential for learning from differing opinions and experiences. The provided resources help them identify commonalities, leading to group members growing together through the ministry. Ultimately, the ministry aims to offer a library of literary resources that will argue, support, and educate single fathers on the purpose of this ministry. Fathers will have access to resources related to the role of being a single father, whether they live with their children or not. For example, *How to Handle Adversity*⁹ by Charles Stanley informs participants about personal adversity and assists in developing their moral qualities of fatherhood. Stanley's perspective on ethical responsibility offers a holistic view of fatherhood that does not judge a father's qualities and character based on individual merits.

Furthermore, critical thinking has evolved from the research in the form of resources provided to single fathers, which they can also reference outside of group discussions. As single fathers read and review these resources multiple times, they report a desire to consistently improve their relationships with their children. In phone conversations, both young and adult children shared that their families have grown closer. When discussing family growth during group sessions participants become emotional and expressed a clearer understanding of the importance of directly teaching family values, regardless of circumstances or beliefs.

⁹ Charles Stanley, *How to Handle Adversity* (Nashville, Tennessee. Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publisher 1989).

While the church has acknowledged the growing trend of single fatherhood, there are few, if any ministries developed to assist single fathers struggling with their pride. Additionally, the number of men in the church continues to decline. The lack of ministries for single fathers and the decreasing male attendance highlight the need for a single father ministry. It is important to note that while the role of single mothers is significant, the primary focus of this thesis project is to identify short- and long-term spiritual growth facilitated by this research, encouraging single fathers to embrace their responsibilities in fatherhood.

Basic Assumptions

Some basic presuppositions guided the research for this project. The ministry coordinator recognized that not every single father responds the same way to their role as a single parent. Interactions between single fathers and their children vary, even when ministering to their children. However, the coordinator encouraged a shared understanding of the father's role among the mother, father, and children contributing to the family's comprehension of fatherhood. This understanding should benefit the father's ability to serve the Lord, even as he faces complex and challenging realities on this journey.

Additionally, the coordinator believed that understanding a father's background is essential. The single father ministry can help single fathers recognize areas where they need improvement and facilitate personal growth. The coordinator has experienced the harsh reality of family members judging him. Lastly, the coordinator planned to engage various groups to develop resources for the ministry, with the hoping for gaining support and optimism for the ministry's development.

Definitions

Cognitive: "Means mental processes of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning, as contrasted with emotional and willful processes."¹⁰

Ethnographic: "the study and systematic recording of human culture."¹¹

Hypotheses: "The data can furnish descriptive information, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on."¹²

Ideology: "Tend to equate knowledge and education with the acquisition of information."¹³

Methodically: "arranged, characterized by, or performed with method or order."¹⁴

Philosophy: "Is not an emphasis on individual development or personality construction. Instead, strategic therapists focus on removing problems that are occurring now."¹⁵

Philosophical: "an overall vision of or attitude toward life and the purpose of life."¹⁶

Single Father: "an unmarried person and esp. one young and socially active."¹⁷

¹⁰ Samaria M. Colbert, *Christian Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (Middletown, DE: Createspace Publisher, 2018), 13.

¹¹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2000), 398.

¹² Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 2016), 182.

¹³ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publisher, 2009), 19.

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2000), 730.

¹⁵ Duane A. Halbur and Kimberly Vess Halbur, *Developing Your Theoretical Orientation In Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Publisher, 2011), 83.

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2000), 870.

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2000), 10921.

Theory: "The outcome of action research [*sic*] are increased clarity and understanding that provide the basis for resolving the problem on which the study focused."¹⁸

Limitations

The project encountered both expected and unexpected limitations. Single fathers could choose when and how to participate upon request due to health concerns related to COVID-19, according to the CDC guidelines. Health concerns also impacted the location of group meetings. Furthermore, some individuals seemed hesitant or unwilling to volunteer due to the virus.

Another limitation arose when single fathers considered declining to join the ministry due to its Christian foundations, especially those fathers who did not hold Christian beliefs. Therefore, the coordinator developed the ministry with neutral resources applicable to both believing and non-believing single fathers. As Michael Kibbe stated, "There is something deeply satisfying about moving from chaos to order, from confusion to clarity from ignorance to understanding."¹⁹

Additionally, the coordinator aimed to focus on the leadership attributes of single fathers while minimizing external distractions. However, avoiding distraction proved challenging in cases of personal feuds and denial, which could hinder the children's potential for personal growth.

It is important to recognize that some single fathers are living alone while others are cohabiting with a woman. Part of this study acknowledges that each situation is unique. Annice D. Yarder and Paul M. Sharp offer this insight, "Another limitation of this study is that we do not focus on differentiating individuals who are single from those who are single and in a cohabiting relationship."²⁰ This quote illustrates how a father's situation can vary significantly. Additionally,

¹⁸ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publisher, 2014), 71.

¹⁹ Michael Kibbe, *From Topic to Thesis: A Guide to Theological Research* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 91.

²⁰ Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp, *Single-Parent Families: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publication, 2010), 153.

not every single father in the ministry felt comfortable sharing their family struggles with others. Some single fathers believed that questioning invaded their privacy and chose not to share.

Delimitation

This research project established a model for maintaining confidentiality among single fathers during discussions within PFBC. The participating single fathers recognized the need for confidentiality from the outset. The ministry began with an open invitation for single fathers and did not coerce anyone into attending for legal reasons. Participants came from diverse communities and cultures, spanning ages ranging from eighteen to fifty, and they attended as willing volunteers. The diversity in their ages facilitated honest group discussion. The wide age range and diversity of participants revealed various parenting styles associated with child-rearing at different points in history, whether in a two-parent home or solely in a single parent home.

Thesis Statement

If single fathers, both within and outside the church, receive teaching on the specific role of fatherhood outlined in this research, they will learn how to effectively minister to their children. A single father ministry should assist fathers in establishing effective means of communication, which can significantly transform the relationship between single fathers and their children, fostering spiritual and emotional growth within the family. Additionally, understanding how single fathers perceive themselves and correcting any misconceptions about their role as a father should also have a positive impact on family growth. While single fathers may initially focus on self-discovery, aligning this process with their Christian responsibilities and their ultimate goal of positively impacting their children's mental and social development should lead to further family progress. The research is conducted through the collection of data from scholarly books, websites, and resources, as detailed in the following chapters.

Furthermore, insights from participants' personal experiences in Chapter Four provide valuable context. These insights are supported by group discussions conducted during the project, interviews, and a questionnaire, all of which aided in qualitative analysis to establish a comprehensive resource for this study's account. By gathering information from the eight willing participants and collating various resources, this study's account is substantiated.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

The conceptual framework of this literature review establishes the theological and theoretical principles for future studies and research. It serves as a foundation for exploring methodical approaches in the academic research of single fathers. By integrating various disciplines, this framework provides a starting point and shapes the conceptual foundation of this field. In Christianity, the context of this study employs spiritual leadership as an approach to understanding personal growth for laypersons or clergy. The ministry's purpose is to offer spiritual guidance to single fathers, enabling them to live purposeful lives in the love of Jesus Christ, and to communicate a purposeful and meaningful life as a single father. Although the Bible does not specifically address single fathers, the concept of fatherhood encompasses the responsibility and compassion that fathers should have toward their children. As stated, “(Ps. 103:13 ESV) As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” This scripture emphasizes the importance of mirroring God's compassion in our relationship with our family and children.

Furthermore, Second Peter 1:5-8 instructs us to grow in spiritual qualities promises by cultivating moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, endurance, brotherly love, and affection for everyone. By embracing these teachings, we can deepen our understanding of Jesus Christ and strengthen our faith. The lesson from these texts extends beyond this study and participants. The Scriptures and this research provide a compelling reason for all individuals to put their faith into action. It reminds us that what may initially seem unattainable becomes achievable through our unwavering faith in the Lord.

Discovering our identity in Christ is a lifelong process often challenged by family problems with our children testing our faith in the Lord. During such trials, this ministry offers valuable guidance, assisting participants in their growth and helping them find the strength to persevere in their journey with the Lord. Romans 5:3-5 reminds us that we can find joy in the midst of troubles as we develop patience and confidence in our faith, relying on the salvation provided through Jesus Christ. Kenneth Barker and John Kohlenberger state, “Such perseverance develops character. Job sensed its worth, saying in the midst of his trouble. When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).”²¹ By teaching and nurturing such unwavering faith, this ministry ensures that we are not left disappointed but rather filled with the Holy Spirit and the love of God. Additionally, it reinforces the understanding that when we seek the strength of the Lord, we can overcome life’s challenges with patience, ultimately leading to emotional growth rather than disappointment.

The researcher sought to investigate some churches involved in men's ministry but not directly related to single fathers and found that their men's ministry has similarities. Pastor Charles Eason of Ellis Temple Missionary Baptist Church 412 White Street, Winfall, North Carolina 27985, engaged men in ministry to help them develop the mutual benefits of change that can occur in a father's life. This ministry has guided men to recognize that even seemingly insignificant life issues are valid reasons to participate. As the ministry leader, Pastor Charles Eason's aim is to help participants discover the positive aspects that can emerge from their circumstances. Although participants may not have initially grasped the potential benefits of the

²¹ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 1994), 544.

ministry, they eventually realized that the emotions triggered by anger, whether expressed outwardly or inwardly, served as indicators of their need to engage in the men's ministry.

Dr. Anthony Copeland, the pastor of Oak Grove Baptist Church, 2635 E. Washington Street, Suffolk, Va. 23434, has established the Oak Grove Men's Ministry, a ministry specifically designed to support men in various aspects of their partner relationships. This ministry considers the spiritual perspective of men's roles, whether married, single, or single fathers. Attendees receive words of encouragement and spiritual guidance, regardless of their present living arrangements. The primary objective of this ministry is to foster a strong relationship with the Lord, which is particularly relevant for all fathers who face unique struggles. Single fathers are encouraged to commit to the values of fatherhood, actively nurturing and providing emotional support to their children from their developmental stages into adulthood. Through the research conducted on men's ministry, single fathers possess both exceptional nurturing abilities and caregiving attributes that defy stereotypes. Having such a commitment challenges single fathers to embrace parental responsibilities that have a lasting impact on their children.

In a similar vein, Pastor Vernon W. Hairston of Canaan Baptist Church, located at 2064 Nansemond Pkwy, Suffolk, Va. 23434, also ministers to and supports men's spiritual development, whether they are married, single, or single with children. Like the single-father ministry in this project, Pastor Hairston's men's ministry provides assistance to fathers who are currently married, those who are separated, and those who have never been married. The ministry addresses married and single fathers' struggles, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong relationships with their children.

Pastor Ronald A. Jones, The Life, a Non-Denomination Church, 12680 Darby Brook Court Woodbridge, Va. 22192, began another relevant ministry known as Adult-Family Life Ministries. Under this umbrella of ministries, the pastor's church has a single's ministry that addresses the challenges of single parenting. <https://thelifedc.org/organizer/singles-ministry/>. Their ministry's website welcomes church members, single participants, and non-members, including fathers with various backgrounds. The interviews were conducted and documented after being approved on Nov. 11th, 2021, by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in Chapter Four, and they address the concerns of divorced fathers, single fathers, those who once lived together with the mother of their children but never married and single fathers that have not experienced either.

Qualitative research for this study is a collection of data on single fathers to gain an understanding of their social perspective on life, attitudes, and beliefs in the development of this research. The literature and statistical review provide an in-depth narrative of Chapter Two and Chapter Four of this research on how the rise of single fathers has evolved from divorce due to infidelity, financial conflicts, or irreconcilable differences. Furthermore, single fathers may have children out of wedlock due to choices related to contraception non-use or a lack of commitment to marriage. Roberta L. Cole's research acknowledges some common areas single fathers bring to this qualitative research. By addressing their contributions and presenting practical applications that synthesize her findings from the U.S. Census Bureau, the research study offers valuable insight. "For the most part, these studies gathered their data from the fathers' perspectives, which is both a strength and a weakness of qualitative research."²² Roberta L.

²² Roberta L. Coles, "Single-Father Families: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 7, no. 2 (June 2015): 144-166, accessed October 15, 2020, onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/epdf.10.1111/jftr.12069+.

Cole's research gives us the percentages of single-father homes from the U.S Census Bureau over fifty years, from 1960 to 2011. This study accounts for various circumstances, such as divorce, living together but separated, being now single and never married, or having lived with the mother of their children, and one other scenario not addressed in this study. The loss of a husband's helpmate and the role of a single father is not elaborated upon in this research, as it falls outside the scope of this study's objective. The research addresses fathers as custodial parents in contrast to single mothers and the emotional issues between the children and parents after interviewing the participants in Chapter Four.

The study and shared results correlate with David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones work on "Fathering Through Change (FTC) Intervention of single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problem behaviors"²³ underscores the significance of informing fathers about the benefits of behavioral training when they are actively engaged in this project. DeGarmo and Jones address behavioral patterns in the child's emotional development, marital separation, and fathers not having a relationship with their children. This study finds it very important for fathers to understand the importance of being emotionally active in their children's lives. Even in the presence of divorce proceedings that outline visitation and the father's financial responsibilities, this experience should serve as a reminder not to let emotional tensions with their mother influence their action. Instead, fathers should strive to be actively engaged and emotionally supportive of their children during these challenging family times.

²³ David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, "Fathering Through Change (FTC) intervention of single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problems behaviors," *Development and Psychopathology* 31, no. 5 (December 2019) 1801-1811 accessed May 12 2023. <https://liberty.summon.serialssolution.com>

Much has been and will be said about the need for single fathers to grow through their struggles while ignoring how society can label them. Simon Haworth and Lee Sobo-Allen have found, “It can be argued that social work literature predominantly constructs fathers as a problem, though over emphasis upon their negative characteristics and [sic] behaviours creating stereotypes of fathers as uncommitted and unwilling to change.”²⁴ Here, we encounter an argument from the quote above this ministry rejects because all single fathers do not hold the same characteristics. There are exceptions that contradict being labeled as stereotyped in support of this research's purpose and mission. The literature presented in this study is meant for single fathers and readers to have an open-mind by avoiding the social effects of being stereotyped by society. However, DeGarmo and Jones target interventions for fathers that address parenting skills dealing with emotional concerns affecting the father and their children's relationship during such difficult times in their relationship. This study delves into the emotional struggles experienced by the participants, with the coordinator uncovering a range of emotions, including hurt, anger, and profound affection for their children during the interviews conducted in Chapter Four. David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones emphasize the significance of intervention relating to the emotional well-being relevant to this study of single fathers and their children. Roberta L. Cole’s research provides us with data on single-father households increasing over the years, using information from the U.S. Census Bureau. All of these sources affirm that there is a growing problem and growing struggles with single fathers. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, scholarly journals, and authors contribute to this study a growing understanding of the struggles of single fathers.

²⁴ Simon Haworth and Lee Sobo-Allen, “*Social Work with Single and Non-Resident Fathers: How Inclusive Is Our Practice and Where Do We Go from Here?*” pp. 163-182 (February 2020) accessed July 23, 2023. <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/8142/1/SocialWorkWithSingleandNonResidentFathersPV-SOBOALLEN.pdf>

Pastor Ronald A. Jones' church ministry offers guidance, addressing the challenges faced by single parents that also address behavioral concerns while providing support that bolsters their strengths and addresses their weaknesses. A crucial aspect of this ministry's mission is to contribute to and impact the parents' spiritual growth in their relationship with Christ, as well as in their spiritual connection with their children. DeGarmo and Jones offer statistical data, including the percentages of parents who initially participated but dropped out of the research. Their contributions collectively aid in identifying the spiritual strengths and weaknesses observed concerning single fathers. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that according to DeGarmo and Jones research, some participants chose not to complete the training. Gretchen Livingston, in her work *The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960*,²⁵ highlights the significant increase in the number of single fathers from 1960 to 2011. Meanwhile, Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor, in their study titled *Role Adjustment of Single Parent Fathers with Dependent Children*,²⁶ focus on detailing the challenges that single fathers face when navigating a new relationship. Chapter Four communicates the information above, which is essential to this research. In its strengths and weaknesses, qualitative research is gathering data so the coordinator and readers of this literature can gain an understanding of the social reality of single fathers through this research. While they are learning, bringing their concerns into an open discussion helps build upon practical application to apply those interventions where they matter in their lives.

²⁵ Gretchen Livingston, "The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960," *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends* accessed May 12, 2023, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/07/02/the-rise-of-single-fathers/>.

²⁶ Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor, "Role Adjustment of Single Parent Fathers with Dependent Children," *National Council of Family Relations* 25, no. 4 (October 1976) 397-401 accessed May 12, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/582853>.

Pertinent to this research is the Bible's wisdom of fathers being stewards over their children while guiding the family according to God's word to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. *The Power of Dadhood*²⁷ by Michael Byron Smith encourages men to develop relationships with their children. Smith shares the many principles of growing as a father and the importance of that growth to sustain a relationship with their children. Additionally, in *The Complete Single Father*,²⁸ Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg share methods of reassuring children by communicating effectively to fathers to understand the differences between raising sons and daughters. Teaching and learning the differences for the participants during group discussions and interviews became vital in learning communication skills.

Furthermore, in *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men*,²⁹ Myles Munroe emphasizes the importance of a father's leadership role as a visionary, teacher, and provider, which significantly contributed to guiding group discussions during the project. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins give an overview of the following steps for single fathers: "Identify the target behavior(s), determine behavior goals, select the intervention approach, and evaluate the result of the intervention."³⁰ These actions help the single father accept the role of fatherhood while identifying struggles and challenges associated with change.

²⁷ Michael Byron Smith, *The Power of Dadhood: How to become the Father your Child Needs* (Fresno, CA.: Familus Publication, 2015).

²⁸ Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg, *The Complete Single Father: Reassuring Answers to Your Challenging Situations* (Avon, MA: Adams Media Publisher 2007).

²⁹ Myles Munroe, *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men* (New Kensington, PA.: Whitaker House Publisher, 2001).

³⁰ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publisher, 2011), 117.

When considering the effort made in researching fatherhood, it is essential to acknowledge the argument presented by Simon Haworth and Lee Sobo-Allen, which draws conclusions and defines fatherhood through research outside the Bible. According to their research, “Studies have found that the experiences of becoming, and living as, a non-resident father can be ambiguous, complex, and multifaceted. Therefore, when dealing with single fatherhood, it is challenging to find a term that encapsulates the profusion of these father-child relationships.”³¹ Fundamentally, by defining fatherhood through research rather than relying solely on the interpretations of God's Word, the context of fatherhood remains a subject of ongoing research by various authors, scholarly websites, and reviews. In this regard, the book *Focus on Single-Parent Families Past, Present, and Future*³² by Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp has significantly contributed to this research. The book delves into issues concerning social diversity within multicultural groups, which are relevant to the broader subject of single parenting. By incorporating findings from this research and publications, we can gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of fatherhood in different circumstances, leading to a more informed and balanced perspective.

This encompasses religious activities such as Bible study, attendance at Sunday school and services, and involvement in children's church or sports activities. Alternatively, psychological involvement regarding various social structures in our society for single parents includes family counseling to resolve personal quarrels. Dr. Tyrone Davis heads a group discussion at the Department of Social Service, 1701 High Street, Portsmouth, Va. 23704,

³¹ Simon Haworth and Lee Sobo-Allen, “*Social Work with Single and Non-Resident Fathers: How Inclusive Is Our Practice and Where Do We Go from Here?*” pp. 163-182 (February 2020) accessed July 23, 2023. <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/8142/1/SocialWorkWithSingleandNonResidentFathersPV-SOBOALLEN.pdf>

³² Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp, *Focus on Single-Parent Families Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publication, 2010).

entitled “The Fatherhood Mentoring Program.” The program spans ten weeks, covering various topics within the program, such as “Father [sic] Communicating Effectively with their Children in a Changing and Complex Society.” Like the ministry project, the program serves any single father, whether divorced, living together, separated, or single fathers who never married. The single fathers in Davis's group discussion have struggled with issues like participants in our single-father ministry. Despite their struggles, these men seek to learn how to become better fathers to their children through Dr. Tyrone Davis's program at the Department of Social Service. The coordinator of this single-father ministry applied the program's methods by allowing participants to express their frustration while maintaining control of the room and group discussion. When applicable, group discussion involves a father's spiritual responsibility. For Christian and non-Christian single fathers, Davis's program and the single-father ministry encourage maintaining the stability of family values. Upon completing the ten-week session, participants in Davis's program attend graduation, listen to a guest speaker, and fellowship with invited family members attending the graduation.

The strengths and weaknesses of this single father's ministry depend on several attributes contributing to the goals set forth by the coordinator. How do the participants respond in group discussion, where do they feel individual improvement in their life is needed as a father, and how have they used that information to have a better relationship with their children? These are questions participants should have an answer for provided in their responses. As with any research, ministry, or social service, success, failures, and historical accounts can be used as a guide to agree or disagree with the narrative. Notably, any ministry or service may encounter differing opinions and, therefore, should experience an ongoing learning curve. Theologically and theoretically, the single-father ministry aims to help single fathers understand the principles

of fatherhood and assure their children that they will remain present in their lives. At the same time, they were advancing a verbal discussion with their children that rejects the notion that they will not be there for emotional, financial, and spiritual support for their children. Michael Byron Smith explains that single fathers can reassure their children by being present with them, "So to be an effective father means to understand the need for balance and to have solid principles. That's not too much to ask, but it is a tough assignment to deliver because the father has to be present, physically and emotionally, while providing for his family."³³ A single father's deliberate presence should invite open conversation with their children, whether spiritual or secular. Meeting the needs of their children's emotional and spiritual development should become second nature, although challenging when considering their parenting skills.

Moral Responsibility

Single fathers have a moral responsibility to recognize the importance of being accountable for their actions and behavior. It is crucial for them to acknowledge their flaws and areas needing improvement, as this self-awareness is integral to their personal and spiritual growth. According to John Ortberg, fathers may find it challenging to fulfill their role "when [they] cease to understand spiritual growth."³⁴ In such instances, single fathers may experience fear and a sense of loss. To navigate these difficulties, single fathers should prioritize their spiritual growth, which supports their children's spiritual and emotional growth. Despite their struggles, single fathers have an ethical obligation to their children and should maintain a positive outlook on family values. It is important to note that the feminist movement, while

³³ Michael Byron Smith, *The Power of Dadhood: How to Become the Father Your Child Needs* (Fresno, CA: Familius Publisher, 2015), 13.

³⁴ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2010), 28.

impacting the church in terms of declining male attendance and membership, is irrelevant to this study on single fathers and their moral responsibility. The focus should remain on the struggles and conflicts faced by single fathers and their moral responsibility both within and outside the church. Even when struggling with their significance, single fathers have an ethical responsibility to their children and should address their outlook on family values.

Even as single fathers adapt and identify areas needing improvement, those in ministry supporting them should make it known to their participants that the feminist movement does not encompass their struggles. Nor does it reflect who they are as a father and is unimportant to this study of single fathers' moral and spiritual responsibility for their children. It has partially affected the church through the decline in men's attendance and membership, having nothing to do with the feminist movement. According to Linda Woodhead, "Third wave feminism, which began to dominate the field in the 1990s, reacts against essentialism and seeks instead to explore gender differences which are now understood as complex, multifaceted, fluid, constructed, and only loosely related to the body,"³⁵ as single fathers face conflict and struggles. The importance of refraining from projecting their offense is attributed to the feminist movement in this research. Group discussion is irrelevant to their struggles, being exclusive to their moral responsibility inside or outside the church.

The increase of single fathers has grown in recent years. Research informs us of this rising trend and the social issues single fathers encounter. According to Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp, "The single-father family—a growing trend in the United States—accounts for

³⁵ Linda Woodhead, *Feminism and the Sociology: From Gender-Blindness to Gendered Difference* in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion* ed. Richard K. Fenn (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publisher, 2003), 508.

about one-fifth of single-parent families."³⁶ The rise has inevitably led to comparing single fathers to other classifications of parenting when a man is married. Assuming this would make a difference in the moral obligation of the father. Roberta L. Coles implies, "Scholars have wondered how single fathers' parenting compares to that of a married father and single mothers."³⁷ The situations may vary from one individual living arrangement to the next. However, being morally responsible as the father of their children should not be based on status or compared to a married father. Moreover, such comparisons do not account for the unique needs of a single father or mother's moral commitment and parenting skills of the individual.

Single fathers face numerous challenges today as they strive to fulfill their responsibilities and support their children financially and emotionally. However, the researcher must admit to and argue against the societal labels that may undermine their role and capabilities as single fathers. This research advocates for rejecting such labels, and this study should not be a basis for labeling single fathers but should serve as a platform for understanding and supporting their needs. "Social identity theorists believe that identifying oneself with a particular social group influences the person's subsequent behavior, as individuals tend to behave in concert with members of the shared group."³⁸ In the context of single fatherhood, this concept is relevant as societal labels and stereotypes may influence how single fathers perceive themselves and how

³⁶ Annice D. Yarber and Paul M. Sharp, *Focus on Single-Parent Families: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publisher, 2010), 23.

³⁷ Roberta L. Coles, "Single-Father Families: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 7, no. 2 (June 2015): 144-166, accessed May 28, 2020, https://epublication.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://scholargoogle.com/&httpsredir=1154&context=socs_fac.

³⁸ Mikiyasu Hakoyama, "Fathering Styles: Qualities Children Expect in Their Fathers," *Marriage and Family Review* 56, no. 5 (February 2020): 391-424 accessed July 23, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2020.1726851>.

others perceive them as fathers. Rather than giving in to negative societal labels, single fathers should concentrate on building authentic and meaningful relationships with their children. This research aims to develop ministries that support single fathers in overcoming stereotypes and rejecting societal biases and false narratives. These labels point to the need to research and develop ministries supporting single fathers as they overcome stereotypes.

Israel Galindo "instructional intent"³⁹ suggests various communication methods to help single fathers understand their roles as parents and offers achievable solutions to their struggles. Through collective efforts and supportive initiatives, we can argue against stereotypes surrounding single fatherhood and empower these fathers in their crucial roles as caregivers and mentors to their children. Doing so can create a more compassionate and understanding society for all families, regardless of their structure. Changing how single fathers perceive themselves and resisting societal perspectives requires recognizing the importance of fatherhood and trusting the single-fathering process. Michael Byron Smith explains that "men who accept their role as fathers can become Dads."⁴⁰ Strengthening family values and encouraging their children to succeed is all a part of a parent's moral responsibility. In their book on behavioral attributes, Duane Halbur and Kimberly Vess Halbur emphasize the importance of examining personal cognitive and emotional abilities to achieve life goals. "In the process of change, it is often important to examine the *private logic* of the individual. These personal cognitive and emotional abilities are designed to help each person to achieve life goals."⁴¹ These perspectives have

³⁹ Israel Galindo, *The Craft of Teaching Christian Teaching: Essentials for Becoming a Very Good Teacher* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publisher, 1998), 19.

⁴⁰ Michael Byron Smith, *The Power of Dadhood: How to Become the Father Your Child Needs* (Fresno, CA: Familius Publisher, 2015), 26.

⁴¹ A. Duane Halbur and Kimberly Vess Halbur, *Developing your Theoretical Orientation in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2011), 55.

contributed to the development of this thesis project, guiding and assisting single fathers through their struggles and relationship with Jesus Christ.

The project coordinator has considered task-oriented behaviors that promote productive and cohesive relationships between single fathers and their children. These behaviors should align with commitment and accountability. A healthy thought process is crucial, and seeking guidance from God's word supports a caring and positive mindset. John Ortberg professes that "there is a fundamental battle in the spiritual life being waged by the Evil One over the nature of the thoughts that run through your mind."⁴² Therefore, the single father should seek guidance through God's word to support a healthy and caring thought process. Reading relevant books and scholarly articles helps the researcher engage in group discussions to empower participants to develop logical narratives emphasizing the significance and value of their contribution to shaping their families for future generations.

While laws, cognitive behavioral therapy, psychology, counseling, and sociology have influenced societal views of single fathers, they provide only limited assessment and fail to accurately depict the emotional stress associated with a single father's environment. Considering the social demographic and gathering narratives that accurately reflect research and resources from diverse and culturally divided communities is vital. As Frances Goldscheider points out, "Despite the rise in single parenthood, single fathers remain perhaps the least understood group of parents."⁴³ Recognizing the challenges faced by single fathers and addressing the gaps in knowledge about their experience is crucial. John P. Pichition states,

⁴² John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2010), 98.

⁴³ Frances Goldscheider et al. "Becoming a Single Father: The Role of Father and Mother Characteristic," *Journal of Family Issues* 36, no. 12 (November 11, 2013) 1625-1650 accessed May 29, 2020, [sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav.https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13508405](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13508405).

Literature on the profile of single father, that is, his psychological makeup, personal problems, interpersonal difficulties, life-style, and so forth, is virtually nonexistent. Only within the last few years have researchers really begun to investigate the situation of the single father phenomenon in its own right.⁴⁴

Therefore, the project coordinator cautiously approached the literature, ensuring participants' attention was focused and encouraging them to seek solutions to their struggles while challenging reliance on secular opinions.

Formation for Learning

The teaching for single fathers should include research concerning social conditions that can affect their lives and their children's lives in positive or negative ways, according to the living arrangements and social environment. Single fathers come from diverse communities and experience income disparities, which can impact their ability to support their children. They may face challenges such as unemployment, falling behind on child support, and peer pressure. Additionally, they might encounter legal ramifications from the city, state, or government-appointed organizations. Recognizing the severity of these challenges, John Eldredge claims, "Sometimes the battle has to strike close to home in order to rouse the warrior in a man."⁴⁵ The existence of this battle confirms the importance of helping single fathers form a healthy mental model of themselves.

The questionnaire distributed to the group is to establish the need to learn about the shortfalls of single fathers. Lance Cooper shares, "While it's evident that love, peace, patience and self-control are good virtues, some men avoid these evidential truths and behave as if they

⁴⁴ John P. Pichition, "Profile of the Single Father: A Thematic Integration of the Literature," *Personnel and Guidance Journal* 61, no. 5 (January 1983) 295-299 accessed May 28, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2164-4918.1983.tb00029.x>.

⁴⁵ John Eldredge, *Fathered by God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2009), 93.

do not exist."⁴⁶ This ministry provides an opportunity for participants to engage in open-minded discussions about behavioral development without comparing or contrasting their efforts with one another. The traditional family structure has changed, and single-father households have become more prevalent. The church cannot overlook the presence of single fathers in the community. Timothy Keller emphasizes the necessity for the church to understand its community:

Every church, whether located in a city, suburb, or rural area (and there are many permutations and combinations of these settings), must become wise about and conversant with the distinctives of human life in those places. But we must also think about how Christianity and the church engages and interacts with culture in general.⁴⁷

Single fathers often enter the church feeling hurt, ashamed, isolated, and troubled by their emotions and relationships with their children. However, this research addresses these single fathers' spiritual needs and their children's acceptance and responsibility toward fatherhood. Christianity supports this research and the need to establish ministries supporting single fathers in our churches and communities.

Considering the causes, effects, and an increasing number of single fathers in our country, this research presents a model exhibited in the PFBC outreach ministry. The Pew Research Center data and other sources in Chapter Two highlight the growing trend of single fathers and the significant challenge of being separated from their children. Some single fathers experience separation from their children due to divorce, while others may not have married the

⁴⁶ Lance Cooper, *What it Takes: Messages for Men moved by God* (Knoxville, TN: InLight Publisher, 2016), 5.

⁴⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2012), 22.

child's mother. The potential effects on the children can manifest behavioral issues in school, susceptibility to peer pressure, and involvement in a gang. However, Sarah Allen and Kerry Daly of The Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA) explain the benefits of a father's involvement with their children: "Fathers who are involved in their children's lives are more likely to exhibit greater psychosocial maturity, be more satisfied with their lives, feel less psychological distress and be more able to understand themselves, empathically understand others, and integrate their feelings in an ongoing way."⁴⁸ Such data should encourage single fathers to take the initiative and become more active in their children's lives. To promote personal development, single fathers need to understand their attitudes about fatherhood, whether positive, negative, or indifferent. In this process, they should articulate their narratives to improve their relationships with their children for the better. By willingly engaging in learning, single fathers should discover that their most significant attribute resides in their integrity as fathers in their children's presence.

Spiritual Leadership

Living as a single father without their children in the home does not diminish the spiritual leadership and responsibility of fatherhood. Single fathers must focus on creating a better quality of life for themselves and their children. This quality of life includes establishing trust between the father and the children, especially for single fathers awarded custody of their children. Trust aids in building strong relationships with the children. For instance, when a father works to provide for the family, the children can contribute by sharing the responsibility for maintaining the home and keeping it neat and clean. According to Robert Strom, Gail Fleming, and Susan

⁴⁸ Sarah Allen and Kerry Daly, "The effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence," *Father Involvement Research Alliance* (May 2007) 1-28 accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.fatherhood.gov/library-resource/effects-father-involvement-updated-research-summary-evidence>.

Daniel, "Single fathers also demonstrated a willingness to share control with their children. The motivation for choosing this type of parenting style is not fully understood. To be sure, self-reliance is necessary for some children."⁴⁹ Sharing responsibilities, no matter how small, contributes to the character development of father and child.

Furthermore, shared responsibility can benefit the children by instilling a sense of unity with their earthly father, like Jesus' unity with His heavenly Father. The father's willingness to utilize what he has learned from this ministry to provide spiritual guidance for his children aligns with the goal of understanding God's will for the family to grow and become disciples of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke 6:40 teaches us that we are students and not our teachers. Jesus Christ is the teacher, and we are His students willing to be the Lord's disciples. By learning from the Lord, we gain the foundation necessary to become disciples and teach our sons or daughters what is required to be followers of Jesus Christ. The coordinator of the ministry plays a crucial role in helping participants learn to become disciples and teach their sons and daughters what is required to be followers of Jesus Christ. Understanding this study value emphasizes the importance of having a personal relationship with their children, knowing they will learn to have faith in their father and his decisions for the family.

This research also addresses patterns of troublesome circumstances experienced by single fathers and how they can overcome them by committing to family values. According to Greer Litton Fox and Carol Bruce, the argument then turns toward "Understanding the processes by which men come to take on a paternal identity and persist in that role has been the focus of much research, not only on new fathers but fathers after separation and divorce. Symbolic interactional

⁴⁹ Robert Strom, Gail Fleming, and Susan Daniels, "Elementary School Guidance & Counseling," *Families in Transition* 19, no. 1 (October 1984) 77-87 accessed May 30, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42868647>.

perspectives, especially those informed by identity theory, dominate the literature in this area.”⁵⁰

This study and research show that fathers' continued refining of their role affects their behaviors, attitudes, and relationships within the family and society, which can influence other fathers.

Understanding the focus of this study identifies how fatherhood should influence his sense of who he is as a father. Compared to engaging in critical thought and learning from the teaching based on their belief in Jesus Christ, single fathers can better understand their commitment and its impact on their children. Myles Munroe specifies that a father's positive commitment to the family contributes to new beginnings that can be passed down to future generations: "God is saying to men, Don't let My ways out of your sight. Make sure you understand and obey them first. Then "teach them to your children and their children after them." Why? Because you are supposed to be the teacher."⁵¹ As a teacher and learner of family values, the project coordinator examines areas of concern, addresses social issues, and evaluates the single father's commitment to the family.

Moreover, this thesis communicates a desire for the ministry to uplift and encourage single fathers by identifying the dynamics of their transformation while acknowledging the need to shift and channel their thinking away from the secular opinion of single fathers. Although this thesis emphasizes the significance of single fathers' involvement in the family, it also argues that the lack of participation can affect their children's behavioral development. Situations may seem complicated at times, but John Eldredge emphasizes that children value the quality of hearing from their single fathers:

⁵⁰ Greer Litton Fox and Carol Bruce, "Conditional Fatherhood: Identity Theory and Parental Investment Theory as Alternative Sources of Explanation of Fathering," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 2 (May 2001) 394-403 accessed July 23, 2023. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00394x>

⁵¹ Myles Munroe, *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House Publisher, 2001), 137.

All this is to say that it is *your* voice, my friend and fellow dad, that is the most powerful voice in the world . . . in the lives of your children. No one will have the impact on them that you will have. But isn't that what you've always wanted—to be powerful? To have an eternal impact? You do. When it comes to what they need and what you can offer them, you have what it takes. You are the man.⁵²

Is this eternal impact manageable or realistic? Yes. The learning experience from the printed questionnaire in Appendix A used during group discussion for the ministry project is evident in the single fathers' positive reactions to the teaching. According to Ira Shor, single fathers should naturally grow from this teaching method: "In reality, all serious classrooms already do a form of research because meaningful learning involves examining subjects in depth and from several perspectives."⁵³ The opportunity for single fathers to learn from this research project stems from a core principle of the research. During the project, the coordinator assessed appropriate means of communicating the project's subject matter during the interview process in Chapter Four. Clear and effective communication should improve single fathers' understanding of the important and applicable concepts, ultimately strengthening their relationships with their children.

The single father ministry's invaluable offering of resourceful information lies in its capacity to support single fathers, ensuring they do not face challenges alone. This ministry's teaching and shared knowledge aim to help fathers deal with their problems through the spiritual knowledge of growing in faith through Jesus Christ. Consequently, this teaching method can motivate fathers to contribute further by mentoring other single fathers. John Eldredge shares this history lesson: "There's an old African proverb that goes like this: 'I hear, I forget, I see, I

⁵² John Eldredge, *You Have What It Takes: What Every Father Needs to Know* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2004), 24.

⁵³ Ira Shor, *Empowering Education; Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 171.

remember. I do, I understand.' How true this is when it comes to masculine initiation. Men, and boys, learn by doing, we learn through experience."⁵⁴ This proverb highlights the importance of experiential learning for men and boys in masculine initiation. By embracing resourceful information as an educational experience that promotes a need for change, single fathers can become empowered to turn away from pride and make better decisions. Paul Pettit gives these words of encouragement: "Resourceful individuals are able to find ways around problems. This resourcefulness trait corresponds with the constructs of learned resourcefulness and hope. Such individuals possess the belief that actions that they take will accomplish the results they intend, which is termed self-efficacy."⁵⁵ These self-efficacy helps them re-establish strong relationships with their children. Committed fathers can then understand the diverse issues confronting their children at home, in school, or when faced with peer pressure.

By not confining this study to one group and being open to the diversity of single fathers, the researcher argues. "A monolithic and simplistic understanding of fathering in diverse cultures that does not include knowledge of contextual influences can result in stereotyping and overgeneralizations, leading to a dearth of appropriate knowledge for social work clinical practitioners who work with fathers and families in cross-cultural settings."⁵⁶ Therefore, the teaching method employed in this project supports learning new and applicable concepts, comprehensive study, and planning by emphasizing the changing values of family and the associated stressors and rewards of fatherhood. The single father ministry project provides a

⁵⁴ John Eldredge, *Father by God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2009), 70.

⁵⁵Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 2008), 151.

⁵⁶ Wayne Miller and Sarah Maiter, "Fatherhood and Culture: Moving beyond Stereotypical Understandings," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 17, no. 3 (August 2008) 279-300 accessed July 23, 2023. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233135976> DOI: 10.1080/15313200802258216 279-300.

systematic plan for success. However, emotional swings, demographics, locations, relationships with children, and prevention methods for single fathers vary. Jack W. Hayford discerns a best practice for spiritual growth: "'Wisdom' refers to our receiving of *specific, practical, workable truth* from God. 'Revelation' refers to being given insight and understanding of *how that truth can be applied* to your life."⁵⁷ The revelation of what we learn from this study is not always out of the Bible, but how we once saw ourselves while changing our perspective on fatherhood allows us to see how our understanding has grown as single fathers.

The Learning Father

Amidst the many challenges single fathers face, their response to battles during troubling times in life and at home has been the focus of this research project. To be successful, single fathers must consistently grow from within, seeking to understand the importance of fatherhood and maintain the mental stability to accomplish their goals. Within this context, they faithfully pursue improved relationships with their children. Rather than numerically measuring personal and relational goals, single fathers should rely on quality time spent with Jesus Christ. Kenneth Boa discusses the importance of learning from scripture, saying, "Scripture tells us that our worth is determined by what Christ was willing to do for us and that in him we have an unlimited and unchanging source of meaning and purpose."⁵⁸ Quality time spent with Jesus Christ inspires spiritual growth, helping to shift feelings of detachment from the children and focusing on strengthening relationships with them. Various statistics provide different proportions that influence this research but do not reach single fathers in the church. However, open lines of

⁵⁷ Jack W. Hayford, *Grounds for Living: Sound Teaching for Sure Footing in Growth & Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Book Publisher, 2001), 31.

⁵⁸ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2001), 144.

communication with the children can demonstrate the father's devotion to this spiritual grounding from this research.

Moreover, to invest in their children's spiritual development, the single father can follow the guidance of Moses, as expressed in "(Deut. 6:7 GNB) Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working." Using this example of Moses, spiritual leaders committed to learning and teaching scripture can pass on their spiritual beliefs to their children as a core family value. Single fathers can use this example to communicate honestly with their children about how God's word guides them through their day and helps them overcome struggles. This approach encourages the children's active participation in their spiritual development.

Many single fathers attend church services seeking spiritual support through their struggles without actively seeking spiritual support in their lives. The struggle can be difficult and slow, and navigating the process of character development through spiritual growth is not easy for a single father. From this experience, the coordinator understands that isolation does not equate to separation. The father seeks guidance from the teaching of the Word of God. Simply attending church does not guarantee the handling of struggles spiritually. The feeling of isolation can also occur within the church, hindering individual growth and preventing the sharing of struggles with other single fathers. Therefore, the church must support single fathers and provide a ministry for them, even if they do not regularly attend church services. Like the need for single fathers to consistently commit to spiritual growth, the church should consistently commit to single-father ministry. As Rick Warren states, growth takes time: "Character building is a slow process. Whenever we try to avoid or escape the difficulties in life, we short-circuit the process, delay our growth, and end up with a worse kind of pain, the worthless type that accompanies

denial and avoidance."⁵⁹ The church and its single fathers learn and grow together through a simultaneous commitment to growing in the Lord.

During emotional upheavals, people may overlook the spiritual warfare that causes life's battles. Single fathers must acknowledge this warfare as they encounter challenges in their lives. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins explore moving from emotional battles to conviction and transformation, noting that: "Transformation requires the intensification of anxiety and arousal as system heats up. The imagery of heat and fire is a common biblical symbol of spiritual transformation. The transformation process involves a dialectic of arousal and soothing, as fire is balanced by water. The Holy Spirit convicts and comforts."⁶⁰ As single fathers submit to spiritual transformation, they enable themselves to provide guidance for their children, and their transformation becomes a learning experience for the family. Single fathers' legacy can then take on a new beginning for those fathers who seek Jesus Christ.

Statistical Review

The statistical review for this conceptual framework and study provides data relevant to the growing outliers of single fathers associated with the research project. Please see Chapter Four for more Statistical Review. For example, some single fathers were never married. Bryndl Hohmann-Marriott notes, "Increasing numbers of children are being born to unmarried parents, with nonmarital childbearing in 2005 representing 36.8% of U.S. births, or more than 1.5 million births, an increase of 12% over 2002."⁶¹ Unmarried fathers should share the rewards and

⁵⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2002), 199.

⁶⁰ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publisher, 2011), 147.

⁶¹ Bryndl Hohmann-Marriott, "Coparenting and Father Involvement in Married and Unmarried Coresident Couples," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 73, no. 1 (February 2011) 296-309 accessed April 22, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29789574>.

challenges of developing relationships with their children. However, single fathers who were married to former partners also struggle. Richard M. Smith and Craig W. Smith state, "When asked what the greatest difficulty was in making the transition to single parenthood, 52% of the fathers indicated that it was the loss of their [sic]wives companionship."⁶² It is vital to understand the research implication for those who were married to their partners and are now struggling as single fathers with new living arrangements, as they participated in this study. The intention is not to consider a single father as someone who has never been married but to understand their different struggles.

This research aims to highlight the need for the church to extend its outreach to community-wide ministry for single fathers. According to Vicky Phares, "U.S. children under 18 years old 23% live in single parent families headed by the mother, and 3% live in single-parent families headed by the father."⁶³ Furthermore, the number of single fathers' households has increased. Gretchen Livingston states, "The number of single father households has increased about ninefold since 1960, from less than 300,000 to more than 2.6 million in 2011,"⁶⁴ as reported by Gretchen Livingston. Livingston also notes, "Similarly, one-in-five absent fathers say they visit their children more than once a week, but an even greater share (27%) say they have not seen their children at all in the past year."⁶⁵ These statistics underscore the need for a

⁶² Richard M. Smith and Craig W. Smith, "Child Rearing and Single-Parent Fathers," *Family Relations* 30, no. 3 (July 1981) 411-417 accessed April 22, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/584036>.

⁶³ Vicky Phares, "Where's poppa? The relative lack of attention to the role of fathers in child and adolescent psychopathology," *American Psychologist* 47, no. 5 (June 1992) 656-664 accessed April 12, 2021. <https://www.researchgate.net> DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.47.5.656.

⁶⁴ Gretchen Livingston, "The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960," *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends* accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/07/02/the-rise-of-single-fathers/>.

⁶⁵ Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker, "A Tale of Two Fathers: More are Active, but More are Absent," *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends* accessed April 14, 2021. [https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource files/e000002283_0](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource%20files/e000002283_0).

single father ministry in the church and emphasize the significance of this research in shaping family values. Education and income also play a role in single fathers' experiences. According to a study by David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, "On average, fathers had received some post-high school education; among the binned categories, 28% had received a high school diploma, 30% community college or associate's degree, and 24% a 4-year bachelor's degree. The average annual income ranged from \$40,000 to \$49,999."⁶⁶ However, financial and educational background can vary depending on one's profession. It is also essential to consider the struggles and statistics regarding dating someone other than the children's mother. These challenges are shared in the results by Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor entitled, *"Role Adjustment of Single Parent Fathers with Dependent Children."*⁶⁷ The role of these single fathers is to better understand and cope with the changes in their lifestyle. Having the support of other group participants can be beneficial, as we will learn in Chapter Four. The theological foundation helps the participants develop the resilience to adjust to their situations with time and patience. Being open to change is significant in the role adjustment of fathers and fatherhood.

Theological Foundations

Purpose with God's Leading

The theological foundation outlines scriptural passages, including the relationship between God and humanity. Additionally, it sustains an understanding of the importance of family values and the father's role in teaching their children the ways of the Lord and how to

⁶⁶ David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, "Fathering Through Change (FTC) intervention of single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problem behaviors," *Development and Psychopathology* 31, no. 5 (December 2019) 1801-1811 accessed March 6, 2021. <https://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com>.

⁶⁷ Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor, "Role Adjustment of Single Parent Fathers with Dependent Children," *National Council of Family Relation* 25, no. 4 (October 1976) 397-401 accessed May 12, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/582853>.

grow spiritually in Jesus Christ. The scriptures highlight Christ's merciful characteristics to encourage single fathers to show compassion and forgiveness in their relationship with their children.

God's design for marriage and family values can be traced back to Genesis 2:24. Marriage was established in the Garden of Eden, where God created Eve as a helpmate for Adam, emphasizing the importance of companionship and starting a family. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger state, "The blessing itself is primarily posterity. Thus already the fulfillment of the blessing is tied to man's seed and the notion of life-two themes that will later dominate the narrative of Genesis."⁶⁸ E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard expound upon the close union of marriage, stating, "The one flesh relationship certainly involves sexual union, but also includes a husband and wife coming together in spiritual, mental, and emotional harmony."⁶⁹ God ordained the institution of marriage, and its significance should not be disregarded, regardless of the evolving living arrangement of today. However, over the centuries, by choice, humanity's idea of maintaining a commitment to marriage and family has varied, not in accordance with God's word but as evidenced by the growing trend of single fathers, as shown in the statistical review.

Nevertheless, single fathers should also prioritize their spiritual and personal development. The Apostle Paul speaks to spiritual development: "(Gal. 6:9 NLT) So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessings if we don't

⁶⁸ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 1994), 6.

⁶⁹ E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publisher, 2015), 10.

give up." Single fathers must stay committed to themselves and their children because the harvest of blessings is the transformational goal of spiritual development and growth.

Whether married or not, fathers should remain accountable and committed to their children's spiritual growth, which is theologically entrusted to parents in scripture. Moreover, the child's and parents' union should continue to display family values even if the parents do not marry or they have divorced. These theological foundations provide the narrative supporting this thesis project's position, alongside the idea that single fathers should accept the responsibility of fatherhood while pursuing Christian Doctrine. In 1 Corinthians 8:7, Paul calls for a whole relational approach that reflects the fundamental principles of scripture to the service of one God, our creator. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger state, "The knowledge Paul speaks of here is the previously mentioned knowledge regarding an idol and the existence and position of the so-called gods."⁷⁰ The scripture is not directed only to single fathers. Paul encourages us all to remain faithful to God and not fall victim to the world's idol ideas and worship experiences that can distract or deter an individual from understanding that God is the author and finisher of our faith. Indeed, God's Word applies to married and single fathers because, as the Psalm states, "(Ps. 127:3-5 NASB) Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate." Single fathers who uphold family values will not be ashamed due to their commitment to their children's spiritual growth. Understanding that their children are a divine blessing from God

⁷⁰ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 1994), 631.

and a hope for the family legacy simultaneously, they are learning from their parents how to stand in times of struggle.

Hebrews 12:10-11 instruct us to remain disciplined for our good and in accordance with the sanctity of God's Word. Single fathers may not want to hear the truths from scripture, but accepting the truth provides spiritual rewards and blessings to all that believe in God's Word. Therefore, through spiritual discipline, single fathers can follow the ways of Jesus Christ. Understanding the importance of building a solid and personal relationship with Jesus Christ aids the single father in making righteous parenting decisions. As stated, "(Prov. 22:6 NLT) Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it." Single fathers who support their children's development contribute to their long-term growth and approaches to life experiences as they grow into adults.

While learning together to explore the spiritual inspirational narrative and perspective of his prevailing heart to learn fatherhood qualities and disciplines as God shapes a father's heart to learn strong qualities of fatherhood through the covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. Initially, God made a covenant with Adam not to eat from the tree "(Gen. 2:17 NASB) of good and evil," establishing a relationship of obedience with God that Adam failed to keep. Stressing the importance of being committed to the will of God is not meant to find fault. Spiritual development and discipline are meant to help us understand not to take what God has given us for granted, like children, when realizing the cause and effect placed on the family because of our disobedience. Nevertheless, learning of God's invitation to Abraham serves the ministry well in teaching that promises of God are kept as stipulated to Abraham in Genesis 17:2. Understanding how personally God can impress an individual, not by force but by reason, aids in growing spiritually in God.

God's Word did not negate the significance of God's law, prophets, or purpose for those who believe in God's word, as stated in the Gospel of Matthew 5:17-19. God gave Moses and the prophets what Matthew is sharing about teaching all to adhere and be guided by these words of truth and prophecy. E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard state, "Jesus' statement shows that He regarded the OT as accurate and reliable down to the smallest detail. In keeping with this conviction, Jesus taught that fidelity to the OT witness determines a disciple's stature in His kingdom."⁷¹ Believers are called to remain faithful and committed to the fulfillment of God's Word through Jesus Christ concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. This teaching inspires and encourages all parents or participants in this study to have a relationship with God. God's bond with humanity invites us into a relationship with Him from the Old Testament (OT) to the New Testament (NT). As believers, single fathers' accountability to God does not diminish. Justifying a lack of responsibility may seem convenient during a time of struggle, but single fathers must remain aware of spiritual consequences and not ignore or misconstrue the truth.

Furthermore, the covenant includes and shapes fatherhood. God says to Abram, "(Gen.17:4 NASB) As for me, behold, my covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations." God's promise to Abraham is a new beginning that carried a legacy passed on through generations, growing in faith, family values, the love of God, and Jesus Christ. In many cultures, a father's last name is carried on through the children, who may one day marry or become parents, hopefully carrying on the family's values and legacy of their father. These values and legacy can guide a generation to learn what it means to have a relationship with God. Although a daughter's last name may change if she marries, the believing father hopes that

⁷¹ E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publisher, 2015), 1014.

legacy and faith in God remain with her through spiritual growth and learning what it means to have a relationship with God. This single-father ministry encourages such spiritual and relational goals for the family. Therefore, understanding the relationship between Abraham and God is one he confessed to God and us as believers in the Lord. With our mouths, we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and in our hearts, we believe that the same is for all, not according to any culture, but Romans 10:9-12.

Given the understanding of fatherhood, God gave this assignment to the father "(Gen. 18:19 NIV). For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about Abraham what he has promised him." Fathers acknowledging the importance of spiritual development for the family are a means of providing spiritual guidance to their children. When providing instruction, single fathers should rely on the promises of God, being just in their responsibilities as the head of their household. Therefore, single-father ministries should encourage single fathers to maintain the spiritual leadership position as the head of the family.

The father's spiritual covering is generational and directly contributes to the children's emotional and spiritual development for their well-being when nurtured by the caring heart of their parents. However, personal issues that do not build an honorable family heritage can occur when a parent takes no initiative in their children's spiritual development and covering. For example, a father's decisions can sometimes cause dissension among the extended family when their children have different mothers. In such families, the possibility that a father may not treat siblings equally, spiritually or emotionally, can be a factor. This project's ministry purpose is to enlighten single fathers in these situations, guiding them with wisdom to make spiritually favorable and equitable decisions for multiple siblings so that none would feel rejected.

A father decides whether to engage in a covenant relationship with God, and the willingness to uphold its standards is highlighted in Psalms 78:4-6. A father committed to God allows fathers to mold family values for generations. Fathers have flaws, but if they pass on their honorable qualities learned from the Word of God, they can teach their children to have a spiritual birthright concerning the blessings of Christ's authority. Out of Ishmael came the twelve princes of Ishmael, as seen in Genesis 25:13-15. However, when a father submits to his flaws, he is willing to seek spiritual renewal, which he should seek when convicted of his flaws. By making amends for their flaws, the father progresses in the right direction by accepting spiritual discipline from the Word of God. While remaining in a relationship with God moves the father closer to renewal, which this project's ministry presented to participants during the interviews in Chapter Four to teach them, as single fathers, to grow in spiritually healthy ways. However, the father who struggles with spiritual discipline may progress slowly. This single father ministry must remain diligent for these fathers, knowing that the healing time does not represent rejection because everyone does not grow at the same spiritual rate. A group ministry benefits the single father who progresses not at the same pace because participants can help one another without judgment since they have undergone similar struggles. When those fathers who struggle with spiritual discipline strive alongside those who accept it, the group grows together.

Christians learn from experience in times of crisis that God leads believers to hear from Him for guidance. Philippians 4:7 teaches the value of growing in a relationship with the Lord through prayer. E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard state, "Prayer is the antidote for worry."⁷² The single father should be devoted to prayer because struggles lessen through the

⁷² E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publisher, 2015), 1295.

patience and peace found in the heart through prayer. The objective of this ministry is for single fathers to understand God's mandate of upholding family values. Having or learning of such a commitment, a father can effectively lead his children spiritually according to God's word. As Ray E. Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard discuss, this father will "establish a people who would keep the way of the Lord."⁷³ Through the leading of Jesus Christ, the single father builds leadership skills and fulfills their mission and purpose as father and guardian.

The single father walking in Christ stirs up the desire for devotion to Christian beliefs in their children. Deuteronomy 11:19 shares this teaching and sanctioning as the spiritual leader of the home. The father's open communication about God establishes a religious standard of holding onto biblical scriptures and principles. Passing on their faith can be difficult for single fathers when they experience disappointing struggles while trying to find the strength to sustain their faith in God. However, there is an alternative, as stated in 1 John 2:13-14. God's word reaches out to guide the committed fathers to overcome their struggles.

A theological foundation in the home grows from compassion, as seen in Psalm 103:13. A single father's compassion nurtures the children's resolve to know the fear of the Lord because God's word speaks not only to the father but also to the children. However, life includes moments of emotional distraction. According to Kenneth Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, in these moments, understanding should come from wisdom (2 Cor.10:3-4). "Paul draws a clear distinction between existence in the world and worldly conduct and techniques. He does not deny his human weakness, yet he affirms that spiritual warfare demands spiritual weapons."⁷⁴

⁷³ E. Ray Clendenen and Jeremy Royal Howard, *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publisher, 2015), 37.

⁷⁴ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 1994), 690.

Seeking wisdom from God helps bridge emotional distractions and the compassion gap it causes between the father's leadership and the children. Reading scripture reminds us of God's wisdom and profound truths about Christ's teaching and the obligations of fatherhood. Scripture also highlights the essential qualities single fathers need for cultivating clear theological interpretation of (Prov.14:26). The understanding of fatherhood is the reverence that signifies a willingness to submit and live according to the principles of God's word. Furthermore, when a single father acknowledges the centrality of Christianity in his teaching and the living nature of Jesus Christ's words in their home, the children can have confidence that the home is where they can feel safe and secure from their fears, knowing they have their father's emotional support.

Romans 12:2 is a teachable moment of what to do when seeking to teach others not to conform to worldly thoughts. Being willing to grow spiritually changes the perception and thoughts when learning from scripture the ways that are pleasing to God. This discernment helps us understand how a worldly worldview customs can complicate life's struggles, impeding the expectations of growing in God's living word. Discussing the need to abide by God's word, Shirley C. Guthrie says, "This unity of word and act is even more clearly seen in God's self-revelation in Jesus, who is himself the 'Word' of God John 1:1."⁷⁵ A father's actions should reflect the living word through Christ being the head of the man and God is the head of all. First Corinthians. 3:11 gives us the succession of living in Christ, teaching men how to pursue their spiritual development. The single-father ministry for this project encourages fathers to embrace the Lord's leadership, submitting to it to strengthen their foundations of fatherhood and their relationship with God.

⁷⁵ Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 57.

Trusting God

First Peter 2:6 presents a path the single father can rely on for the home and spiritual leadership of the children. On this path, they should not feel guilt or shame and honor the foundation given to all who trust the Lord. The willingness to be transformed through scripture occurs when single fathers become willing to change their ways, as stated in Ephesians 6:4. It is highly important for this study, ministry, and teaching to help fathers understand, not to let their struggles and burdens become a distraction and annoyance to their children. Not ignoring the spiritual responsibility of participating in the ministry is essential for growing in Christ and teaching their children the way of the Lord. Moreover, the submissive father establishes a pattern of willingness that can inspire the children to grow through submissiveness.

Luke 15:20 teaches the compassion God has for all who seek and ask for forgiveness when they have turned away from God's will. God will not hold His love from us because of our mistakes. God will welcome us back with open arms. The teaching expresses this ministry's compassion and approach to encouraging fathers to be an example that intentionally teaches, reveals, and guides their children to understand what it means to have forgiveness in the heart. By not holding onto an individual past fault. Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham share, "There can be no doubt that in the father's welcome of the younger son Jesus is teaching that the heavenly Father welcomes returning sinners."⁷⁶ Parents and Children sometimes needed correction, verbally and otherwise, and in love. These critical moments can shape the spiritual relationship between the single father and the children. As a result, witnessing family values

⁷⁶ Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publisher, 2014), 1583.

from their single father can guide the children to accept and develop a greater relationship with the Lord as their father.

A single father's leadership in the home comes from living for Christ, not from a non-Christian worldview but in agreement with Ephesians 5:15-17. Single fathers living for Christ and learning from this teaching will grow in the knowledge and understanding that Christ wants us to live a wise and fulfilling life, not being naïve about the evil that can occur during the day. Fathers should use the wisdom found in scripture to discern the Lord's will for their lives and not be fooled by the customs of the world. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King connect single fatherhood to seeking to know Jesus, pointing out that "Jesus watched to see where the Father was working and joined Him. You can follow the same pattern by watching to see where God is at work."⁷⁷ Single fathers can follow the same pattern through this ministry to be at work in the home as a protector, provider, and teacher, watching to see where the work of Jesus is being manifested in their lives.

Theoretical Foundations

The Theory

The theoretical foundation discussed in the passages considers diverse lifestyles and social characteristics of single fathers, along with various thought-provoking concerns surrounding single fatherhood, including family values and relational issues. The project theory highlights practical approaches to addressing single fathers' distinctive struggles and needs that embrace both Christian and non-Christian participants.

⁷⁷ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publisher, 1994), 78.

This theory employed theoretical concepts to construct the foundation of the research project and its associated ministry, incorporating various viewpoints to support the practical application of the research findings. The work commenced with the coordinator acknowledging the significance of the research and the importance of intercessory prayer for others through Jesus Christ. John 17:9 emphasizes that the contribution of Christ to this research and ministry is not of the coordinator's own doing but rather the will of God. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger state, "At this point, Jesus' intercession is confined to the Eleven present with him. He reminds the Father that these men are under his special care."⁷⁸ The coordinator's assignment is to recognize the importance of praying for others to fulfill God's will in this ministry instead of conforming to worldly norms. Prayer played a vital role in shaping the theoretical framework of this ministry, establishing principles that assisted single fathers in navigating family challenges while striving to uphold strong family values.

The diverse life situation of single fathers stems from various circumstances, as highlighted by Ross M. Stolzenberg, Mary Blair-Loy, and Linda J. Waite. They state, "Family formation includes a broad array of behaviors. For example, cohabitation may be a precursor to marriage or an alternative. Divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, and dissolution of cohabitation unions also characterize many individual family formation histories. Each of these behaviors may have a different association with religious participation."⁷⁹ Given the increasing prevalence of single fatherhood, these situations inevitably affect single fathers within the church. Consequently, ministries catering to single fathers must consider the diverse dynamics of their

⁷⁸ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 1994), 357.

⁷⁹ Ross M. Stolzenberg, Mary Blair-Loy, and Linda J. Waite, "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood: Age and Family Life Cycle Effects on Church Membership." *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 1 (February 1995): 84-103 accessed February 7, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096347>

life situations and how these factors can impact ministry, mission, and purpose in correlation with this thesis project, *The Struggles of Single Fathers in the Christian Church*.

Furthermore, a wide range of relational issues and social factors discussed within this research contributed to the project's ministry. While the project was grounded in Christianity, it also recognized and addressed the broader narrative of single fatherhood. Consequently, the concepts encountered by single fathers within the ministry helped them pursue truth, values, and qualities that support family growth. The practical approaches presented in the research served the growth and development of the single father ministry. More importantly, the ministry extended its invitation beyond church members, in alignment with the perspective of Greer Litton Fox and Carol Bruce, who assert that,

This line of research leads to the expectation that the continued involvement or persistence of a birth father in his child's life will be contingent on the relationship he maintains with the birth mother irrespective of their marital status. It should not be overlooked that underlying this research is a presumption that men's commitment to their children is contingent, not unconditional, with the corollary presumption that the father role identity is one varying salience, dependent on choice and circumstance.⁸⁰

In contrast to the earlier theoretical foundation discussed, the ministry emphasized practical application by addressing participants' social and ethical needs. While the ministry encouraged participants to embrace Christianity, it did not mandate it since beliefs varied among participants. By allowing Christian and non-Christian individuals to participate, such ministries could reach a broader spectrum of single fathers. The theory and design of the ministry emerged from a range of life applications, encompassing experiences beyond those solely encountered by single fathers in the church. As discussed in Chapter Four, common factors among Christian and non-Christian participants manifested as relational and moral commitments to family.

⁸⁰ Greer Litton Fox and Carol Bruce, "Conditional Fatherhood: Identity Theory and Parental Investment Theory as Alternative Sources of Explanation of Fathering." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 2 (May 2001) 394-403, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/219770205?pq-63>,

Consideration of social viewpoints and unique struggles of this study extended its applications beyond the confines of church ministry, taking into account the social viewpoints of single fathers and their struggles. A holistic view of single fathers is to consider the behaviors addressed within this research, influenced by cultural and ethnic differences, income disparities, and varying emotions of participants. Particularly, the study emphasized the importance of considering lifestyles and income levels when developing a single-father ministry, particularly during the initial stages when assessing the unique challenges faced by participants. Rebekah Levine Coley suggests, "Although the assumption that fathers' involvement enhances children's development seems perfectly reasonable, there is actually relatively little evidence to support it, especially when considering low-income and minority fathers or fathers who do not reside with their children."⁸¹ The questionnaire employed in the project enabled the coordinator to understand participants' differences and facilitated their transition into the mission and purpose of the ministry. The responses to some questions are in Chapter Four.

Balancing family-based ministry and Christian values has been debated regarding assistance provided to single fathers through family-based ministries versus relying solely on Christian values. Bryan Nelson and Timothy Paul Jones suggest, "Family ministry is not the answer; family ministry will not fix your church's problems; and family ministry will not transform peoples' lives. The Gospel is what changes people—not programs or practices; not models or methods; but solely and only the Gospel of Jesus Christ."⁸² However, urging participants in a single-father ministry to convert to Christianity disrespects non-believing

⁸¹ Rebekah Levine Coley, "(In) visible Men: Emerging Research on Low-Income, Unmarried, and Minority Fathers." *The American Psychologist Association, Inc.* 56, no. 9, 743-753 (September 2001), accessed February 8, 2023, https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000000443

⁸² Bryan Nelson and Timothy Paul Jones, "The Problem and the Promise of Family Ministry." *The Journal of Family Ministry*, 3, no. 1, 36-43 (Fall 2010), accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2012/03/0191>

participants and their efforts to seek a better way of life. For non-believers, the ministry project of this study did not oppose their beliefs but rather respected them while encouraging participating believers to recognize that diverse methods, programs, and approaches can address their struggles as single fathers when practiced through Christian perspectives. The approach of this outreach ministry sought to follow the examples set by Jesus Christ, aiming to facilitate the spiritual growth of all participants without disregarding anyone based on their beliefs. For non-believers, the ministry project of this study did not oppose their beliefs but rather respected them.

Nonetheless, the foundational ministry concepts were developed based on the coordinator's experience as a single father within the Christian Church. The commitment, mission, and witness extend beyond the church walls' confines while retaining some relevance to the church outreach efforts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The researcher developed the methodology for this project based on the vision of a single father ministry that emerged during a group discussion while the researcher pursued a master's degree in divinity at Virginia Union University. The methodology was also influenced by Ira Shor's *Empowering Education*.⁸³ The researcher recognized the importance of personal experience and the value of sharing it in ministry. The vision for the single father ministry was initially discussed in a classroom setting during the researcher's studies at Virginia Union University. Drawing from personal experiences as a single father, the coordinator identified the need for such a ministry. The vision was then shared with the pastor of PFBC, who offered support for the ministry.

The single father ministry included eight participants, both members and non-members of the church, ranging in age from eighteen to fifty. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, recruiting willing participants was a slow and deliberate process while awaiting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB granted approval for the research on November 11, 2021. Some participants encountered obstacles in their participation due to argumentative behavior concerning their privacy. To address this, the researcher added a series of questions (see Appendix A) to the questionnaire used in the project, including one related to Christianity in group discussions, which elicited mixed responses.

- Is having a relationship with Jesus Christ helpful? If so, why? If not, why not

The presence of single fathers who believed in Christ in the group informed the research. These fathers expressed negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, and loss related to

⁸³ Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

aspects of their lives they held dear, such as family structure and being present with their children. Despite their struggles, the participants maintained their faith in God and sought comfort from Him. One participant in the group had multiple children with different mothers and did not attend church. When asked about their lifestyle compared to that of a Christian, this participant showed no interest. However, the group did not judge or discount the value of this participant's contributions to the discussions or their desire to grow, learn, and understand the qualities of fatherhood. Although this participant avoided discussing Christianity, they acknowledged their dislike of being separated from the children. The question about Christianity proved productive in generating a collaborative group discussion. Some of the subsequent questions in the appendix received shared responses, which will be reflected in the results.

- Explain what necessary steps you will take to maintain or rekindle a relationship with the children.
- How should a single father surmise the scope of fatherhood and its reconstruction in his life?
- Explain in detail what accomplishments are most important in learning from this ministry?
- Explain what the reason for agreeing to this research is?
- Explain in detail if there is a relationship with the children? If yes, what kind and why? Is the relationship close by phone or via social media? If not, why? This question is to search your heart, not to blame others.
- In detail, how do you view the role of a single father?
- How do you handle the emotional struggles as a single father and provider?

- Explain in detail how peer pressure influenced your relationship with the children, positive or negative?
- Explain in detail what positive or negative relationship was there with your father?
- How did your childhood influence you as a single father?
- What experiences of fatherhood did you learn as a child?
- What family values come from having a relationship with the children?
- As a single father, what would be done differently?
- Explain if this ministry can have relevance in learning the characteristics of fatherhood.
- What is the role of a father?
- What do they expect to learn from this research?
- How do the participants plan to use what they learned from this research in their daily lives?

In addition to the questions outlined in the appendix, various other inquiries arose during our group discussions. For example, participants were asked to contemplate the question, “What is the role of a father?” Despite hearing this question multiple times throughout our discussions, participants consistently provided similar responses. Many emphasize the financial aspect of fatherhood, with responses such as, “A father is someone who financially provides for his family.” There was little mention of a father’s role in providing spiritual or emotional support. Similarly, when questioned about their involvement in their children’s developmental areas, the consensus was that most of this responsibility should fall on the mother, especially during early school-age years. Some participants even admitted to not feeling obliged to provide educational support, such as attending parent-teacher conferences or assisting with homework. However, they unanimously agreed that fatherhood entails taking part in the discipline of their children.

As the group discussion continued, the ministry leader posed another question that was not included in Appendix A, “What do participants expect to learn from this research?” Although their responses were brief, they agreed on the importance of family values and what they entail. Each participant also acknowledged that certain aspects of their lives needed to change because their struggles hindered improved relationships with their children. Toward the end of our group discussion, participants encountered yet another question not found in Appendix A: “How do the participants plan to use what they learned from this research in their daily lives?” Initially uncertain, participants gradually arrived at an answer over time. They concurred with the ministry leader, expressing that single-family values and single fatherhood are ever-evolving, and accepting this truth helped them navigate through their struggles. Our discussions primarily took place through virtual platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime, and conference calls due to COVID-19 restrictions. Questionnaires, relevant material, and resources were emailed to participants ahead of each discussion. Physical meetings were limited to a few due to health concerns.

Those who participated met at least once a month but sometimes twice with advance notice of meeting dates and times. Zoom, FaceTime, and conference calls played a pivotal role in facilitating both group and individual discussions. During these discussions, participants candidly expressed their struggles, such as their difficulties in spending quality time with their children. Many revealed that they had refrained from attempting to spend more time with their children due to disappointment stemming from their transition to single fatherhood. Recognizing these emotional challenges and the need for improvement was a significant step forward, and participants were reassured that active involvement in their children’s lives remained crucial. Throughout the group discussions, the ministry leader oversaw conversations based on past or

present discussions to observe the growth of each participant throughout the project. The questionnaire served as a tool to test responses and identify differences in spiritual growth, shedding light on how participants viewed themselves as single fathers, whether as church members or non-church members. Age differences among participants were noted in Chapter Four concerning group discussion and responsiveness. While some responses indicated more pronounced growth than others, all participants acknowledged areas in which they needed to grow.

The methodology employed during these discussions provided participants with the freedom to express their disappointments openly. As Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen suggest, “Clearly expressing an event objectifies the situation, enabling useful reflection on it and potential learning from it.”⁸⁴ Moments of reflection during group discussions reinforced the benefit of sharing feelings without fear of judgment. Other texts also supported this methodology during the project. For example, *The Craft of Christian Teaching: Essentials for Becoming a Very Good Teacher*⁸⁵ by Israel Galindo contributed to our discussion by elaborating on learning and spiritual growth theories in adulthood.

Furthermore, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*⁸⁶ by Kenneth Boa offered biblical approaches that enriched our research and provided valuable teaching concepts to our participants. Additionally, *The Popular Encyclopedia of*

⁸⁴ Jeffery H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen, *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993). 34.

⁸⁵ Israel Galindo, *The Craft of Christian Teaching: Essentials for Becoming a Very Good Teacher* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998).

⁸⁶ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Zondervan, 2001).

*Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Healing People with Their Problems*⁸⁷ by Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins served as a resource for addressing unproductive behaviors and supporting positive outcomes. These scholarly sources played a pivotal role in facilitating meaningful conversations during group discussions. In Chapter Four, the research material spurred inquiry in the minds of participants during group discussion. The topics discussed in Chapter Two, our literature review, significantly influenced the qualitative methodology employed in this research. For instance, the moral character of a single father emerged as a critical factor affecting their ability to connect with their children. Furthermore, the importance of teaching underscored the necessity for single fathers to embrace a healthy mental model, enabling them to provide effective guidance. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*⁸⁸ by Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell corroborated the data and statistics presented in Chapter Four. The data collected as part of our intervention design contributed substantially to the development of this research project and, by extension, supported the core objective of this study as it pertains to single fathers.

The qualitative methodology of this research focused on the qualities of a single father. For example, in the context of their spiritual positioning, participants came to understand that being outside the home or residing with the children as single fathers did not diminish their status as a father. Most importantly, they recognized that their role as teachers played a pivotal role in advancing their knowledge, mental stability, and their ability to guide their children toward their goals, all while fostering strong relationships with their children. This research delves deep into

⁸⁷ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Healing People with Their Problems* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2011).

⁸⁸ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 2016).

the struggles faced by single fathers and identifies this qualitative research methodology as an effective tool for addressing the challenges associated with single fatherhood. In doing so, we have shaped the framework for this single father ministry, drawing from the experiences and insights of the participants.

Family values have also played a significant role in shaping the ministry's framework. According to Dennis K. Orthner and Ken Lewis, these steps provide a plan supporting the positive reinforcement of a single father's active participation:

- (a) actively gained experience in childrearing,
- (b) received some education about children,
- (c) participated in household responsibilities,
- (d) been actively involved in the discipline of their children, and
- (e) had nurturing supportive interaction with their children.⁸⁹

These steps were emailed to participants, equipping them with the tools to evaluate their successes in developing influential characteristics of fatherhood. By instilling belief in their fatherly leadership, growth becomes attainable. Our project's methodology centers on establishing goals for behaviors that support healthy relationships between single fathers and their children, ultimately assisting single fathers in navigating the rapid changes within society. Additionally, *Action Research*⁹⁰ by Ernest T. Stringer provided literary guidance, encouraging participants to communicate effectively after consulting the resources shared via email for group discussions. The

⁸⁹ Dennis K. Orthner and Ken Lewis, "Evidence of Single-Father Competence in Childrearing," *Family Law Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 27- 47 accessed October 18, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25739231>.

⁹⁰ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publisher, 2014).

significance of this study is underscored by its integration into church ministry. Church leadership, for instance, should actively seek mentors for single fathers within their congregations, recognizing the need and potential for programs that align with the original intent of this study.

Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead state, “In this context, feminist theorists have played a crucial role in highlighting the significance of affect and emotion to critiques of positivism and the presumed role of objectivity in knowledge production.”⁹¹ It is crucial to acknowledge that fathers may not always fully grasp the feminist movement’s dynamics within society, and such acknowledging may sometimes raise concerns that their roles as fathers are being challenged. Issues such as child support, often rooted in feminist ideas, can inadvertently give rise to assumptions about financial support. These assumptions may stem more from a misunderstanding of feminism than from an effort to seek equal rights. Amidst their struggles, single fathers may perceive these opinions as threats to their status as single fathers.

Among the myriad of challenges single fathers face, maintaining healthy relationships with their children stands as a paramount concern. In certain families, maintaining these relationships proves difficult, often due to visitation rights issues. Authorities may monitor or suspend visitation rights for various reasons. However, confident single fathers can navigate such hurdles. Single father ministries play a vital role in guiding these fathers toward a deeper understanding of fatherhood. Given the scope of this thesis project, our group discussions, and the growing prevalence of single fathers. The literature and resources we gathered for the single father ministry at PFBC extend their relevance to many single fathers and their journey toward

⁹¹ Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, “Affecting feminism: Questions of feeling in feminist theory,” *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 2 (August 2012): 115-129, accessed November 16, 2020. <http://fty.sagepub.com/content> DOI: 10.1177/1464700112442635.

personal growth. For instance, single fathers participating in our ministry have benefitted from literature addressing family characteristics and cognitive behaviors inherited by children.

However, the most significant progress became evident when these fathers willingly embraced personal growth and focused on meeting the needs of their children. Moreover, displaying ethical, fair, honest, and professional solutions while collaborating with their peers contributed substantially to the development of the single fathers participating in this research. Building on these principles of growth and shared discourse fortified these single fathers, continuously opening avenues for personal development.

This thesis project also addressed the social experiences of single fathers, analyzing them through a comprehensive literature review and responses to the questionnaire employed in our project. Reflecting on the responses of single fathers' responses alongside the literature revealed the importance of exercising caution when identifying their concerns. By addressing these struggles and concerns head-on, our single father ministry has laid a solid foundation and purpose for the spiritual growth of these fathers. Through accountability, our ministry has empowered single fathers to examine their actions and the underlying reasons, thereby identifying their struggles and charting a path toward overcoming them. The literature review has unearthed a multitude of concepts that support the basis for this research. Although our study did not focus on one specific culture, it sought to raise awareness of the growing trend of single fathers within the church. Moreover, our single father ministry has remained inclusive, extending its welcome to non-members of PFBC. In striving to impart fundamental truths that empower single fathers to navigate their struggles and challenges, our research has also explored the emotional struggles experienced by children when separated from or residing with their fathers.

Additionally, the literature review has significantly contributed to the development of a robust methodology for engaging in private or group discussions with our participants.

Intervention Design

The Action Plan

This qualitative research study employed interviews with willing volunteers to explore their understanding of fatherhood. The research received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and participants were notified of the interviews fifteen days after providing their consent. They were informed about the interview location and health requirements, such as wearing a mask due to COVID-19. The interviewer and each volunteer mutually agreed upon meeting times. The researcher conducted interviews with single fathers individually and in groups. In-person interviews took place at PFBC in Norfolk, Virginia, but flexibility was provided regarding interview methods based on participants' preferences, including telephone, text message, FaceTime, and various social media networks. Participants were informed that the interviews would last between twenty and thirty minutes, and the collected interview information, whether written or recorded, would be used for further analysis later. The interview questions focused on the challenges faced by single fathers and aimed to support their spiritual development, understanding of fatherhood, and relationship with their children.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with the participants two weeks after the initial interview, focusing on their personal growth and emotional progress with their children. These follow-up interviews lasted no more than an hour, considering each participant's willingness to participate in group discussions. The intervention design encouraged single fathers to engage in interactive discussions with their children, prioritize their physical and emotional well-being, and

strive to support their families financially. The ministry also guided participants in identifying personal development needs as parents and understanding the changing trajectories of fatherhood. This interview-based research process of the ministry concluded after two months. Participants were informed that signed consent forms would be securely stored, and private sessions ranged from twenty to thirty minutes. The researcher ensured that access to recorded sessions was password-protected and restricted to the researcher and an assistant. These recordings could potentially be used if research were to continue or resume in the future. Appendix A included fifteen interview questions that guided participants to reflect on single fatherhood without encouraging blame toward the mothers. Group discussions were incorporated when necessary. Participants were allowed to hold private sessions with the children upon request, and if the children were present during an interview, both parents were required to sign a consent form for children under eighteen.

The questions aimed to explore participants' perceptions of single fatherhood and encourage them to consider aspects they may not have previously thought about or considered. Some responses indicated the fathers' desire to uphold spiritual principles of fatherhood according to their beliefs. The questionnaires facilitated personal analysis and provided guidance for decision-making. The results from this research indicated that single fathers recognized the researcher's investment in their emotional well-being and families. The following quote from Norma Cook Everist was emailed to be discussed in the group. "To care is to facilitate not our appearance but learners' imaginations."⁹² The quote encouraged open discussion, allowing participants to share their experiences, explore their commitment to personal growth, and address

⁹² Norma Cook Everist, *The Church As Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 112.

their struggles with family values. The questionnaire and emailed quote helped the single fathers understand the benefits of participating in the study and brought clarity to how the study could impact their lives. Through the ministry, the single fathers set goals to overcome obstacles, such as accepting responsibility, moving past peer pressure, focusing on positive reinforcement, nurturing relationships with their children, and evaluating their development and understanding of fatherhood.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

You Are Not Alone

The participants were provided with names of scholarly books and relevant websites pertaining to the ministry's purpose and objective. These resources and emailed materials encouraged open discussion and helped single fathers comprehend the potential emotional struggles associated with their lack of involvement in their children's lives. The theological foundation of the project guided committed participants toward adopting best practices and recognizing their achievements in their relationships with the children. Insight from Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen's insights were shared during a group discussion: "Clearly expressing an event objectifies the situation, enabling useful reflection on it and potential learning from it."⁹³ The research underscores the importance of expressing events to facilitate reflection and learning, as further discussed with the participants in Chapter Four.

The methodology also allowed for open group discussion among the single fathers without the fear of judgment from their peers. Participants recognized that being a single father entails responsibilities beyond financial support. They realized the need to support their children,

⁹³ Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen, *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 34.

develop leadership skills, and uphold family values. Group discussions commenced with prayer, and the researcher explained the reasons and significance behind this practice. John Ortberg's insight on prayer was shared with the participants, emphasizing its role in alleviating anxiety and promoting peace. John Ortberg states, "Prayer is the single most fundamental spiritual discipline when it comes to putting off anxiety and putting on peace."⁹⁴ The ministry incorporated prayer as a discipline to encourage single fathers to enhance their emotional resilience and commit to prayer in their own terms, extending beyond group discussions. The objective was to contribute to the single fathers' sense of peace in their circumstances and foster more fruitful relationships with their children.

Leadership and the role of a single father were also topics of discussion in group sessions, drawing insight from Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. A quote from the book provided the single fathers with a discussion point: "Your capacity to grow will determine your capacity to lead."⁹⁵ Participants stressed the significance of viewing themselves as leaders and recognized the integration of prayer as a valuable tool for personal growth and leadership development, referencing John Ortberg's wisdom on prayer.

The ministry's design promotes open discussions among single fathers without fear of judgment from their peers. They recognized that being a single father goes beyond financial support and requires support for the children, growth in leadership, and the preservation of family values. The methodology supported participants in expressing their beliefs and raising

⁹⁴ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2010), 124.

⁹⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2007), 45.

questions. It advanced a healthy mental model for single fathers, helping them grow in their responsibilities and practices of fatherhood. According to Mark Trahan and Monit Cheung, “Involved fathers provide practical support in raising children and serve as models for their development.”⁹⁶ This research and its ministry encouraged single fathers to become aware when they downplay the importance of their credibility and, instead, to reassure the children of their moral principles. The ministry also collaborated with the single fathers to establish objectives supporting a paradigm shift in their spiritual discipline. Discussion encouraged them to confront and overcome old and fruitless behavior. *Slaying the Giants in Your Life: You Can Win The Battle and Live Victoriously*⁹⁷ by David Jeremiah helped develop goals to confront struggles and feelings of resentment, guilt, and anger. The ministry facilitates self-reflection, acknowledging spiritual growth and emotional progress during the study. The single fathers could then use this intervention methodology to reassess behavioral factors clouding their better judgment. This methodology also equipped the single fathers to hold each other accountable during group discussions and openly share emotional resolve without concerns about being judged. Openness and truthfulness were fostered, leading to progress in areas requiring spiritual development.

The single fathers' ministry engaged with a selected quote on page ninety-three of *The Complete Single Father: Reassuring Answers to Your Most Challenging Situations*. In the book, Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg state, “The constant juggling act required by parents with kids, work, chores, social life, and more chores is always tricky, but it’s especially

⁹⁶ Mark Trahan and Monit Cheung, “Fathering Behavior within the Context of Role Expectations and Marital Satisfaction: Framework for Studying Fathering Behavior,” *Journal of Family Strengths* 12, no. 1 (Dec. 2012): 1-24, accessed October 11, 2020, https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol12/iss1/7/?utm_source=digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu%2Fjfs%2Fvol12%2Fiss1%2F7&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

⁹⁷ David Jeremiah, *Slaying the Giants in Your Life: You Can Win The Battle and Live Victoriously* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2001).

so when you're a single dad.”⁹⁸ It helped the participants understand the challenges faced in balancing various responsibilities. The participants realized the importance of applying worldviews to their lives and acknowledged the need for emotional control during high-stress situations requiring effective communication as a parent with their children.

The ministry's approach did not seek to assign blame but challenged the single fathers to be blessings to their families and maintain emotional control during unexpected situations. It encouraged them to restrain their emotions and support their spiritual growth. The ministry validated an approach to formulating guidelines for single fathers to confront their struggles. Although their struggles may differ, the guidelines should assist single fathers as they seek an objective that allows them to understand struggles differently than in the past. This undertaking challenged the single fathers but proved necessary to empower critical thinking to arrive at healthy mental and emotional outcomes. It also helped them identify with family values, fatherhood, and practical applications to overcome their struggles. The ministry also supported the goal of justifying qualitative research through the evidence it provided from interviews with single fathers. Compiled information from the interviews revealed the need to address the problem, or the lack of single father ministry in the church, which in turn substantiated the ministry's purpose and the significance of this study.

The methodology employed in this ministry project is intended to advance the knowledge within PFBC regarding the spiritual struggles single fathers face. The methodology and biblical foundation shared in Chapter Two impart to single fathers the essential principles and characteristics of fatherhood. Additionally, it facilitates their personal growth by encouraging them to focus on necessary changes. When called upon to serve as mentors, teachers, and leaders

⁹⁸ Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg, *The Complete Single Father: Reassuring Answers to Your Most Challenging Situations* (Avon, MA: Adams Media Publisher, 2007), 93.

in church activities, single fathers should be willing to serve in ways that align with their spiritual principles and understanding of fatherhood. Furthermore, the methodology aims to equip future ministries at PFBC and other churches to guide single fathers to comprehend the complexities of family values. The scope of the methodology encompasses practical application through literature and resources, which encourage single fathers to explore new approaches to fostering harmony within the family unit. The Apostle Paul, in Colossians in 3:14, emphasizes the significance of love as a unifying force stating, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” The ministry empowers single fathers to cultivate unity through love within their families when promoting their overall development, expansion, and strength as single fathers and fatherhood.

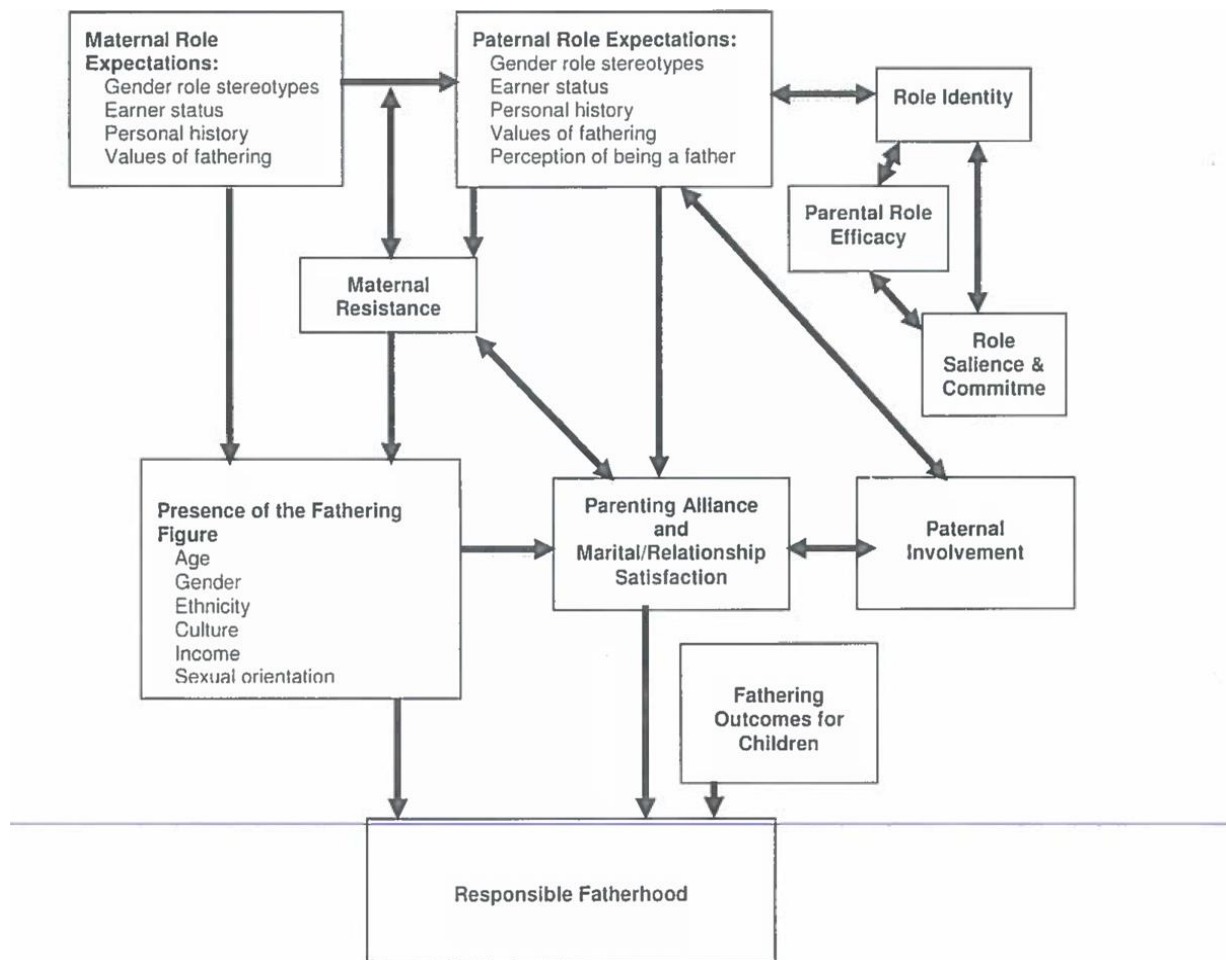
The significance of this project lies in its relevance to those who have overcome adversity and are seeking increased leadership roles as single fathers within the contemporary church. Charles Stanley provides insight into overcoming adversity by stating, “The areas in which you are experiencing the most adversity are the areas in which God is at work.”⁹⁹ During our open discussion, the participants engaged in a thought-provoking debate concerning their relationship with God and their ability to discern the Lord’s intervention amidst adversity. While some participants acknowledged God’s presence in their lives, others had difficulty understanding spiritual principles. Nevertheless, they agree that personal growth can lead to transformative change.

The research methodology devised an interactive framework for discussions based on relevant literature, encouraging independent thinking among single fathers regarding their roles as fathers. Within this framework, the single fathers devised plans to implement the intervention

⁹⁹ Charles Stanley, *How to Handle Adversity* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1989), 11.

design and maintain active involvement with their children while prioritizing their emotional well-being. The literature and resources provided as part of the methodology underscored the importance of bonding with the children to foster commitment and strengthen their relationships. Furthermore, the methodology assisted single fathers in shaping their attitudes toward their new beginning and working toward personal transformation. Despite ongoing challenges, the fathers recognized the need to identify and influence the necessary changes to advance and uphold family values. As Rick Warren said: “Every change involves a loss of some kind. You must let go of old ways in order to experience the new.”¹⁰⁰ The methodology facilitated participants in breaking free from old habits and embracing personal growth in their roles as fathers.

¹⁰⁰ Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publisher, 2002), 220.



“Figure 1. Research Framework for Studying Fathering Behavior”¹⁰¹

This framework explores the development of patterns in socialized behaviors among fathers, shedding light on common responsibilities and challenges they face. It examines financial responsibility and its impact on behavior, recognizing that higher income does not necessarily alleviate emotional struggles. Additionally, it discusses the communication methods employed by single fathers, particularly concerning gender differences. The framework aims to provide a model for accountability in fatherhood.

¹⁰¹ Mark Trahan and Monit Cheung, “Fathering Behavior within the Context of Role Expectations and Marital Satisfaction: Research Framework for Studying Fathering Behavior,” *Journal of Family Strengths* 12, no. 1 (Dec. 2012): 1-24, accessed October 11, 2020,

The methodology used in this research can inform future practices. For example, Ernest T. Stringer proposes, “Established theory ‘drives’ the processes of inquiry, and the hypotheses to be tested are drawn from established theory.”¹⁰² Applying research methods from the single father ministry should inform further and future assessments of single fatherhood. Single fathers should learn to re-evaluate their position as fathers, especially if they become uncommitted to the family. The results from this research are shared from the interviews in Chapter Four. This chapter emphasizes the benefit of transparency during re-evaluation and the support offered by this single father ministry. In these opportunities, single fathers should accept the challenges to identify issues hindering family growth and, as revealed by this research, develop a path toward leadership by confronting previously avoided struggles. The study underscores the importance of inclusivity, supporting both Christian and non-Christian single fathers. Furthermore, all single fathers can benefit from a commitment to personal growth and leadership, even when confronted with ongoing struggles. By embracing their purpose, single fathers can embark on new beginnings.

Based on ministering through a comprehensive communication method, this research supported single fathers with Christian beliefs and those wanting to learn of Christianity. This ministerial approach showed the benefits of an open invitation to participants because all types of single fathers need support, and their input can contribute to the cognitive theory relied on by this study. For example, an emotional gap between single fathers and their children can occur in a family with Christian values and families that do not ascribe to the same values. All single fathers should benefit from accountability, as expressed by the different fathers participating in

¹⁰² Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publisher, 2014), 37.

this study. Therefore, this study's project assisted Christian and non-Christian single fathers, presenting a model for other studies.

Furthermore, all single fathers should commit to growing as fathers, as described in this study, seeking their purpose even when struggles to overcome remain. In *To Know as We Know: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, Parker J. Palmer states, "By this understanding, I not only pursue truth but truth pursues me. I not only grasp to but truth grasps me. I not only know truth but truth knows me."¹⁰³ By accepting their purpose, single fathers can bring about new beginnings.

Hiding in the Shadows

The objective of uncovering hidden emotions single fathers experience opened pathways for discussion during the single father ministry. Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen note that "[t]he process of connecting with the experience of the participants is a step toward deepening the mutual reflection which enriches the learning of all who participate."¹⁰⁴ Peer interactions can support critical thinking, allowing discussions to expose and address struggles that have remained in the shadows. The research for this study provided evidence regarding critical issues that single fathers confront in their daily lives. *Shared Wisdom*¹⁰⁵ by Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen assisted single fathers in participating in the study, helping them learn from each other about the importance of building strong relationships with their children. Please refer to Chapter Four for the content of these interviews.

¹⁰³ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As A Spiritual Journey* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 1993), 59.

¹⁰⁴ Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen, *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 49.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey H. Mahan, Barbara B. Troxell, and Carol J. Allen, *Shared Wisdom: A Guide to Case Study Reflection in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993).

Furthermore, the research philosophy, methodology, theological disciplines, action plan, design, and data collection used in the study influenced participants' opinions and decisions regarding changes needed in their lives.

This study relied on inquiry to address the struggles of single fathers in the church. The ministry's mission and focus emerged from a goal to support single fathers at PFBC. From this research, the ministry established a pattern for formal study to help single fathers identify areas of social behaviors that do not support the moral obligations of fatherhood. The study revealed tendencies for single fathers to struggle in their relationships with their children. These struggles directed group discussion toward various areas of concern and a collective focus on improving their family values. The common ground discussed among the participants revealed the study's potential contribution as qualitative research that can inform other single father ministries. The study also gathered spontaneous reactions from single fathers, allowing the researcher to analyze individual needs. More details will be provided in Chapter Four. Each father needed to understand that their participation in this project could lead to turning away from an inability to see a way out of their emotional struggles.

The study's methodology also drew from organizational theory. According to Gibson Burell and Gareth Morgan, "all theories of organization are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society."¹⁰⁶ The methodology for this study included this philosophy and theory to facilitate functional changes in single fathers' understanding of family values. Moreover, the philosophy emerged as a strategy to pursue variables, and the theory helped construct a model of leadership independent of fatherhood, emphasizing the complexity and status of the different

¹⁰⁶ Gibson Burell and Gareth Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1979). 64.

responsibilities of single fathers. For example, the single father should acknowledge the responsibility to lead the children. Regarding variables, the study's methodology accounted for differences among fathers, such as possibly suppressed emotions of anger and disappointment or the feeling of failing the children.

Furthermore, the methodology used in this ministry prepared participants to grow as new leaders in the church. Phil. 2:4 challenges us all, stating, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others." As a leader, the researcher informed the group of a sincere desire to support the single fathers in their struggles, which also encouraged them to assist one another. This encouragement helped fulfill the purpose of the intervention plan for the study. The study's design included opportunities for single fathers to communicate with their peers in areas where they felt vulnerable. Fathers came to understand that attention to a worldview causes struggles when attempting to cope with their problems. In contrast, attending to concepts in the intervention plan assisted the single fathers by leading them to separate from that worldview by exposing hidden struggles.

The methodology used in this study is not limited to PFBC but applicable to all churches that find this theory helpful. Such churches should tailor their ministries to meet the needs of single fathers in their congregations. This study supports tailored ministry based on the reasons for and core principles behind this thesis project. As in this study, future single father ministries should utilize literature and resources to inform and assist participants. Considering this ministry, leaders of future single father ministries can also consider the benefits of single fathers overcoming a worldview, including equipping single fathers to foster a healthy home environment and achieve emotional growth. As seen in this study, an organized research plan

supports the emotional and personal growth of the single father. Review Chapter Four for the content of these interviews.

In addition, the study aimed to minimize behavior within the group that did not support self-worth. Instead, the researcher guided group discussion to ensure that single fathers became aware of their value, actions, and credibility as a father. Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins share, “When cohesion or a sense of group unity is activated, the trust level will reveal an intimate level of collaboration.”¹⁰⁷ During the ministry project, trust advanced group discussions while allowing participants to freely disclose their struggles and their effects on their relationships with their children. Moreover, according to Maria Letizia Bosoni and Sara Mazzucchelli, “Fatherhood beliefs concern what fathers think about their role and come from stories about what fathers did in the past and what they are capable of doing in the future.”¹⁰⁸ Many, if not all, participants agreed with this insightful reference from this quote, leading to open discussion. Admitting they followed some examples of male family members and their fathers, participants discovered that some but not all examples would further future endeavors. While recalling favorable or non-favorable practices of relatives supported fulfilling, correcting, and establishing desirable outcomes with the children. To reach these outcomes, the participants realized they must first move toward setting personal goals, which emerged through group discussion and personal assessment. The study’s intervention guided the single fathers to set goals based on their unique opinions concerning their choices and desires to be better fathers. Once they invested in individualized plans, communication involved revealing unknown struggles. Even considering a

¹⁰⁷ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 253.

¹⁰⁸ Maria Letizia Bosoni and Sara Mazzucchelli, “Researching Fathers through Surveys: Methodological Challenges” Esther Dermott and Caroline (eds.), *Fathers, Families, and Relationships: Researching Everyday Lives* (44-72), (Bristol University Press, 2019) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/doi:10.2307/j.ctt21kk24p.9>.

concern that seemed to be a non-issue can push inquisitive participants to learn what they overlooked. This step in the plan helped the single fathers avoid repeating past mistakes.

Single father ministries should prepare single fathers to learn and discover how to develop and fulfill a proper understanding of fatherhood. Jack W. Hayford states, “Revelation’ refers to being given the insight and understanding of *how that truth can be applied* to your life.”¹⁰⁹ This enlightenment can alter a single father’s thinking, turning it toward a faith-driven purpose to determine the best path that serves the family. The intervention plan inherent in the single father ministry for this study intertwined Christianity, social commitment, spiritual growth, and faith beliefs, identifying correlations for the best qualities and practices for single fathers. Future single father ministers should consider these varying bases. According to Gibson Burell and Gareth Morgan, “All theories of organization are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society.”¹¹⁰ These ideas reflect a general principle in organizational theory that can support research concerning the single father’s growing knowledge of fatherhood.

Understanding fatherhood extends beyond expectations that a father must provide a roof over their children’s heads, clothes on their backs, and food on the table. For those children who do not live with their fathers, other opportunities arise for fathers to support the family, as revealed in this research for single fathers who reinvented their ways of thinking. When interviewed in Chapter Four, for example, single fathers realized that instead of going straight home from work, even if they knew about a parent-teacher conference, attending the conference shows support for the children. An action that could seem inconvenient would encourage the

¹⁰⁹ Jack W. Hayford, *Grounds for Living: Sound Teaching for Sure Footing in Growth & Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Book Publisher, 2001), 31.

¹¹⁰ Gibson Burell and Gareth Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life* (Hawthorne CA: GF Book Inc., 1979), 64.

father and show the children that even though they are single, their father wants to develop their family values and relationships. Therefore, single fathers who participated in the ministry planned to apply what they learned from this study to their daily lives. The research project positively influenced them by encouraging improved moral responsibility. This research project also guided the single fathers to identify tendencies as positive or needing improvement, strengthening their understanding of fatherhood.

While supporting the right understanding of fatherhood, the study discouraged single fathers from regressing in areas that contributed to their struggles. The fathers committed to growing based on personal goals. They advanced their knowledge of moral credentials through this methodology and a spiritual and relational outlook on fathering their children. As a group, the fathers expressed a broad understanding of the literature. As the study continued, group discussion inspired the fathers to share their perspectives and personal experiences with their children, positive or negative. According to Sean E. Brotherson, David C. Dollahite, and Alan J. Hawkins, “While research has suggested that quality fathering does matter to the identity and well-being of both men and children developmentally, the patterns of how men care for children and those themes and behaviors that seem most important to men in the work they do as fathers are still being discovered.”¹¹¹ While knowledge about single fathers’ methodologies may remain a mystery, the ministry’s progress appeared through addressing their struggles and their

¹¹¹ Sean E. Brotherson, David C. Dollahite and Alan J. Hawkins, “*Generative Fathering and the Dynamics of Connection between Fathers and Their Children*,” 3, no1 (Winter 2005): 1-28, accessed June 2, 2022, <https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=15&sid=25f28a43-363f-441c-9ca8-d8b93ce9616d%40redis&bquery=single+parenting+ethic&bdata=JmRiPXBkaCZkYj1wemgmZGI9cHhoJmRiPXBzeWgmZGI9bGRwc3kmY2xpMD1SViZjbHYwPVkmdHlwZT0xJnNlYXJjaE1vZGU9UmVsZXZhbmn5JnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl>

commitment to fatherhood. This approach displayed caring behavior that surfaced as a desire to maintain relationships with their children.

For the fathers' personal development, the researcher explored various developing theories of fatherhood. According to Sean E. Brotherson, David C. Dollahite, and Alan J. Hawkins, "Theoretically, the linkages between connection as a component of generative work in fathering and other constructs such as father presence, attachment, or elements of father involvement are still developing."¹¹² This ongoing development points to the need for continued analysis as supported by this study concerning single fathers. A single father's self-perception during the interview process in Chapter Four is a point of reference for understanding their behavioral patterns and how others, mainly the children, perceive the father. This charge to look inward assisted single fathers in the ministry as they discussed learning how to assess their actions to avoid worsening their struggles, such as unproductive relationships with their children. After personal reflection, the fathers could learn from others, using group discussion to share steps they had taken for progress and reexamine their responses to the questionnaire given to the group. This approach showed the benefit of assisting each other to encourage wiser decision-making for single fathers. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves state, "The first step is to admit to yourself that even the most stable, trusted facets of your life are not completely under your control."¹¹³ Therefore, personal reflection initiates the positive impact single fathers can have on

¹¹² Sean E. Brotherson, David C. Dollahite and Alan J. Hawkins, "Generative Fathering and the Dynamics of Connection between Fathers and Their Children," 3, no1 (Winter 2005): 1-28, accessed June 2, 2022, <https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=15&sid=25f28a43-363f-441c-9ca8-d8b93ce9616d%40redis&bquery=single+parenting+ethic&bdata=JmRiPXBkaCZkYj1wemgmZGI9cHhoJmRiPXBzeWgmZGI9bGRwc3kmY2xpMD1SViZjbHYwPVkmdHlwZT0xJnNlYXJjaE1vZGU9UmVsZXZhbmN5JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl>

¹¹³ Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, (San Diego, Ca. TalenSmart Inc., 2009), 133.

the lives of their sons, daughters, or others as they admit they need to learn and grow with the family's best interest in mind.

During the study, the single fathers also learned to acknowledge emotional growing pains through group discussions. This research aimed to change single fathers' viewpoints about their circumstances and to help them process their thoughts in less emotionally strenuous ways. The fathers sought emotional progress through group discussions with their peers because the research design relied on this social construct. Research has shown that single fathers improve and grow from peer interaction, such as through a willingness to stay involved with their children, addressing behavioral concerns at school or home, and spending quality time with their children.

An Overcomer

The outcomes of the ministry project are intended to continue aiding single fathers as they develop concrete reasoning based on past, present, and future actions. The ministry's goal should be to equip fathers to acknowledge areas in their lives that contribute to personal struggles. Single fathers should have continued access to the literature and resources used during the ministry, reminding them of the value and reliability of this material and empowering them to change how they view their contributions to their families and strengthen their family values. While this research primarily focused on single fathers, it also developed notions of spiritual leadership for the home and church. Leadership development occurs through a learning process in which a father identifies with fatherhood while establishing leadership responsibilities and qualities. Therefore, the study of single fathers advanced by encouraging them to identify struggles that hindered their growth as leaders. For example, single fathers can overcome struggles by actively participating in their children's lives, such as attending parent-teacher

conferences, engaging in sport activities, assisting with homework, and spending quality time with their children. In doing so, they serve as leaders as well as parents.

This study's ministry project engaged single fathers to help them overcome hidden struggles, confront their issues, and grow as fathers. The methodology challenged single fathers to focus on overcoming one struggle at a time. The diversity also facilitated relevant discussions, sharing of struggles in group settings, and a collective willingness to change for the benefit of their family. As leaders of their families, both single and married fathers have an obligation to learn from various solutions presented in this research and the provided resources. These resources informed the participants, enhancing their theological understanding and bridging a gap between cultural and generational differences, as observed through group discussions. Additionally, the resources instilled confidence in the group to proceed during discussion time. Biblical hermeneutics supported the analytical process of compiling resources from historical literature and theories on fatherhood. The teaching from this thesis project should help single fathers and leaders of single father ministries recognize the essential importance of single fathers' contributions to their families. A proper understanding of fatherhood, grounded in theology, emerged from the study, emphasizing possibilities and transformative needs. In future single-father ministries, this grounding has the potential to enrich participants' lives as they progress together and encourage one another to develop strong relationships with their children.

Furthermore, the implementation plan in the study included practicing accountability and encouraging single fathers to accept areas in their lives that require improvement. John Ortberg states, "Life is not about any particular achievement or experience. The most important task of your Life is not what you do, but who you become."¹¹⁴ Moreover, the study's aim is for single

¹¹⁴ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan Zondervan Publisher, 2010), 13.

fathers to understand who they should become by setting aside worldviews of single fatherhood and monetary success, as participants' purposes and goals may differ. However, the single fathers expressed the common goal of strengthening family values.

The ministry project for this thesis encouraged single fathers to remain proactive in their emotional development as fathers and in their relationships with their children. Strengthening emotional development requires single fathers to conform to personalized and sound principles that they apply to their role as leaders and providers. The emotional development should enable single fathers to identify with their concept of leadership without diminishing their expectations of fatherhood. By exploring their characteristics during emotional conflicts, single father can realize areas for personal growth regardless of their age. Peter G. Northouse writes, "It is the relationship dimension that implicitly suggests how the content dimension should be interpreted, since the content alone can be interpreted in different ways."¹¹⁵ Inherently, learning is a continuous process.

¹¹⁵ Peter G. Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, Ca. Sage Publications, Inc., 2012), 176.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The mission and vision of this thesis project recognized the need for a single father ministry at PFBC, with the aim of extending its impact to various churches lacking ministries for single fathers. The project relied on the practical applications of *The Single Father in the Christian Church and Their Struggles*, which will be discussed later in this chapter through participant testimonies. Data, scholarly books, websites, and resources mentioned in previous chapters supported group discussion during the project. Interviews and a questionnaire facilitated qualitative analysis to create a descriptive resource for this study. The collecting of information from eight willing participants and gathering resources formed the basis of this study. For the sake of privacy, participants are referred to as Mr. A and Mr. B (actual names omitted). Their experiences highlighted the church's failure to recognize the absence of a single fathers' ministry.

During the summary process, the researcher avoided emphasizing concepts irrelevant to these groups. For instance, these groups may not wish to address concerns related to young children in families with single fathers or the children's behavioral issues at home, school, or in their neighborhoods. Additionally, the researcher refrained from discussing legal matters or court proceedings, as they are not qualified to provide legal advice. To argue the results found locally in comparison to national statistics discussed later in this chapter the following argument is presented. These statistics serve the purpose of reflecting the growing trend of single fathers in our society. It should be noted that these statistics are not directly related to the increasing trend of single fathers in the church. They are used only to support an opinion relevant to this research.

The statistics below present results from the literature review showing outcomes from nationwide studies on a much larger scale than the scope of this research project. Additionally, while this research assessed whether participants professed church membership and held religious beliefs, the nationwide studies do not. Therefore, the national statistics may include volunteers without religious affiliation or church membership. However, this research revealed localized statistics to raise awareness regarding the ministry's role in addressing the connections between fatherhood and spiritual leadership. Furthermore, the localized statistics underscore the critical need for establishing a ministry for single fathers in the Christian church. Ultimately, the framework should contribute to the development, rationale, and forward-thinking of ministries centered around the theme of The Struggles of Single Fathers in the Christian Church.

Statistics

Large-scale studies have revealed low participation in parental training. According to David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, "A recent systematic review found that at least 25% of parents in need of behavioral parent training (BPT) do not enroll or engage in treatment when offered, and of those who do initially engage, 26% prematurely drop out, leaving fewer than half of the parents who had been identified as likely to benefit from BPT actually receiving appropriate treatment."¹¹⁶ Without addressing participants' spiritual needs, BPT fails to consider the whole parent, which may have contributed to low enrollment and dropout rates. Therefore, in this study, participants' spiritual needs took center stage, especially due to their professed spiritual challenges and aspirations related to single fatherhood. Including spiritual needs in this study encouraged participating single fathers to confront emotional struggles and potential

¹¹⁶ David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, "Fathering Through Change (FTC) intervention of single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problem behaviors," *Development and Psychopathology* 31, no. 5 (December 2019) 1801-1811 accessed April 12, 2021. <https://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com>.

misconceptions about fatherhood stemming from societal expectations. Such stigmas may have also influenced low participation in the study relying on BPT. Overcoming emotional stigma brought on by external expectations became possible within a ministerial research setting.

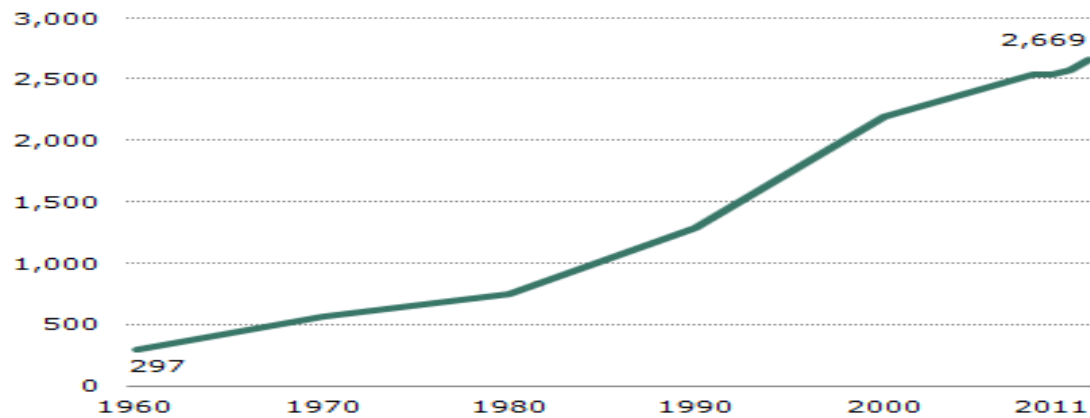
This study recognized commonalities among single fathers as they navigated the transitional phases of fatherhood, with both their successes and shortcomings. The study then explored how to utilize resources and literature to encourage participant collaboration, focusing on spiritual aspect within the context of Christian education. The theme of this study, *The Single Father in the Christian Church and Their Struggles* does not encompass an exhaustive set of objectives. However, it laid the groundwork for the ministerial methodology of this study.

Nationally, the number of single fathers has increased. Gretchen Livingston reports on the increase of single fathers, discussing that a “record 8% of households with minor children in the United States are headed by a single father, up from just over 1% in 1960, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey data.”¹¹⁷ Figure 2, included in Livingston’s study, illustrate the upward trend of single fatherhood over several decades: The graph initially identifies a 1% increase in single father household beginning in 1960, totaling three hundred thousand households. According to the Pew Research Center Graph, this figure increased to 8% from 1960 to 2011, marking a rise of two point six million single father households.

¹¹⁷ Gretchen Livingston, “The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960,” *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends* accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/07/02/the-rise-of-single-fathers/>.

Rising Number of Single Father Households, 1960-2011

In thousands



Notes: Based on household heads ages 15 and older who have children younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who are married but their spouse is absent and those who are cohabiting with a non-marital partner are classified as single fathers.

Source: Pew Research analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey (IPUMS)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2. Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends

For the single fathers reported on from 1960-2011, the graph does not provide insights into their varying experiences. Harry Freeman, Lisa A. Newland, and Diana D. Coyl suggest, “Barriers, in turn, may shape parents’ beliefs about their capacity to become involved and to positively affect their child’s development.”¹¹⁸ The graph’s purpose does not pertain to these barriers. However, single fathers need to overcome barriers and address complex issues in their relationships with their children and their pursuit of establishing family values, highlighting the importance of research on single father ministry.

In this research study and its ministerial context, the questionnaire explored faith beliefs and how they shape participants’ understanding of parenting roles. The questions covered the

¹¹⁸ Harry Freeman, Lisa A. Newland, and Diana D. Coyl, “Father beliefs as a mediator between contextual barriers and father involvement,” *Early Child Development and Care* 178, no. 7 (December 2008): 803-819 accessed December 7, 2020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430802352228>.

potential for single fathers to fulfill fatherhood objectives by growing in parental responsibility. Responding truthfully to the questionnaire (see Appendix A) was crucial as participants evaluated their strengths and weaknesses. Responses on the questionnaire supported group interactions.

When asked, “Is having a relationship with Jesus Christ helpful? If so, why? If not, why not?” some participants did not fully grasp the personal impact of having a relationship with Jesus Christ. This lack of understanding led to productive discussions within the group. Believing participants refrained from imposing their beliefs on non-believers, fostering open and respectful discussions. Occasionally, participants found it challenging to separate their emotions from a worldview on single fathers, resulting in occasional verbal confrontation. However, some participants readily acknowledged that the ministry offered them the opportunity to strengthen their relationships with Jesus Christ during their struggles.

When asked to “Explain what necessary steps you will take to maintain or rekindle a relationship with the children?” Participants conveyed their understanding of the importance of nurturing their relationships with their children while striving to set aside personal struggles or disagreements with other family members. Simultaneously, they used group discussions to provide emotional support to one another, enhancing their comprehension of family values. Participants also responded to the following question, “How should a single father surmise the scope of fatherhood and its reconstruction in his life?” Participants sought to rationalize this question for various reasons, including living arrangements and financial considerations. However, this group discussion concluded that fathers should remain actively involved in their children’s lives drawing from lessons learned from experiences. Participants also responded to a question about the most important accomplishment they learned from this ministry. “Explain in

detail what accomplishments are most important in learning from this ministry?” The participants expressed that they had gained insight into tendency to let emotions dictate their actions. Identifying these moments through group discussion in this ministry significantly helped them and provided clear guidance for future emotional struggles.

Regarding their involvement in the research, participants explained their reason for agreeing to this research. Most single fathers participated out of curiosity, while some appreciated the teachings. However, they all agreed that the ministry recognized the essential importance of single fathers and fatherhood. Participants’ responses also delved into their relationships with their children: “Explain in detail if there is a relationship with the children? If yes, what kind and why? Is the relationship close by phone or via social media? If not, why? These questions is to search your heart, not to blame others. Some fathers reported having strong relationships with their children, while others admitted their relationships were not strong, as discussed later in this chapter in the context of groups A and B.

The remaining questions asked by the researcher and the subsequent discussion in this chapter exploring groups A and B include participants’ testimonies, further sharing their thoughts and opinions based on the lessons learned from this research.

- In detail, how do you view the role of a single father?
- How do you handle the emotional struggles as a single father and provider?
- Explain in detail how peer pressure influenced your relationship with the children, positive or negative?
- Explain in detail what positive or negative relationship was there with your father?
- How did your childhood influence you as a single father?
- What experiences of fatherhood did you learn as a child?

- What family values come from having a relationship with the children?
- As a single father, what would be done differently?
- Explain if this ministry can have relevance in learning the characteristics of fatherhood.

These questions do not cover all the concerns that single fathers experience, but they served as an introduction to a ministerial form of research. Helen A. Mendes points out, “The role of the single father is not yet institutionalized in American culture. Consequently, any man who attempts to perform that role must do so without role clarity.”¹¹⁹ While this study could not rely on established standards of information related to the role of the single father, it drew inferences from the responses and discussions of single fathers participating in the ministry. The need for this study became evident because a systematic study has not emerged from the church to assist single fathers as they navigate their social climate and spiritual development. Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor state, “Dating posed a problem for 57.5 percent of the fathers. Twenty-two fathers (55.0 percent) considered business trips a problem [*sic*] area while the pursuance of job possibilities [*sic*] were troublesome for 45.0 percent.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, such a correlation attracted participants’ interest in distinguishing between a worldview and a Christian educational perspective as they apply to fatherhood.

According to David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, the principles should then stand on their own to provide a pattern for success: “These components lead to less conflict, greater

¹¹⁹ Helen A. Mendes, “The Family Coordinator,” *National Council on Family Relations* 25, no. 4 (October 1976): 439-444 accessed December 8, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/582858>.

¹²⁰ Rita D. Gasser and Claribel M. Taylor, “Role Adjustment of Single Parent Fathers with Dependent Children,” *National Council of Family Relations* 25, no. 4 (October 1976) 397-401 accessed April 16, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/582853>.

involvement for fathers, and reduced litigation. Eligibility included having been divorced or separated within the past 24 months and a focal child between ages 4 and 12 years.”¹²¹

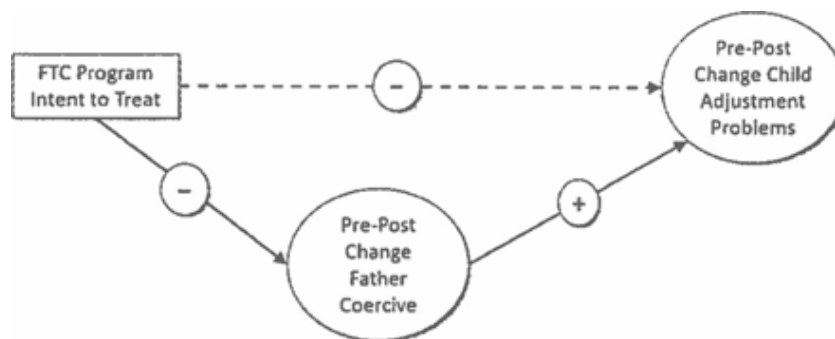


Figure 3. Mediation hypothesis for FTC effectiveness evaluation.

Figure 3. Development and Psychopathology

This project provides an example of these eight participants who shared their experiences from different perspectives and struggles as single fathers. They agreed that their situations differed. Some participants struggled with anger issues, disappointment, and the feeling of failure. However, according to statistics provided by Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Molly Rohal, single parenting has become increasingly common: “The decline in children living in two-parent families has been offset by an almost threefold increase in those living with just one parent—typically the mother. Fully one-fourth (26%) of children younger than eighteen are now living with a single parent, up from 9% in 1960 and 22% in 2000.”¹²² The results from this study, when compared to the national average, are not equal when considering the national average in contrast to the eight participants in this research.

¹²¹ David S. DeGarmo and Jeremy A. Jones, “Fathering Through Change (FTC) intervention of single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problem behaviors,” *Development and Psychopathology* 31, no. 5 (December 2019) 1801-1811 accessed February 9, 2021. <https://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com>.

¹²² Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Molly Rohal, “Parenting in America: Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation,” *Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends* (December 2015): 1-77 accessed May 8, 2021 <https://pewsocialtrends.org>.

Single Family Homes

Some participants in this project's study were married, others were unmarried, one lived with a partner, and another single father had never married or lived with their children's mother(s). Major themes for the once married and unmarried included the following challenges: growing apart, breakdown in communication, financial struggles leading to arguments, and a decline in their intimate relationships. The single father participants who had experienced neither marriage nor living with the mother of their children explained the reason for this outcome in group discussion. A summary of the participants' relational experiences with their children's mothers is expressed below in groups A and B.

Mr. A1 comes from a family with two sons and has worked for a private company for more than fifteen years. Mr. A1 had married his wife ten years prior, and their sons are seven and nine. Resentment sometimes consumed Mr. A1's conversations, which occurred for all participants when looking back at their past, their current financial situations, and lifestyle changes. Mr. A1 expressed experiencing a slow decline in the marital relationship and found it hard to explain, not knowing how or when it began.

Participants in the group also shared reasons for living together but remaining unmarried. Some participants explained that their relationships suffered due to complacent attitudes. Relationships with their children's mothers declined as intimate encounters declined, and they did not invest in maintaining lines of communication and fellowship. Paul Pettit shares the benefits of avoiding complacency and maintaining relationships: "Purposeful individuals are able to regulate their behavior by comparing behavioral choices to long-term values and goals."¹²³

¹²³ Paul Pettit, *Foundation of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 2008), 151.

Without purposefully regulating behaviors, parents damage family values, which occurred in participants' relationships, as expressed in their narratives about pulling away from each other.

Mr. A2 comes from a large family of five. Mr. A2 had worked for an independent contractor for ten years, been married for twenty years, and fathered three children, two sons and one daughter, ages seventeen, sixteen, and twelve. Adjusting to a single lifestyle and finalizing a divorce brought on a rollercoaster of emotions with highs and lows, as expressed in group discussion. Mr. A2 came to understand that hiding these emotions did not show an act of masculinity but a false means of disconnecting from personal struggles. Mr. A2 believed in the importance of remaining in the marriage until the children had grown. Surprisingly, the other participants did not support those actions. They felt Mr. A2 had adopted a façade in the presence of the children, so they could not recognize the problems in the marriage. The study showed that for Mr. A2, accepting the predicted outcome of divorce and separation sooner would have benefited the family. Parker J. Palmer states, "If we can know only what is available to our sense and our logic, then reality is reduced to those narrow terms."¹²⁴ At the time, Mr. A2 placed their family in a position that seemed to fulfill personal needs. The group discussed this action as an unhealthy response to the declining marriage. A pattern developed during group discussions during the study. The group, to their surprise, developed a serious attitude and did not gloss over each other's struggles. They respected each other's concerns and exhibited efforts to learn from each other and this research.

Mr. A3 is from a family of three and has held various jobs but was working for an independent contractor. Having lived with his wife for thirteen years, the two married seven

¹²⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publisher, 1993), 12.

years before their divorce. Mr. A3 has a ten-year-old daughter and now struggles when coming home from work, knowing the apartment is empty. Additionally, Mr. A3 confessed to trying to adjust to not receiving a greeting from his daughter when entering the home. Mr. A3's responses implied having a strong, close relationship with the daughter. However, being subjected to intervention by the court, Mr. A3 faces visitation restrictions. Mr. A3 restrained from placing blame but shared disappointment about the coming years in the daughter's life and being unable to be physically present daily. At times, the discussion made participants challenged to hold back their emotions, which occurred as Mr. A3 shared his story. The thesis project supported single fathers with literature and resources to advance their understanding of fatherhood, including the varying emotions single fathers inevitably encounter. According to Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, "Processing the emotional baggage and cleaning it out is paramount to healing from a divorce."¹²⁵ Moreover, sharing in the group allowed participants to release their frustrations among their peers, supporting spiritual growth.

Mr. A4 is from a family with two children, a brother and a sister. He has been employed at his present job for twenty-five years. He has been married for twenty years and is a father to two daughters and one son, ages twenty-two, twenty, and eighteen. Mr. A4 is also a grandfather of two. Participating in group discussions raised many questions for Mr. A4 about the marriage decline. Blame surfaced in the discussions, as well as the struggle of denial, which showed that Mr. A4 carried a heavy burden of guilt. Mr. A4 was the oldest man in the group but identified with the causes of other participants' divorces, such as a breakdown in communication, financial difficulties, and a decline in relational intimacy. Mr. A4's participation helped participants face these issues and reflect on best practices for children and grandchildren. The single fathers

¹²⁵ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling: An Indispensable Tool for Helping People with Their Problems* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2011), 297.

struggled to put their pasts behind them, deal with broken marriages, understand separation from their children, and overcome their disappointments.

To overcome disappointment, single fathers must acknowledge a new beginning with an open and optimistic attitude. Self-serving showed as a defense mechanism for Mr. A4 until the discussion turned to responsibility and accountability. Mr. A4's coping mechanism had been to focus on fatherhood before the divorce. Considering the factors that contributed to the divorce proved to be difficult. Mr. A4 should have acknowledged his responsibility in the divorce, no matter how small or great. During the ministry's duration, Mr. A4 adjusted former views and adopted a focused perspective on single fatherhood derived from the literature and resources addressed during group discussions. Although challenging, this change underscored the importance of strengthening relationships with the children and the importance of strong family values.

The willingness to change and accept single fatherhood becomes a struggle while seeking to maintain a fruitful relationship with the children. When the single father faces their significant lifestyle change, they empower their children, providing perspective on relationships and life challenges. The participants described in group A agreed that their commitment to this ministry exposed subtle issues and deficient emotional restraint, both of which impeded spiritual growth. The study revealed the necessity of spiritual support from the church in a group setting to guide single fathers through their hidden struggles. Emotionally, they agreed that their attention spans while listening to the Word of God in the form of sermons suffered because their circumstances of attending the same church as the children's mother became a distraction. Equally important, group A agreed with the need for the church to engage in a spiritual ministry supporting single fathers.

Mr. A4 agreed that, even as a single father, learning how to respond to disappointment could enhance interactions with the children. Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg state, “As fathers we have to set an example of self-control and we always have to take into consideration the feelings of our little ones because it’s not their fault ever.”¹²⁶ Group A’s members showed evidence in the discussions that they learned to circumvent self-centered behavior for their good and the children’s emotional development.

In Group B, participants are discussed in two phases. Mr. B1, Mr. B2, and Mr. B3 are unmarried and once lived with their wives. Mr. B4 experienced neither living with the mothers of the children nor marriage.

Mr. B1 an independent contractor specializing in lawn and gardening work and various home improvements, has two children—a son and a daughter aged seven and six, respectively. He dated the mother of the children for three years before cohabitating but remaining unmarried for seven years. During the group discussion, Mr. B1 disclosed that their problems stemmed from a lack of trust, long working hours, and insufficient time devoted to the family. They also shared their experiences of separating from the mother and other relational issues. Mr. B1’s experience highlighted a common concern within group B, the prospect of getting married.

Mr. B1 had adopted a worldview regarding marriage, believing that living together equates to being married. Some group members noted that Mr. B1’s explanation seemed weak, potentially avoiding the question due to a lack of commitment to marriage. Nonetheless, Mr. B1 accepted their choice about marriage. When discussing his children, Mr. B1 emphasized the priority of remain as active as possible in their lives. He expressed an initiative that aligned with the intervention plan for this project, which encouraged physical presence with the children for

¹²⁶ Elaine Fantle Shimberg and Michael Shimberg, *The Complete Single Father: Reassuring Answers to Your Most Challenging Situation* (Avon, MA: Adams Media Publisher, 2007), 63.

all participants. To interact with his children, Mr. B1 utilized various communication methods, including FaceTime, Skype, the internet, and other means. These initiatives inspired other participants and prompted them to re-evaluating their own communications strategies with their children.

Mr. B2, an only child who had worked for a private corporation and owned his own house, shared his experiences as the father of two sons age ten and eight. Although the children's mother lived separately, they had cohabited for ten years for convenience and to reduce expenses. Mr. B2 revealed that both parents had struggled with desiring attention from each other after the births of the children, which they recognized as the cause of their separation. During discussions about the children, some group members perceived Mr. B2 as self-centered, leading to the observation that he needed to prioritize his children well-being. The group observation had a positive impact on him.

Mr. B3 a construction worker from a family of four, had lived with the mother of his two daughters age nine and eight for eight years. During the group discussion, Mr. B3 demeanor became stern and seemed as if he had something to prove. The group observed his harsh and arrogant tone which they speculated might have affected his home life. They asked him if he had ever hit the mother, to which he responded with a quick "No." However, when questioned about the cause of his separation from the children, Mr. B3 admitted to being domineering. He acknowledged that his attitude had led to their separation, court proceedings, visitation rights, and financial responsibilities. The group perceived his actions as stemming from self-serving mindset, and Mr. B3 expressed remorse about the state of his relationship with his daughters. This experience highlighted the need for single fathers to seek change and best practices in fatherhood. Reflecting on their struggles, participants considered a quote from Jayme Albin and

Eileen Bailey that states, “Taking the time to analyze what you are thinking helps to identify negative thinking. However, core beliefs are harder to identify as they are hidden below layers of problematic thoughts.”¹²⁷ The group contemplated this quote in silence, acknowledging their own challenges. With the group’s support, Mr. B3 began to reason without regret or remorse, demonstrating a willingness to do what he could to maintain a healthy relationship with the daughters. Emotional responses from single fathers during group discussions sometimes provoked unexpected reactions from participants, resulting in splits within the group due to differing opinions. These differences often stemmed from varying understandings and beliefs about the role of Christianity in fatherhood or the challenges of meeting child support obligations.

In the event that a father’s work slows down, a layoff could occur, preventing him from meeting financial responsibilities. Mr. B4 can be considered a free spirit. With seventeen years of experience in ship repair industry, he had never been married and did not live with the mothers of his children. He faced legal requirements but felt free to come and go as desired. While sharing with the group, Mr. B4’s conversation implied irresponsibility. He also conveyed an enjoyment of his social life, creating the impression that he did not want to invest more in his children. His sons were nine, ten, and thirteen years old. However, Mr. B4’s agreement to participate in this research suggested that he might be open to a change in direction.

All participants expressed some level of denial regarding their relationships, but for Mr. B4’s denial appeared particularly strong. Nevertheless, he found common ground with other participants in recognizing the importance of financial responsibility. Like the other, Mr. B4 shared his emotional struggles but stressed his concerns about financial responsibility. During

¹²⁷ Jayme Albin and Eileen Bailey, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (New York, New York: Penguin Group Inc. 2014), 38.

group discussions, participants emphasized the need for Mr. B4 to be accountable in his children's lives. They also asked him if he showed Mr. B4 if he showed favoritism toward one child over another, prompting him to reflect on the complexities in his life and the challenges of being a single father. With encouragement from the group Mr. B4 identified behavioral patterns that required attention. As Mikiyasu Hakoyama states, "It is still important for fathers, regardless of their personality traits, to be aware of the effect of these characteristics and consciously try to act accordingly."¹²⁸ Mr. B4 began learning to understand the value of his son's perceptions of him and acknowledged the need to make changes that better aligned with family values. From this understanding, Mr. B4 articulated his desired outcome for each son: building a closer relationship, growing together as father and son, and bonding through healthy family values.

The researcher shared literature quoted from scholarly books or websites such as the one above to discuss during group discussion. The literature helped participants engage with their past and current thinking about commitments and enhanced their learning experiences from this ministry. Participants expressed progress in accepting the existence of struggles they needed to leave in the past, as well as the responsibility to change their spiritual perceptions of fatherhood. While acknowledging their faults, these single fathers also recognized how their behaviors had affected emotional and spiritual relationships with their children.

Honest reflection in group discussions encouraged participants as they made progress. Some questions during the discussion did not originate from the study's questionnaire but applied to the single father's understanding of fatherhood. Nevertheless, the questionnaire served an essential purpose. Its questions allowed participants to revisit their initial responses enabling

¹²⁸ Mikiyasu Hakoyama, "Fathering Styles: Qualities Children Expect in Their Fathers," *Marriage and Family Review* 56, no. 5 (February 2020): 391-424 accessed April 2, 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2020.1726851>.

them to understand changes in their thinking that occurred during the ministry duration. This process proved helpful to the participants as they acknowledged how their understanding had evolved from the initial responses to the answers on the questionnaire.

Testimonies

Some single fathers could struggle to understand the positive benefits demonstrated in examples provided through literature and resources on fatherhood. Forgetting these examples could cost them their peace of mind. Mr. A1 and Mr. A4 displayed sensitivities to their weakness. However, while Mr. A2 and Mr. A3 seemed to grasp the importance of transformational moments, they rejected them when these moments did not fulfill their needs to control their situations. Consequently, being in control became a distraction for these single fathers.

Some fathers in group A wrestled with controlling when they could visit their children, how often they could visit, and how visits could occur without day or time restrictions. They also grappled with implications surrounding the financial support of the family. For Mr. A2 and Mr. A3, involvement in the court system and its removal of parental control became a distraction. As a result, both Mr. A1 and A4 agreed on the benefit of not being involved with the court system, and they both preferred their situations after hearing the struggles of their fellow group members. They also agreed that having the opportunity to remain involved in their children's lives yet neglecting to uphold that responsibility as a single father would be regrettable.

The results show that Group A learned to a greater extent than Group B that choices do matter, not only for personal gain but also to acknowledge their struggles. Group A realized that becoming sensitive to fatherhood dynamics means making mistakes because doing so promotes learning. Group A also concurred that the goals differ for single fathers regarding relationships

with their children, and maintaining healthy relationships proves challenging as a single parent. However, setting sound goals allows single fathers to recognize the necessity of change because it instills purpose and guidance for the children in association with family values.

Mr. A2, Mr. A3, and Mr. A4 mentioned unique needs related to being fathers of daughters. As stated by Michael Byron Smith, “Father-daughter relationships are powerful and unique, which can be either good or bad. No one has the ear of a young woman like her father.”¹²⁹ Participants with daughters in group A shared the value of setting an example because the qualities a daughter observes in her father profoundly affect her future relationships. Additionally, those who had daughters in group A shifted their viewpoints during discussions. They came to recognize their flaws as single fathers. These fathers also became concerned about strengthening their bonds with their daughters. They expressed desires to support their daughters (and sons) through the transitions of separation and divorce to bolster family values during adverse events. Group A’s remorse for their children’s disappointment about the broken marriages revealed valuable takeaways. Nevertheless, whether married or not, one factor summarized the experience of these single fathers: they tended to feel judged because of neglectful circumstances concerning the children. However, the fathers in group A mutually appreciated the ministry’s objective to encourage them to remain proactive concerning their relationships with their children.

In contrast, the fathers in group B needed to believe in themselves, a paramount need in achieving positive outcomes as a single father. Group B expressed the necessity of building harmonious relationships with their children, based not on living arrangements but on accountability and responsibility. This desire emanated from fundamental principles of a father’s

¹²⁹ Michael Byron Smith, *The Power of Dadhood: How to Become the Father Your Child Needs* (Fresno, CA: Familius Publications, 2015), 175.

love for the children and did not revolve around buying expensive gifts, clothes, and toys but rather focused on the children's spiritual development.

Participants in group B needed to understand how their children viewed them. Mr. B1 did not want to be seen as someone with visitation rights or always bearing gifts. On the contrary, Mr. B1's testimony revealed a desire to be seen as a person who models family values. Mr. B1 believed this model stemmed from classroom pedagogy. However, Mr. B1 also saw value in the children's narratives, understanding that their perspectives could promote new avenues of learning. Mr. B1's willingness contributed to understanding family problems. As Ira Shor says, "Problem-posing does not set itself against subject matter, scholarly knowledge, or intellectual passion. It seeks empowering formats for the study of any theme."¹³⁰ Open problem-posing allowed the researcher of this thesis project to set objectives that considered but did not ascribe to a worldview while focusing on spiritual congruence with the subject matter of fatherhood, which applied to Mr. B1's experience and understanding of family values.

Additionally, the study revealed the importance of parental collaboration under favorable and unfavorable circumstances. The best interests of the children should be a priority. The group differed in their opinions on parental collaboration. Mr. B1 and the group experienced such a divide. Some participants in groups A and B took positions of masculinity and denial: "I will not collaborate." Others in the groups discussed their frustrations and tribulations and how they overcame them. For example, Mr. B1 concluded that both masculinity and denial exposed anger in the single fathers, even though their situations differed.

Mr. B2 expressed struggles with pride and forgiveness, despite efforts to set aside the disappointment of a broken relationship with the children. However, Mr. B2 became convinced

¹³⁰ Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 84.

that an intervention plan would help restrain verbal and behavioral patterns that do not support fatherhood responsibilities. The group agreed that the literature and resources they encountered addressed individual needs. Gregory L. Jones has explored behavioral patterns and tendencies, stating, “Those who embody forgiveness discover that one of the chief obstacles to overcome is the tendency to see one’s own life as something to be either possessed or simply given over to another’s possession; too often, the result is that people cling to their power or even their powerlessness.”¹³¹ Mr. B2 confessed that struggles existed from the difficulty to remain committed as a single father. These struggles also affected how Mr. B2 expressed his opinions. For example, they expressed that not having custody of the children tempted them to enjoy an open lifestyle and avoid responsibility for their actions.

Mr. B2’s testimony implied a position of power and not desiring control of familial situations because of the emotional challenges of adapting to the changing nature of single fatherhood. This mindset contrasted with the viewpoints of other participants who did not have custody of their children. However, Mr. B2’s feelings of not being in control related to when and how often they could see the children. This mindset seemed problematic because it did not take into account the children’s needs.

However, the problematic aspect does not exclude the possibility of being granted custody. That single father would have to adjust their arrangements to suit the children’s needs, rights, and desire to see their mother if required. For example, Mr. B3’s understanding of their struggle showed that when single fathers acknowledge their need for accountability, they do not add to the discord the family may be experiencing. When reflecting on the printed literature and resources during group discussions, Mr. B3 concluded that personal arrogance became a

¹³¹ Gregory L. Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 6.

significant issue in family relationships. Mr. B3 initially expressed a preference for sweeping moments from the past under a rug. Nevertheless, they came to understand that this approach did not support progress or overcoming struggles. From this learning experience, Mr. B3 expressed acceptance that helped him overcome his struggles. Growing in awareness, Mr. B3 also shared developing verbal restraint in the presence of the children and the benefit of humility garnered from this restraint. Mr. B3 understood such restraint did not need to be seen as a weakness.

Mr. B4 admitted to faults in this setting but did not feel the need to prove self-growth to the group. However, Mr. B4's feeling of not being alone in experiencing the struggles single fathers face showed progress resulting from this study. A father feeling social stigmas associated with single fatherhood faces difficulty accepting the opinions of others. This social agenda does not reflect their ideals as single fathers. Even as single fathers struggle to establish and participate in fulfilling family values associated with fatherhood, they should commit to their positions as single fathers and define their own agendas. This research project assisted single father participants as they examined their lives and beliefs, allowing them to identify personal attributes to promote growth as single fathers.

Improving the Ministry at PFBC

This ministry project showed that to improve the ministry at PFBC; leaders must encourage single fathers who do not live with their children to maintain their commitments to family. Focusing on and maintaining priorities serves the children and leads to accepting an identity as a single father. The ministry at PFBC encouraged the transformation to single fatherhood because the children received an in-depth look at their fathers as they set pride aside and placed family values at the forefront. However, their struggles revealed the emotional challenges of endeavoring throughout the children's development.

The mission, ministry, and purpose of the ministry at PFBC became much clearer during group discussions for the participants and coordinator. Participants came to realize the benefits of growing a relationship with their children, as it should be in Christ. In doing so, the fathers and their children became empowered by understanding the value of maintaining a commitment to each other. By observation and reflection, the group acknowledged feeling powerless, which changed the tone of the meetings. Moreover, during the project, the ministry coordinator acknowledged the challenge of navigating through a controlled aspect while developing a relationship with the participants to serve the ministry effectively. Moving forward, PFBC needs to improve this teaching to inspire participants like those in groups A and B so they do not give up on their goals as single fathers.

For this single father ministry, the coordinator sought to encourage those who struggled to remain committed to their goals, even when facing hidden struggles. However, for the ministry at PFBC, improving those struggles caused single fathers to become reactive as they maintained fruitful relationships with their children. In this process, the single fathers in the ministry reacted against societal norms; as Louise B. Silverstein states,

Current fatherhood ideology continues to define a father's relationship with his children primarily in the context of a bond with the mother. If that bond is not legitimized, as in the case of unmarried teen fathers, or if it is disrupted by divorce or separation, many mothers, fathers, and societal institutions collude to undermine the relationship between father and child.¹³²

Through the single father ministry, PFBC understood the value of supporting single fathers to disrupt damaging ideologies about single fatherhood and, in turn, recognize the principles that define the values of fatherhood. Fortunately, single fathers and their value has slowly gained

¹³² Louise B. Silverstein, "Fathering is a Feminist Issue." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (March 1996): 3-37 accessed March 29, 2021 <https://liberty.summon.serialssolutions.com/>.

support. Felix O. Chima states, “Forty-one percent felt that single parent father roles lack support from the American culture. Another 41 % agreed or strongly agreed that the American culture supports the roles of single parent fathers, and 17% were undecided.”¹³³ As society seems to recognize and support single fathers, church ministries serving them should encourage honest relationships with their children.

The single father ministry has shown PFBC the importance of teaching single fathers to commit to their children so they understand the long-lasting benefits of being nurtured by their fathers. By faithfully socializing with the children, the single father develops spiritual maturity in fatherhood. Therefore, by positively impacting a son or daughter, the father also grows. This study has shown that the ministry at PFBC can serve as a model for other ministries seeking to guide single fathers beyond unexpected life changes so they can optimistically look to the future and honor family values.

¹³³ Felix O. Chima, “Fathers with Single Parenting Roles: Perspectives on Strengths, Concerns and Recommendations,” *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology* 27, no 2 (November 1999): 3-13 accessed May 7, 2021 <https://scholar.google.com>.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

During this project, group interactions thrived as the discussions centered around the literature and resources distributed to the group. The participating single fathers utilized these resources to learn from their mistakes and identify their struggles. This process helped them understand the vision, mission, and purpose of fatherhood. Furthermore, this project instilled in them the importance of maintaining spiritual ideals and family values even in difficult family circumstances, such as separation from their children. If single fathers allow these struggles to interfere with their productive relationships with their children, they will not remain invested and committed to family values.

The project began by focusing on the single fathers' self-perception. The ministry continued to support the fathers, encouraging them to positively influence the lives of their sons and daughters, with an emphasis on personal growth for the fathers. While the ministry did not enforce specific biblical principles of morality, it highlighted the significance of family values. Moreover, the single fathers grew through group discussions, sharing their unique experiences of single fatherhood. They compared and contrasted the differences in their communities, finances, legal ramifications, and church participation. At times, these differences became distracting and served as justifications for not spending quality time with their children. However, they came to understand that committing to their children requires a faithful investment as a learned behavior.

Single fathers' expectations regarding their family outcomes must change, and the ministry at PFBC promoted learning from this change. While this research cannot solve the increasing trend of single fathers across the nation or all the issues they face, it provides literature and testimonial experiences from willing participants who shared both their faults and

successes, one struggle at a time. The experiences of the single fathers in this ministry can assist other single fathers experiencing similar struggles. Importantly, other single fathers should understand that this research demonstrates the value of consistently spending quality time with their children. Quality time does not always occur through face-to-face, in-person conversation; single fathers should strive to maintain connections with their children, even through formats like Zoom, FaceTime, and text messaging. Furthermore, single fathers with younger children who do not have access to these technologies should deliberately invest in in-person interactions with their children.

However, single fathers need assistance and encouragement as they seek to connect with their children. Single father ministries should support single fathers in their spiritual and emotional development, which frequently occurred in this ministry project during group discussions. Within the open discussions, single fathers could safely express their struggles and came to understand that they did not need to place fault solely on themselves. As the single fathers learned together, the ministry became an opportunity for them to understand the importance of fatherhood and family values. Through mutual understanding and shared experiences, participants also realized they can overcome struggles through spiritual growth.

Literature and resources emailed for group discussion helped the single fathers process theory, philosophy, and methodology while also providing spiritual assistance. These resources included *Fathered by God*¹³⁴ by John Eldredge, which focuses on God's leadership through the developmental stages of life, and *You Have What It Takes: What Every Father Needs to Know*¹³⁵ by John Eldredge, a small booklet highlighting the principles and reasoning of being a father.

¹³⁴ John Eldredge, *Fathered by God*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2009).

¹³⁵ John Eldredge, *You Have What It Takes: What Every Father Needs to Know*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2004).

Another resource, *What it Takes: Message for men moved by God*¹³⁶ by Lance Cooper, also aided the single fathers participating in this project. The literature and resources used in this study underscore the need for a library that single fathers can freely access, further emphasizing the importance of single father ministries in the church. Undoubtedly, single fatherhood is an ongoing growing trend, and both leaders and laypersons grapple with their identities as single fathers. The church must persistently assist single fathers on their journeys so God can use them.

Future research should continue to investigate the theme of The Single Father in The Christian Church and Their Struggles. As children experience life-changing emotions and continue to develop when family situations change, future research should focus on the active involvement of single fathers during child development. Furthermore, future research should continue to address the evolution of single fatherhood. A single father who sets a positive example for their children regardless of the circumstances instills the importance of family values. This research supports such responsibility for single fathers through making wise decisions, spending quality time with their children, and resolving issues with the children to build healthy relationships.

In some respects, the single fathers who participated in this study represent the single fathers seen in nationwide statistics. The increase of single fathers across the nation inevitably leads to an increase in the number of single fathers in the church. However, the impact of single fatherhood on the family may go unnoticed in the church. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King state, “Without a healthy and functioning body, a church will miss much of the good God

¹³⁶ Lance Cooper, *What it Takes: Message for men moved by God* (Knoxville, TN: InLight Publishing, 2016).

provides for it.”¹³⁷ Therefore, this study reveals the need for the church to assist single fathers as they refuse labels associated with statistics and, instead, become spiritually empowered to lead their families effectively.

The participants’ stories showed that relationships with their children’s mothers often led to anger and disappointment, resulting in parental separation, similar to single fathers across the country. However, this study contributes to current literature about single fathers by focusing on a faith-based perspective, showing the responsibilities of single fathers according to the Word of God, which assisted participants as they faced emotional struggles. Confronting and understanding their emotions motivated the single fathers to invest more in their children. Future ministries for single fathers should continue to help them develop a course of action that ultimately contributes to a growing relationship with their children.

Moreover, this research project and its ministry encountered other struggles concerning single fathers. Although churches may seem ill-equipped to address these varying struggles through single father ministries, this thesis project highlights the need for such ministries and the positive impact they could provide in a church community. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 15:1 (NLT), “We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves.” Identifying a need in the church becomes a ministerial responsibility that, when fulfilled, pleases God. Additionally, this research should equip churches to understand the value of single fathers in the family and the church. By aligning with the goals and mission of this ministry, churches can guide single fathers in a manner that supports family values and encourages positive emotional reinforcement with their children.

¹³⁷ Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 76.

This research project aimed to equip single fathers to oppose harmful practices affecting their families. Through literature, resources, and sound doctrine, participants learned the value of bolstering their children's confidence in them as single fathers. Richard M. Smith and Craig W. Smith suggest, "With such a social change there may be confusion in regard to role expectations, and the single-parent father is often left without clear guidelines for performing the new role he has accepted."¹³⁸ Single father ministries can provide support when fathers' role expectations seem to change, whether the children live with the father or mother. Single fathers should not be discouraged by their living arrangements because their position in fatherhood does not change. By maintaining open communication with their children, single fathers will find emotional rewards. Furthermore, single father ministries should encourage fathers to pursue a holistic approach to fatherhood, which includes emotional and psychological well-being.

Church membership should also be considered when churches develop single father ministries. This project did not require participants to join the church hosting the ministry, and because of the rising trend of single fathers, the church should welcome members and non-members when planning single father ministries. These ministries should foster critical thinking to raise single fathers' awareness of their responsibilities even when facing significant challenges due to new living arrangements. Irving R. Stuart and Lawrence Edwin note, "While we see ourselves as living [*sic*] one way, powerful forces are dynamically affecting families to respond in complex and myriad directions."¹³⁹ These forces can work against family values in a climate of adversity and contribute to broken relationships between single fathers and their children.

¹³⁸ Richard M. Smith and Craig W. Smith, "Child Rearing and Single-Parent Fathers," *Family Relations* 30, no. 3 (July 1981): 411-417) accessed May 10, 2021 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/584036>.

¹³⁹ Irving R. Stuart and Lawrence Edwin, *Children of Separation and Divorce* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Inc., 1981), 102.

Therefore, single father ministries should welcome all single fathers, helping them view their struggles from a biblical lens that contributes to renewed relationships with Christ and strong family bonds.

Change Is Progress

Teaching family values to children is critical and challenging. Therefore, this project aimed to support single fathers in learning from their experiences while supporting their children's spiritual and emotional development. Through this study, single fathers resolved to establish a firm foundation with their children through strong family values. The single father ministry allows fathers to speak freely about their struggles without facing harsh criticism.

Single father ministry promotes personal growth in single fathers as they learn from each other through healthy discussions, even when they do not always agree. The researcher found that discussions sometimes flowed more openly when they, as moderators, did not interject but allowed group members to continue speaking about their struggles. As an observer, the researcher could discover the factors contributing to the single fathers' struggles. For instance, financial support for the children caused struggles for participants. Changes in living arrangements revealed another struggle, showing that single father ministries should promote a positive outlook about the home to bolster a father's spiritual growth. Thomas R. Murray comments on the everyday experiences that apply to the home, saying, "Religious explanations of cause often derive from people's inability to identify mundane explanations of events, particularly of unwelcome events."¹⁴⁰ According to the participants in this project's ministry, home life became personally challenging. However, this ministry and research reached success by supporting single fathers on a step-by-step basis.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas R. Murray, *Human Development Theories* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication Inc., 1999), 73.

This ministry also assisted participants in acknowledging the reality of their struggles within group discussions. The resources offered through this research and ministry supported productive discussions and wise decision-making among the participants. However, single father ministries should recognize the importance of managing emotional diversity among single fathers due to complex differences in attitudes, personalities, and behaviors. Differences also exist for single fathers with visitation rights, relationships with their children, and living arrangements. Group discussion in single father ministry enables a father to find wisdom from others in the same position. Hearing from other single fathers can help change a habit that complicates life situations. Group discussion should also encourage critical thinking to impact single fathers' convictions and motivate them toward actions benefiting the family. Listening and responding during group discussions builds strong relationships among participants due to shared struggles.

Moreover, bringing single fathers together from multiple generations showed them that even though their life experiences differed, mutual support could lead to personal growth. By welcoming participants of different ages, this study revealed that group dynamics benefit from the differences. Older participants shared past experiences, and younger participants shared culturally relevant experiences older participants might not have encountered. In this process, the ministry helped cultivate a unified understanding of learning, and the single fathers grew together as a group.

Through the ministry project, the researcher observed areas of concern associated with single fathers within their communities, their understandings of family values, and their ideas of fatherhood. Group participation also assisted single father participants as they discussed these types of struggles and burdens, which single fathers may feel they carry alone. Within the group,

camaraderie formed as the single fathers shared their struggles. The Apostle Paul reminds us in Gal. 6:9 (NASB), “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.” This ministry and research allowed participants to contribute to the discussion mutually and introduced spiritual responsibilities without criticism or imposing upon others’ spiritual beliefs.

Group discussion also helped the fathers confront struggles they initially considered weaknesses. The intervention plan contributed to the single fathers engaging in genuine discussions within the group or with their children. Even when the conversation addressed weaknesses, participants remained committed to continuing the conversation. They willingly talked about concerns and, in so doing, developed humility by submitting to the guidance of the group. Job 12:11 (NLT) says, “The ear tests the words it hears just as the mouth distinguishes between foods.” Therefore, single father ministries should use group discussion to lead fathers to eliminate feelings of fault, which should equip them to build family values. However, these ministries should also remind single fathers that healing takes time and diligence offers resolutions that assist in achieving godly fatherhood goals.

Single father ministries should focus on helping single fathers understand the value of their presence with the children and that quality time rewards the whole family. According to Israel Galindo, “Theories of learning and teaching are important because they give us the ‘big picture.’ They help explain why things work and why they don’t, how things fit together and how they shouldn’t.”¹⁴¹ Single father ministries should encourage learning by addressing the

¹⁴¹ Israel Galindo, *The Craft of Christian Teaching: Essentials for Becoming a Very Good Teacher* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 77.

rewards that emerge when the desire for spiritual growth penetrates the single father's heart. This father grows to understand how meaningful their participation is in their children's lives.

A progressive church, PFBC, willingly assessed available means to allow this project to move forward despite restrictions resulting from COVID-19. For example, due to CDC requirements, the church supported the ministry as it engaged in networking through the proper use of masks, maintaining a distance of six feet between participants, and using conference calls through Skype or FaceTime. Allowing for various modes of communication ensured participants' safety.

The mission of a single father ministry should be for single fathers to set goals, instilling family values and biblical principles that build proactive relationships with their children. Seeking solutions for the good of the family helps the single father understand the current situation and contribute to the ministry. At the same time, ministries should guide single fathers to know of the possibility that some struggles may remain while acknowledging that resolution comes from perseverance. As single father perseveres and grows as a father, they can develop a clearer outlook, enabling them to support their children financially. Additionally, ministries should encourage fathers to openly dialogue with their children to examine concerns, build relationships, and instill family values.

This research project aimed to help single fathers overcome struggles that accumulated in their lives. The ministry led the fathers as they engaged in self-discovery to acknowledge patterns of ongoing struggles. Many of them had experienced divorce. Others had never married or lived with their children's mother(s). Most had separated from the mothers and struggled to identify as a single father. They also encountered unexpected problems that developed from living a single life. For example, they struggled to normalize because their relationships with

their children had changed. They felt conflicted about their responsibilities but came to realize the importance of committing to their children's growth. For many reasons, the fathers had to rediscover their priorities to overcome struggles.

Furthermore, when single fathers accept worldview opinions, they harm themselves emotionally because these views can distract them from their responsibilities. Therefore, the research project encouraged the single father participants to set aside stereotypes about single fathers. The project led the fathers to acknowledge their struggles and accept reasonable solutions that best served themselves and their children. In this process, the single fathers understood the reasons for participating in this ministry and the goals they needed to accomplish. Questions and discussions helped the fathers reflect and redirect their attention away from negative factors and toward improving family values and emotionally supporting their children. With clearer minds, the single fathers could grow and learn essential attributes of fatherhood. Therefore, single father ministries can forge positive qualities in single fathers by assisting them to overlook stereotypes. Ministries can then foster renewed outlooks by including scripture in group discussions without infringing on personal beliefs.

Single fathers also need to grow in the knowledge of their spiritual responsibilities for the family and the change those responsibilities may require. Because feelings of masculinity can seem to curtail spiritual responsibilities, single father ministries should help fathers understand the benefits of removing feelings of guilt that may contribute to their struggles. This research project modeled challenging single fathers to recognize the importance of their feelings, not as weakness but as a recourse to build and strengthen their understanding and integrity. Through continuous growth and acceptance of single fatherhood, fathers can build solid foundations in their homes and with their children.

Single father ministries should also prepare for participants to disagree. In these moments, ministry leaders should remind attendees to avoid applying personal views or opinions on others. Avery Cardinal Dulles states, “In any effort at evaluation we must beware of the tendency of each contestant to polemicize from a standpoint within his own preferred position.”¹⁴² Ministries should encourage fathers to grow by understanding that personal opinions could be an area of struggle. Instead, the single father may need to understand that responsibilities can emerge from discussion. Ministries can emphasize the risk of responding to a familiar situation in former, damaging ways. A father who truly takes in the learning provided by a single father ministry will re-examine their ideas of fatherhood.

Additionally, a single father with an inquisitive mind will confront their struggles by focusing on strong family values and the growth of his children. In this study, examples of biblical principles and methodology raised the levels of participants’ awareness when dealing with their struggles. Consequently, they collectively and individually pursued answers when asked questions. Although single father ministries will need to introduce unanticipated answers, they should encourage necessary changes to help single fathers overcome their struggles.

This research should also petition church leadership to acknowledge that single fathers regularly attend services, grappling with challenges on any given day. The church can no longer conduct ministry as usual and continue to ignore the single fathers quietly sitting in the pews in search of spiritual guidance. Parker J. Palmer offers guidance to churches aiming to assist single fathers: “Every spiritual search is and must be guided by a particular literature, practice, and

¹⁴² Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of The Church* (New York, New York: Doubleday Publisher, 2002), 182.

community of faith.”¹⁴³ The community of faith leaders should extend their reach beyond the church and into the community of struggling single fathers.

This project introduced single fathers to helpful literature to guide and instruct them through their difficulties. Therefore, literary resources provided in single father ministry should enlighten single fathers about their changing experiences. Furthermore, single fathers should meet with other single fathers so they can discuss resources and support each other through their struggles. Additionally, this ministry project incorporated research from psychologists, sociologists, and therapists, and the coordinator used this information to demonstrate how that research supported the ministry’s objective. Therefore, while identifying societal issues has its merits, there should also be a focus on literature that aids spiritual development and teaches single fathers that they are not alone in their struggles.

During the process of this thesis project, single father participants discovered the sources of their problems and accepted their role in their struggles. The model presented in this project should motivate single father ministries to help fathers analyze problem areas in their lives, understand areas for emotional progress, and develop sustainable relationships with their children. Ministries should also guide single fathers to become more informed about their approach to fatherhood. Through feedback, ministries can help fathers recognize that fatherhood requires continuous development, and persistence forms the basis of best practices.

Values of a single father’s notion of leadership also influenced this research project. When learning the concept of family values, a single father must also acquire qualities of leadership that can establish a legacy for their children to follow. Therefore, this single father ministry became supportive of participants mentoring each other, which in turn contributed to the

¹⁴³ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education As A Spiritual Journey* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 14.

success of this ministry when they realized shared goals, such as restoring relationships with their children. Experience teaches that collaboration can help expose struggle, which could include an inability to connect with their children emotionally. To shape fathers as leaders of their families, this project guided the fathers to see themselves as mentors to their peers.

Ministries should establish clear definitions of the word mentor and consider it integral to the concept of fatherhood. Empowered by this research, mutual respect among the participants led to giving one another advice. The lesson plans generated group discussions, fostering integrity in participants and breaking communication barriers. Consequently, participants could see their struggles from new perspectives and move forward with their relationships with their children. Men, in general, may be reluctant to share personal struggles. However, this ministry encouraged collaboration among the single fathers so they could mentor each other by sharing their experiences and providing sound advice during group participation.

Moreover, mentorship emanates from a sense of loyalty to oneself and one's children. By fostering collaboration among the single fathers, the project's ministry encouraged single fathers to also mentor their children. To support a positive outlook toward leading and mentoring the children, ministries should reinforce the value of establishing fatherhood goals that promote personal growth. These goals should include a comprehensive plan for long-term growth. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Tim. 2:15 (NIV), "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, a worker who correctly handles the word of truth." Single father ministries should help single fathers to correctly handle the word of truth as they work toward their goals and seek to effectively lead their children. Furthermore, this research project benefited single fathers by acknowledging that they should not only guide their children but also learn from them.

Because the church should serve as a place of refuge, single fathers must feel secure in single father ministries as they engage in serious discussions about their struggles. Security will help them remain open to accepting necessary support. Security also builds their trust, knowing their struggles will remain confidential. Moreover, even in a diverse group, confidence can grow. This research project benefited from the differences in ages of the participants because they came to realize they shared experiences. Single father ministries should invite fathers to consider common ground because some similarities associated with single fathers and their struggles persist throughout generations. Through understanding shared experiences, single fathers can also learn to trust one another, which will lead to progress in single father ministries.

The efforts a single father puts into healing during ministry opportunities are linked to their willingness to overcome struggles, change, and grow spiritually. Single father ministries should allow single fathers to focus on their problems and struggles to support their spiritual growth. While change feels complex and unwelcome at times due to pride or unfamiliarity, ministries should seek to guide single fathers through changing life circumstances and instill a sense of redirection in them. Living arrangements for single fathers also impacted this research project. Children want to feel accepted, not only by their peers but also by their mother and father. However, a change in a living arrangement does not need to change the relationship between a single father and the children. Single father ministries should encourage open lines of communication between fathers and their children to sustain their relationships. Ministries should also help single fathers recognize that emotional longings brought on by change and missing their children must be expressed and can serve as motivation to spend quality time with their children. Proverbs 16:9 (ESV) offers a reminder for the single father: “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps,” Single father ministries must assist fathers in

planning necessary steps, making changes, acting with moral responsibility, and stewarding their children well.

Single father ministries should also focus on discouraging single fathers from comparing or contrasting their situation with that of other fathers. This emphasis can move the single father into a more fulfilling role and a clearer understanding of fatherhood. To achieve these goals, the research project encouraged and supported the extended character qualities of a single father. The group discussed recompense by recognizing the need to free themselves from worldview opinions and stereotypes. They came to understand that the reward of fatherhood applies to being spiritually accountable as a father.

Finally, the root of this ministry and research originated from the researcher's personal experience and a desire to establish the importance of single fathers remaining active in their children's lives, regardless of the circumstances. Single fathers must learn from their experiences that moral support is emotionally valuable. The researcher found encouragement from his parents and did not allow life changes to discourage or dictate his vision of family values. This thesis project and this ministry gave willing single fathers the opportunities to find fellowship and self-discovery. From their struggles, they understood the need to renew their identities as they developed in their roles as fathers.

APPENDIX A

SEARCHING THE HEART QUESTIONNAIRE

- Is having a relationship with Jesus Christ helpful? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Explain what necessary steps you will take to maintain or rekindle a relationship with the children.
- How should a single father surmise the scope of fatherhood and its reconstruction in his life?
- Explain in detail what accomplishments are most important in learning from this ministry?
- Explain what the reason for agreeing to this research is?
- Explain in detail if there is a relationship with the children? If yes, what kind and why? Is the relationship close, by phone, or via social media? If not, why? This question is to search your heart, not to blame others.
- In detail, how do you view the role of a single father?
- How do you handle the emotional struggles as a single father and provider?
- Explain in detail how peer pressure influenced your relationship with the children, positive or negative?
- Explain in detail what positive or negative relationship was there with your father?
- How did your childhood influence you as a single father?
- What experiences of fatherhood did you learn as a child?
- What family values come from having a relationship with the children?
- As a single father, what would be done differently?

Explain if this ministry can have relevance in learning the characteristics of fatherhood.

IRB Approval

November 11, 2021

Kennedy Abbott

IRB Approval FY 20-21-394: The Single Fathers in the Christian Church and Their Struggles

Dear Kennedy Abbott,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

IRB Mentor Jerry Knoblet

Liberty University

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