

Lutheran
Building
Men in
Men for
Mission
Christ

foundations

Our vision is for every man to become a bold, daring follower of Jesus Christ.

Could the church be the best hope for our boys?

By Tim Wright

These are tough days to be a boy!

- Boys are falling behind girls in every area of education from pre-school to college.
- The average reading skills of a 17-year-old boy have declined in the last 20 years.
- 17-18 of the top 20 growing professions favor the verbal and relational skills of women over men.
- Boys are growing up in a world without a compelling vision for noble manhood.



These are tough days to be the church, with realities like:

- The number of “nones” are growing, those reporting no religious affiliation.
- The incidents of pastors being caught in various scandals of their own making.
- Church attendance in decline, especially among young adults.
- 70-90% of all boys leaving the church in their teens and early 20’s, and most not returning.

So it may seem cavalier or reckless to suggest that the Christian church *could* be the best hope for our boys. But having spent almost 30 years as a pastor, and having worked on the boy crisis for the last 8+ years, I really do believe the church could be best positioned to help us solve the boy crisis for the following reasons:

• **The church is rooted in a deep, rich, sacred view of men and women.** The Bible says that men and women are created in the image of God. Both male and female are good. Both are equal; but they are also different. Look beyond the surface and we see the differences. Explore our brains and we see the differences – at least 60 differences between the male and female brain have been identified so far. One is not better than the other, just different. Both are rooted in the sacred

view that we are created, male and female, in the image of God. Based on that, the church can rise above political correctness and stereotyping to draw out the best in our boys and our girls. It can take the lead in reshaping the discussion, moving us from antagonism of one sex toward the other to a comprehensive, sacred appreciation of the equality and uniqueness of both.

• The Founder of Christianity offers a vision for compelling

manhood. Jesus offers boys a vision of what it looks like to be a man: courageous, compassionate, a warrior against injustice, an advocate for the voiceless, a friend, passionate, committed, a man of his word, a man of action, gracious, humble, gentle, tough, forgiving, purposeful, commanding, strong, fully in tune with who he is, and ultimately a man willing to lay down his life not just for his friends, but for his enemies. Imagine our boys growing up into that kind of manhood!

• **The church understands the primal need of every boy for a blessing from his father.** Part of what makes a boy a man is the blessing of his father – that moment when dad looks his son in the eyes and tells him he loves him and that he is proud of who he is becoming. Sadly, most boys never hear those words from dad. For some it’s because dad isn’t around. For others it’s because dad never received that blessing from his father and so has no idea how to give it to his son.

The ministry of Jesus began with the blessing from his Father. Equipped with his Father’s love and approval, Jesus had the power he needed to change the world. The church stands in a unique position to train men to give that blessing to their sons, and to boys in general.

• **The church has a mass of men who can pour healthy masculine energy into our boys.** In a time when our boys have few men

(continued on page 6)

This newsletter is sent to all who contribute to the ministry of Lutheran Men in Mission.

Your contribution ensures that *foundations* will continue to be sent to you.

It is our desire that *foundations* will be a source of personal spiritual growth, as well as a source of information for those involved in congregational men's ministries.

Please drop us a line or email us, and share your stories of men's ministry that we can use in this newsletter. We're also interested in knowing what topics and issues you'd like to see featured.

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"I [John the Elder] have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. Peace to you."

1:13-15 (NRSV)



Let's plan to get together – face to face

We laugh, a lot. We have been friends since college, and that's a long while. He knows me better than most and, as a result of knowing some of the foolish stuff I did as a kid, he's made a sport of raising up those moments at the most embarrassing times – because he's my friend and he loves me. Jerry, from the Pacific Northwest, is my friend from the early years of life. Bernie, from Ohio, came along sometime later. Bernie has known me through the middle years of life and witnessed an entirely different set of embarrassing circumstances and is as lovingly merciless as is Jerry. I often wondered what it would be like if the two of them ever met. Now I know.

It was at one of our triennial Lutheran Men's Gatherings. We had great speakers and musicians. But more than anything else, I remember sitting at a table for the first time with Jerry, Bernie, my son Derek and a few others. Every chapter of my life was an open book with these two guys. With every memory there was laughter, and there was friendship growing and there was my son learning to know his dad better while having a great time. I am reminded of a thirteen-year-old Josh's response when asked about his experience at our last gathering in Nashville. He said the speakers were inspiring and helped him grow in his faith. He loved meeting people from all over America. "But my favorite part was going there with my dad. We took a walk to the hotel every day. When we walked we talked, which helped me to bond more with my dad."

The next Lutheran Men's Gathering will be at the Minneapolis Marriott City Center, July 21-23, 2017. You will be hearing much more about this in the upcoming editions of *foundations*. But it's not too early to talk to your friends, your father and your sons to plan to attend an event that will bring you closer to God – and each other.

Doug Haugen, executive director
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By Kyle Pedersen

If someone were to ask you how your intimacy with God is, what would you say?

Today's culture equates intimacy with sex, and because of that, men in the church don't feel comfortable talking about intimacy or pursuing it. The desire of Lutheran Men in Mission is for men to become bold daring followers of Jesus Christ. As leaders of men, we cannot help men become bold daring followers unless we are doing it ourselves. This means we, as men, must have a deep abiding intimacy with Jesus.

3 Forms of Intimacy

Intimacy with God is a process, not a thing. Just like any relationship, it takes place over time. To better understand how this intimacy with God might look, take a look at the many forms of intimacy in our relationships with each other and God.

One form of intimacy is *cognitive* intimacy, where two people exchange thoughts, share ideas and enjoy similarities and differences of opinions. When done in an open and comfortable way, two people can become quite intimate in an intellectual area. Many pastors and small group leaders are intimate with God in this manner as they research and prepare to preach and teach. All of us can encounter God more

deeply as we read books and use resources, and then spend time in prayer talking with God about our ideas and opinions.

A second form of intimacy is *experiential* intimacy via shared time or activity. This is where people meet and do something together. There is little conversation, few shared thoughts or feelings, but they are involved in activities together. Imagine two house painters whose brushstrokes seemed to be playing out a duet on the side of the house. They may be shocked to think that they were engaged in an intimate activity with each other, however from an experiential point of view, they would be very intimately involved. In our relationship with God, this could be experienced through acts of service or leading something at church, knowing that God is there with us. We might also experience God outdoors in nature, hiking and playing, knowing that although we might be by ourselves, God is with us.

A third form of intimacy is *emotional* intimacy, where two people comfortably share their feelings with each other, empathize with the feelings of the other person or try to understand the other person's perspective. Most of us know this area of intimacy with God better than with each other, as we have seen and been taught that this is what prayer is like. We come to God with our concerns and fears, our requests, our hopes and dreams, and then spend time listening to what God has to tell us.

Intimacy challenges

Communication. Sometimes we approach God with a mistaken notion about what intimacy with God is. Communication, or the lack of communication, would be one of the main barriers to the foundation of this intimacy.

One-Sided Prayers. Our intimacy with God can be one-sided, where we give God our side of the story and make our requests (or demands), then move on before God can speak back. We do a really bad job of listening. But God desires to speak to our lives. As we listen to God, it becomes easier to know God's love, blessings and submit to God's will and purpose for us.

Time. Intimacy with God takes time to develop, and a man who is not willing to allow for time for an intimate relationship to occur will struggle to feel close to God.

Awareness. A man must be aware of himself and realize what he has to share with another person and with God. Men who are not aware of themselves frequently are not able to be aware of other people, at least not in terms of the potentially intimate, deeper aspects of the other person.

Shyness/Identity. Sometime we go through a season where we do not feel like we are worthy of being known by God, and we end up keeping our distance. As God's

sons, we have nothing to prove, rather we just need to approach God as we are.

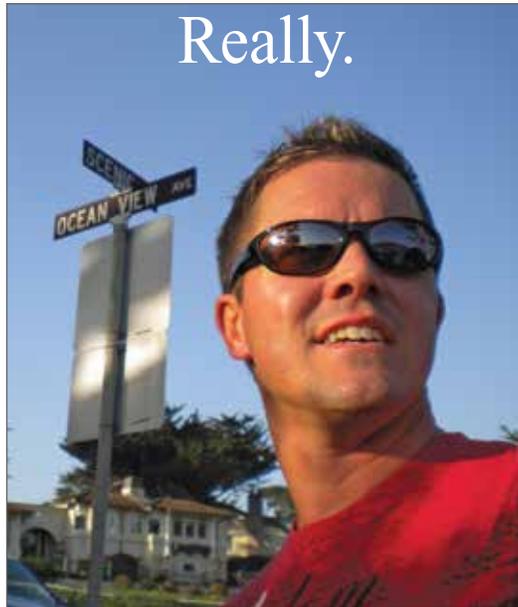
How to develop a deeper intimacy with God

Jesus simply desires that we open the door of our lives to him. In Revelation 3:20, we hear "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (NIV) Fortunately for us, Jesus will come in wherever he is not denied admittance.

Welcome Jesus into your life, and start getting to know him right where you are. Don't try to start in a way that doesn't fit your style just because that's what you have seen modeled by others. Start with the form of intimacy in which you feel most comfortable. Once comfortable in an intimate relationship on that basis, then allow yourself – challenge yourself – to grow deeper, increasingly mature and active in your relationship.

Kyle Pedersen is a brother, a son, and walk-along-sider who is journeying to the foot of the cross with an amazing crew! Kyle serves as an Emerging Ministries Consultant with LMM and has been privileged to journey with the men on the A-Team

Intimacy with God. Really.



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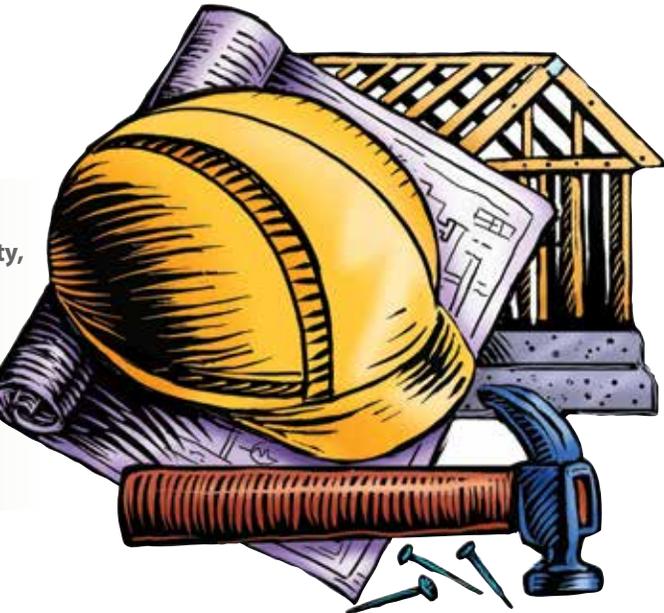
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investing in them, the church is loaded with potential male mentors, who, with a bit of training, can begin to pour good masculine energy into our boys who desperately crave healthy, caring, positive, present, faith-filled men in their lives.

That's why the church could be the best hope for our boys. I say *could* because the church also has a checkered record when it comes to raising boys into honorable men. Too often the church has raised boys to lord it over women rather than serve them. Too often the church has devalued women, treating them as inferior to men. None of this is biblical. None of this is in line with Jesus and his agenda. Yet sadly, it's still happening today.



If the church can get its act together and embrace its deep, sacred understanding of male and female, if the church can let go of its past

sins and truly follow Jesus, the one who is the vision for manhood, and more than that, the vision for humankind, then the church can take the lead in changing the storyline of our boys.

LMM's partnership in this critical work

I have deeply appreciated my partnership with Lutheran Men in Mission because they stand as an example of how the church can shape men into mentors who, in turn, can shape boys into men. I've had the chance to speak about boys several times at LMM events and Doug has always been a strong advocate for our work with boys. I recently joined in a new partnership with Michael Gurian, bestselling author of "The Wonder of Boys; The Mind of Boys; The Purpose of Boys," to offer city-wide events called, Helping Christian Boys Thrive Summit (HelpingChristianBoysThrive.org). Doug has enthusiastically asked to be a partner in this endeavor to help launch these events across the country.

Together, we *can* begin to change the storyline of our boys, which can then help change the storyline of the Christian church. For the sake of our boys, I pray the church will live into its call to be the hope for our boys. And LMM is poised to be a leader in this movement!

Tim Wright is the pastor of Community of Grace Lutheran Church in Peoria, Ariz. (boldrecklessgrace.org). Tim Wright Ministries offers congregations resources, including rites of passage programs, books and a podcast, to help call boys into heroic manhood and girls into wise womanhood. (TimWrightMinistries.org)



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Be healthy and happy

I recently read an on-line article* about the one thing that everyone needs for happier, healthier lives, and it is not what you think. It is not fame or fortune, the two things commonly associated with a person being happier and healthier. Rather, **relationships are the key to a happy life!** That is the conclusion of the more than 75-year-long Grant study – the longest study of human development.

Robert Waldinger, a Harvard psychiatrist, took over the study in 2003, becoming the fourth person to run it. He recently gave a TedTalk (*ted.com*) on it that has been viewed more than 6.5 million times since November 2015. The study included not only Harvard University men such as President John Kennedy



but also a group of young men from inner city Boston tenements. For Waldinger, there is one clear takeaway from the study – the happiest and healthiest participants in both groups were the ones who maintained close, intimate relationships.

Why did this catch my eye and why do I highlight this? Quite simply because one of the primary objectives for our Lutheran Men in Mission programs, activities and resources is to help men build closer relationships with the people around them, be it their friends, spouse, kids or grandchildren, guys at church or their coworkers. While we can talk about many different kinds of activities, they all have a common element – helping guys enrich their relationships.

“People who are more isolated than they want to be from others find that they are less happy, their health declines earlier in midlife, their brain functioning declines sooner and they live shorter lives

than people who are not lonely,” Waldinger said in his TedTalk. “And good, close relationships seem to buffer us from some of the slings and arrows of getting old.”

Waldinger wants people to realize that the commercial projection of a good life – wealth, fame, career success – won’t bring them health or happiness. It’s the work they put into maintaining connections with other human beings that will. Quality and intimacy, as well as stability and consistency also matter. Casual relationships, like the ones forged on social media won’t do it; neither will contentious ones like an abusive marriage or an unreliable friend.

So here is your challenge – over the next couple of months seek to develop a closer relationship with one or more guys at your church. Maybe it is a guy that you usher with at worship, nod a silent “hello” to in passing or a guy who you attended a One Year to Live retreat with. Or maybe it’s reaching out to a guy who is sick or struggling, even if it feels uncomfortable, because that guy could probably use a friendly face and willing, caring listener. How about mentoring a young man who is looking for a healthy father figure or sharing with someone your experience of being a disciple – a student and follower – of Jesus.

God is surrounding you with many opportunities to connect with other guys. Take advantage of them. It will be great for your health and make for a happier life – spiritually, emotionally and physically!

Your servant in Christ,
Rich White, President
rich.white@lutheranmeninmission.org

* “Harvard researchers discovered the one thing everyone needs for happier, healthier lives,” by Colby Itkowitz. Posted online in The Washington Post, March 2, 2016

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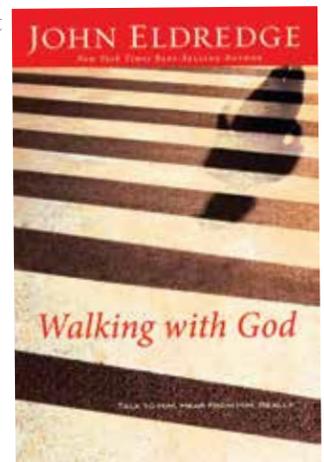
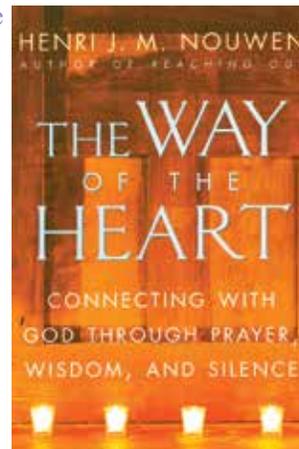
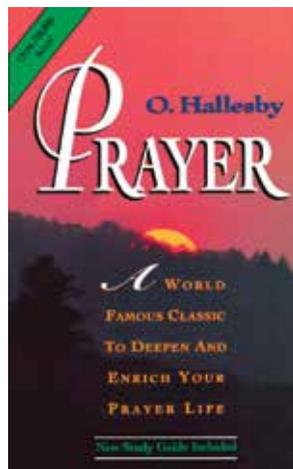
Want to learn more about deepening your spiritual intimacy?

Consider picking up the following books for additional study and reflection:

“**The Way of the Heart**,” by Henri Nouwen. Inspired by the ancient teachings of St. Anthony and the Desert Fathers, Nouwen provides a spiritual path consisting of three stepping-stones: Solitude (learning not to be alone but to be alone with God); Silence (the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive); and Prayer (standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart).

“**Walking with God**,” by John Eldridge. Stories on what it looks like to walk with God over the course of a year. But even more than a tale of walking with God, this is a book about talking with God.

“**Prayer**,” by Ole Halleby. This classic treatise on prayer by one of Norway’s leading Christian teachers and devotional writers is a practical and trustworthy guide into a life of friendship with God.



2017 Bold Gathering Minneapolis, Minnesota July 21-23, 2017

Lutheran Men in Mission Assembly is July 20-21

- Mark your calendars.
- Make a list of guys and young men to bring with you.
- Watch for more details. See you in Minneapolis!