

THE EMPOWERMENT OF YOUNG MEN INTO THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE MYRTLEWOOD ASSOCIATION OF  
CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST CHURCHES  
IN SOUTHWEST OREGON

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**ABSTRACT**

This book argues that *empowerment* is not a trendy fad, but a necessity for biblical discipleship. It explores how to gift emerging generations with the power to follow God whole-heartedly.

Based on God's treatment of five biblical heroes and augmented with insight from academic research, the author conceptualizes empowerment as *helping someone (a) understand his place in God's big picture, and (b) engage his God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes*. He further argues that empowering people *requires authentic relationship - giving people your resources, trust, and blessing*.

The author shares the results of his interviews with young men in Conservative Baptist churches on Oregon's south coast. Their candor is refreshing... and instructive for those who want to empower them.

Jesus is our best coach, the author argues, when it comes to empowering others - and we have what it takes to succeed.





## Chapter 1

### PROPOSAL FOR STUDY OF EMPOWERMENT

"A research problem consists of much more (and less) than a misunderstood collection of unidentified relationships" -

Kjell Erik Rudestam and Rae R. Newton<sup>1</sup>

I am proposing a case study of young men in the Conservative Baptist churches in Coos and Curry Counties, Oregon, in order to assess these individuals' experience of empowerment in the context of their relationships.<sup>2</sup>

#### Background to the Study

The exodus of young people from churches in America is well documented.<sup>3</sup> Churches invest significant resources -

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<sup>1</sup> Kjell Erik Rudestam and Rae R. Newton, *Surviving Your Dissertation* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 54.

<sup>2</sup> I am equally concerned about the empowerment of young women. My focus on young men in this study is due to my sense of calling to disciple men as well as the practical necessity of limiting the scope of my research. Note also that Conservative Baptist churches in Oregon are local churches in voluntary association with CBNorthwest, a regional entity associated with the Conservative Baptist Association of America.

<sup>3</sup> The authors of *Essential Church?* assert that 70% of churchgoing students drop out of church *between the ages of 18 and 22*. See Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church?* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 4.

human, financial, and spiritual - in their youth, only to watch them leave after graduation from high school.

Some of the exodus is due to higher education or employment in another locale: "He went away to college," or "He got a job in Portland." Those who stay in town, however, generally make an exodus - albeit more local - as well. Some who left for college return home after graduation - inspiring fresh hope in their parents and former church members - only to dash such hopes with their general lack of interest in renewing their church ties.

I have a personal interest in this phenomenon. As a young man, I went away to college and abandoned the church. After college, I got involved in church again. Sometimes I felt like the church treated me like an overgrown youth, but I managed to stay and get involved. I noticed that church leaders seemed eager to enlist me for various ministries, but much less eager to disciple me, develop me, or listen to my thoughts regarding the agenda. I felt used by the church.

Now, as a middle-aged man, I have found my way beyond the angst of those years - my twenties - and am a willing, positive, adult participant in church life. I can see now God's grace to me throughout those unsettled years. Today, I am eager to help *today's* young men experience God's grace

in *their* third decade - and engage *their* God-given capacities for their own good, the good of the church, and the glory of God.<sup>4</sup> In order to do that, I need to better understand what young men are currently experiencing in the cluster of local churches of which I am a part.

### **Statement of the Problem / Focus**

Many young men in America are finding the communities of faith called churches irrelevant to them. *In the opening season of adult life, most young men are choosing to drop out of Bible studies, ministries, and anything else connected with church.*

The blame for this exodus can be placed, in part, on the young men; they are choosing to leave. However, the blame may also lie with the churches; *we may be failing to empower young men to live the engaged Christian life.* Church leaders may not be aware of ways we are failing to disciple young men to engage God's power to pursue God's purposes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Here, and throughout the dissertation, I identify myself with church leadership - including the responsibility to disciple emerging generations. I will therefore refer to church leadership, at various points, in the first person.

<sup>5</sup> In this paragraph we see two things that, in this project, are of central importance. One, *empowerment is a matter of experiencing God's power*, and two, *church leaders, potentially, can lead in such a way that helps people personally experience this power.* It is with this hope that I conduct this project and presume to counsel fellow leaders, in Chapter 4, how to empower young men more effectively.

The church needs young men. They are a vital part of our future, but they are also a vital part of our present. We need their spiritual gifts, enthusiasm, and ideas. To the degree that we are not empowering young men, we are an organism with marginally functioning - or missing - vital organs.

What is occurring as a national phenomenon probably exists, to some degree, in Conservative Baptist churches in southwest Oregon - CBNorthwest Myrtlewood Association churches.<sup>6</sup> As a member of one of these churches, I want to know the degree to which the national phenomenon exists locally, the face - or, more accurately, the faces - of this phenomenon where I live.

I will focus my research on this question: *In what ways are young men, eighteen to thirty-three years of age, being empowered in Myrtlewood Association churches?* As I try to understand these men's stories, I will listen for answers to these questions: What do these men say is empowering? What do they say diminishes empowerment?

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<sup>6</sup> The approximately 250 churches associated with CBNorthwest are grouped into geographically contiguous clusters of churches known as "associations." The cluster in southwest Oregon is called the Myrtlewood Association, named after the ubiquitous myrtle tree that grows here.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to (1) discover the process of empowerment, (2) assess the ways in which young men are being empowered in Myrtlewood Association churches, and (3) identify specific ways to better lead and support young men through the process of empowerment.<sup>7</sup>

### **Research Questions**

What *is* the empowerment process?

- What does the Bible teach about empowerment, and how is it practiced by those characters identified as role models?
- What insight do empowerment theory, developmental psychology, sociology, and the sciences provide?
- How is empowerment shaped by contemporary culture?

How are young men experiencing empowerment in Myrtlewood Association churches?

- What do young men in these churches say is empowering?
- What do young men in these churches say diminishes their empowerment?

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<sup>7</sup> These questions will be specifically - and sequentially - addressed in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

- What contribution do empowered young men make to church life?

How are young men being empowered by Myrtlewood Association churches?<sup>8</sup>

- What processes, relationships, and resources exist to foster the empowerment of young men? What barriers hinder it?
- What challenges do church leaders face in empowering young men?

### **Key Terms Requiring Definition**

**Young men:** males that are 18 to 33 years of age. This includes the Novice Phase of male development, as described by Levinson et al., and includes the Early Adult Transition, Entering the Adult World, and the Age Thirty Transition.<sup>9</sup>

**Case study:** a research strategy in which, according to Creswell, "the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals."

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<sup>8</sup> This question is similar to the previous question; however, it shifts the focus from the *experiences* of young men to the *church environment*.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, Charlotte N. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson, and Braxton McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

Various procedures are used over a period of time to collect data on the research topic or case.<sup>10</sup>

**Empowerment:** This occurs, according to Natural Church Development theory, when leaders of a church concentrate not on using lay workers as “helpers” to attain their own goals, but work to equip, support, motivate, and mentor individuals in ministry.<sup>11</sup> This enables them to become all that God wants them to be, and is the process described by Apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of Ephesians.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Assumptions of the Study**

This study assumes churches are comprised of females and males of all ages, that God intends participation by all congregants, and that the church is hampered in function when any age or gender is under-represented. *Empowering young people into the life of the church is therefore desirable and necessary for the church to approach its potential.*

This study assumes *it is normative for church members to have personal faith in Jesus Christ, with supernatural abilities to help and strengthen others.* The church has

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<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 15.

<sup>11</sup> See Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Emmelsbuell, Germany: NCD Media, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> This definition of empowerment seems somewhat pragmatic and individualistic, but provides, at least, a starting point.

everything needed for its members to live godly, content lives - but each person needs to do his or her part in order for the church to fully experience this robust health.<sup>13</sup>

This study assumes *empowerment is a process*, and that *church leaders have the responsibility, authority, and accountability to facilitate the process* in their church.<sup>14</sup>

This study assumes *the Bible is the authoritative and reliable guide for Christian faith and practice*. Its commands and counsel instruct an imperfect person how to live successfully, with godliness and contentment, in an imperfect world - including an imperfect church.<sup>15</sup>

It is assumed that this case study, with thoughtful evaluation of its conclusions, will provide information that will increase the empowerment of young men in Myrtlewood Association churches.

### **Limitations**

The relatively small size of the Myrtlewood Association will limit the size of the study sample, and may make it difficult to obtain substantive results.

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<sup>13</sup> See 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:12-27. This and all subsequent Bible references are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> See Hebrews 13:7, 17.

<sup>15</sup> See 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17 and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:6.



The researcher may have angst and prejudices left over from his experiences as a young man that may cloud his understanding and skew his thinking.

Since the research will be focused on the experience of young men, the results may not provide helpful insight into the empowerment of young women.

### **Delimitations**

Research will be limited to the experiences of men 18 to 33 years of age who are involved, or have been involved, in CBNorthwest churches in the Myrtlewood Association.

Research will not explore evangelism and assimilation of persons not currently associated with CBNorthwest churches; e.g. it will not explore success at recruiting "outsiders."

No attempt to stratify the experiences according to marital status is planned, though such stratification of data may be indicated following commencement of data collection.

Empowerment will be considered as a human experience and, specifically, an issue of personal spiritual development.<sup>16</sup> It will not be considered an external or

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<sup>16</sup> My belief is that in the unseen economy, there is a spiritual process - built into every human being - that transforms people, from the inside out, to become increasingly Jesus-like in character and

measurable protocol, an institutional or programmed effort, a theology of liberation, or a political construct.

### **Importance of the Study**

At the very least, the researcher will better understand, from the Bible and other literature, the nature of empowerment. He will also better understand the experiences of some of the young men in Myrtlewood Association churches, having been privileged to hear their stories of making - and not making - the bridge into adult participation in church life. The researcher will be better informed and equipped to foster the empowerment of young men connected, or not connected, with a church.

Pastors and other Myrtlewood Association leaders will have a contemporary snapshot of how some of the young men are doing in their churches, and be informed and equipped to foster the empowerment of young men both within and outside their churches.

Young men that have been interviewed will have the satisfaction of having had someone listen to their stories.

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increasingly Jesus-like in their effect on others. My hunch is that empowerment moves people along - provides the power for - this process.

## Research Methodology

The research will move, generally and sequentially, through phases of studying the Bible, surveying the literature, collecting empirical data, analyzing the data, and writing the dissertation.

The Bible will be studied to better understand the empowerment that God intends Christians to experience as part of a local church.

The literature will be surveyed to better understand the process of empowerment. This archival research will include texts from the fields of religion, sociology, and developmental psychology, and include works by Christian and non-Christian authors.<sup>17</sup>

Recent literature will be surveyed to better understand the larger cultural phenomenon of young adults leaving church - and the impact that empowerment, or lack of empowerment, has on this phenomenon.

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<sup>17</sup> By archival research, I mean a search of what, in the words of Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, "has already been written, in books and journals, about the topic under research" - Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 209. For this project, I took the following approach: From popular Christian literature - as well as business and management literature written by Christians - I selected prominent and / or respected authors who spoke to the subject of empowerment. From the academic literature, I selected from the writings of those scientists who wrote prolifically, who were frequently cited in others' research, and who emerged - at least in my mind - as the salient figures in empowerment research over the last three decades.

Using a narrative approach, qualitative data will then be collected.<sup>18</sup> This will be done with oral interviews which explore the experience of empowerment by young men.

Additional interviews with pastors and church leaders may be undertaken to corroborate the experiences of young men.

Data will then be synthesized, a description of the sample population will be written, and implications of the study - including church-based solutions - suggested. Opportunities for further research will be identified.

### **Resources / List of Key References**

Prior to listening to the stories of young men in their contexts, the researcher will pursue greater understanding of empowerment, human development, and the lot of young men in America today.

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<sup>18</sup> *Narrative research* is "a form of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives" (Creswell, *Research Design*, 15).

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**Advisory Team**

The following advisory team is proposed:

Dr. Glen Johnson, Ph.D. - reader

Rev. Don McKay, Th.M. - peer advisor

Mr. Darin Nicholson, B.S. - lay participant



## Chapter 2

### A SURVEY OF LITERATURE ON EMPOWERMENT

As stated in Chapter 1, I want to know how young men are being empowered in Myrtlewood Association churches. Before we can make this assessment, we have to define *empowerment*.

My goal in this chapter is to present a cogent and serviceable conceptualization of empowerment.<sup>19</sup> By *cogent*, I mean one that is both biblical and consistent with academic research. By *serviceable*, I mean one that can be easily communicated with others and readily used as a gauge.

My method in this chapter is to listen to various authors who speak about empowerment, analyze and evaluate their ideas, and integrate their theories into a relatively simple concept. I'll begin with empowerment as a biblical concept, then listen to voices in both popular and academic literature.

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<sup>19</sup> Some call empowerment an *idea*, and scientists often call it a *construct* (or sometimes a *model*, or an *exemplar*); we'll accept and use all of these terms as we try to understand the notion of empowerment as a process.

### Empowerment as a Biblical Concept

The Bible frequently uses the word *power*; it is, obviously, an important biblical concept.<sup>20</sup> "The kingdom of God," the apostle Paul points out, "is not a matter of talk but of *power*."<sup>21</sup>

The Bible describes power as *substantive* - supernatural ability, experienced by human individuals, to do good, overcome evil, and rise from the dead. It is not merely an abstract or cerebral concept. "I pray," Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus, "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know... *his incomparably great power for us who believe*."<sup>22</sup> Paul wants Christians to know that they can experience God's power.<sup>23</sup> In fact, he wants them to know that God is able "to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" - and that he does it through "his power that is at work within us..."<sup>24</sup>

Yet while the Bible is clear about the reality of God's power, it is not always clear about how to receive it - or how to help others receive it.<sup>25</sup> The word *empowerment*

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<sup>20</sup> The *New International Version*, for example, translates various Hebrew and Greek words *power* over 250 times.

<sup>21</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:20, italics mine.

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 1:18, 19, italics mine.

<sup>23</sup> Homiletically speaking, God's power is in the tool box, in the war chest, and in the breast of every born again Christian.

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 3:20.

<sup>25</sup> Various theologies do see this clearly in Scripture. Pentecostal theology, for example, sees "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as the key to experiencing God's power. Baptist theology, on the other hand, sees the

is not even found in the Bible. I needed some other starting point besides a study of how the word *empowerment* is used in Scripture.<sup>26</sup>

I had the intuitive and tentative notion of empowerment as "setting someone up to succeed." Consciously bringing only this nascent notion to the Bible text, I asked the question: *How did God empower those men who are held up by the Bible as heroes and role models?*<sup>27</sup> I considered the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul, and observed that God, in his posture and behavior toward these men, "set them up to succeed" in five different ways.

First of all, God revealed to each one "*the big picture*" - his mission to redeem the world. Abraham may have been incredulous, but God was not vague: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... all peoples

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power of the [written] Word of God as the key. These theologies, however, seem somewhat simplistic in that they do not describe *the process* by which an individual positions himself to increasingly experience God's power nor how an individual empowers others in an ongoing, developmental fashion.

<sup>26</sup> In Chapter 1, I make the assumptions that "the Bible is... authoritative and reliable," and that "its commands and counsel instruct an imperfect person how to live successfully." I was forced, however, to find another starting point - besides a study of the word *empowerment* in Scripture - for determining what God had to say about empowerment.

<sup>27</sup> Each one of these men is held up, by the majority of internal and external evidence, as a hero and a role model. Note the limitations and delimitations of this project (see Chapter 2) prevent the inclusion of women that might similarly and quite arguably be described as *heroes* and *role models* as well.

on earth will be blessed through you."<sup>28</sup> God revealed to Abraham his "big picture," his program of redemption.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, God revealed to each of these heroes *the part he personally played* in fulfilling God's mission. "I am sending you to Pharaoh," God told Moses, "to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."<sup>30</sup> Gave revealed to Moses his part in "the big picture."

Thirdly, God gave each one the *resources* he needed. David had to wait for many years to experience established success, but from the earliest accounts of his life - even as a young man - he demonstrated courage, good judgment, and the ability to lead in such a way that people followed.<sup>31</sup> "From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power."<sup>32</sup> God gave David everything he needed - divine resources - to accomplish his part in God's plan.

God gave these men, fourthly, *his trust*. Before Jesus demonstrated his willingness to make the ultimate

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<sup>28</sup> See Genesis 12:2, 3 and Galatians 3:14.

<sup>29</sup> Some would argue, passionately, that God's big picture is *his glory*, and that redeeming the world magnifies his glory. I can only say "Amen!" to that notion, articulated so well by the ancient poet: "May those who love your salvation always say, 'Let God be exalted!'" (Psalm 70:4b, italics mine). John Piper, a worshiper of more recent vintage, also bears testimony to this in *Desiring God* and other of his writings. Please see John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 3:10

<sup>31</sup> In David's victory over Goliath in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17, we see David's courage, alone and unaffirmed by those around him... and his ability to stir up courage and confidence in those who have been discouraged and cowardly.

<sup>32</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16:13

sacrifice, God the Father entrusted to him, among other things, knowledge and power: "The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does... Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."<sup>33</sup> God the Father trusted Jesus with sober responsibility and divine authority.

Fifthly, and finally, God gave each of these men *his blessing*. Paul's life as a Christian leader was fraught with misunderstanding, conflict, and persecution.<sup>34</sup> But he persistently testified of triumph and success - not just as concepts or future promises, but as his everyday experience: "But thanks be to God, who *always* leads us in triumphal procession in Christ... I can do *everything* through him who gives me strength."<sup>35</sup> God blessed Paul as Paul followed him whole-heartedly.

The Bible portrays each of these men, as an *individual*, receiving what he needs to successfully play his part in God's mission.<sup>36</sup> The Bible also portrays God, as an *empowering agent*, using the resources at his disposal to

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<sup>33</sup> John 5:20, 22

<sup>34</sup> For example, Paul notes in a letter to fellow Christians in the city of Corinth: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia" (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:8).

<sup>35</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2:14, Philippians 4:13 (*italics mine*)

<sup>36</sup> Some would describe this as one's calling, and assert that *God gives us all we need to fulfill our calling*. Scripture agrees: "[God's] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us" (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3a). See also Romans 8:28-30, in which it is clear not only that our calling is *sure*, but that it manifests God's *glory*.

help each one play his part.<sup>37</sup> The Bible therefore supports a model of empowerment in which *someone uses the means at his disposal to help someone else pursue God's purposes.*<sup>38</sup>

Did these men who experienced God's empowerment, in turn, empower others? The evidence for this is more mixed. David, as king, enjoyed the fealty of many. Yet when guilty of adultery, he did much less than empower one of his brave, loyal soldiers; he deceived and murdered him.<sup>39</sup> Consistently *experiencing* empowerment, for David, did not automatically translate into consistently *practicing* empowerment.<sup>40</sup> One can be a beneficiary of the empowerment process, David demonstrated, without being a benefactor.<sup>41</sup>

In asking and answering the question "*How did God empower those men who are held up by the Bible as heroes and role models?*" we have focused on individuals and described empowerment as an individual process. The Bible, however, pictures empowerment as a group, or community, process as well. "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus," instructs the apostle Paul, "and the power of

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<sup>37</sup> I begin here to use the term *empowering agent* to denote someone who helps another person appropriate God's power into his life.

<sup>38</sup> Again, given the limitations and delimitations of this project, the conversation is focused on men. I will from this point on speak predominately in masculine terms using masculine language.

<sup>39</sup> The account of David's treacherous treatment of Uriah is found in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> See Appendix A for a fuller description of this biblical research.

<sup>41</sup> We might say that in the give and take of empowerment, one can be a taker but not a giver.

our Lord is present..."<sup>42</sup> There appears to be some aspect of God's power that is engaged only in the context of Christian community; it seems that *empowerment is a community process as well as an individual one.*<sup>43</sup>

The Bible is also optimistic. Apparently, an individual can fail multiple times and not ruin his destiny: "Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again."<sup>44</sup> It seems to follow that human failure - as an under-powered individual, as an empowering agent, or as an empowering community - does not preclude future success. Fresh opportunity to empower, or be empowered, lay just beyond "getting up again."

In summary, the Bible supports a model of empowerment in which *someone uses the means at his disposal to help someone else pursue God's purposes.* This includes revealing to the individual the big picture and his place in it, and providing him resources, trust, and blessing as he imperfectly walks it out.<sup>45</sup> It is in some fashion a shared or community process. It is an inherently hopeful process.

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<sup>42</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:4. Here Paul is instructing believers how to access the power of God to maintain the purity of the local church.

<sup>43</sup> Other Bible passages picture this community aspect of empowerment in a more positive light - the shared power to edify the church (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13), the communal nature of God's power in Ephesians 3, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Proverbs 24:16

<sup>45</sup> Jesus, of course, is the notable exception to imperfection in that he walked out his part of God's mission perfectly: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us..." (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21a).

We now turn to several Christian authors who sharpen our understanding of empowerment.

#### Ken Blanchard

Ken Blanchard is famous for his winsome, practical advice regarding *management* in *The One Minute Manager*.<sup>46</sup> He finds *empowerment*, however, to be a longer term proposition, and in *Empowerment Takes More than a Minute* (1996), Blanchard and co-authors John P. Carlos and Alan Randolph describe empowerment as a messy, slow, and frustrating process.<sup>47</sup>

Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph tell a fable in which a company manager is struggling to empower his employees - and finding empowerment to be elusive. He is afraid to trust his employees.<sup>48</sup> His employees, on the other hand, are afraid to extend themselves; the cost of making mistakes - which is inherent in striving for excellence - is just too high.<sup>49</sup> Inertia - the tendency of matter to keep moving in the same direction - rules the workplace.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager* (New York: William Morrow, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> Ken Blanchard, John P. Carlos and Alan Randolph, *Empowerment Takes More than a Minute* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> "If you must know," confesses the manager, "I don't have that much faith in people" (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 13).

<sup>49</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).



Blanchard and his colleagues do not believe such circumstances are hopeless. They believe that within each individual is "a wellspring of underutilized human capacity," and that in the right kind of working environment, supervisors can make empowerment happen, "releasing the power people already have" within them.<sup>51</sup> The authors describe empowerment, then, in two main ways: as a quality of the work environment, and as a commitment a manager can make.<sup>52</sup>

What do the authors see as essential qualities of an empowering environment? First, it is *a place where people believe in others*; the authors even use the word "faith" to describe how the empowering supervisor looks at his employees' abilities!<sup>53</sup> Second, it is *a place where people feel free to make use of their skills and abilities*.<sup>54</sup> And third, it is *a place where workers are organized into self-directed teams*.<sup>55</sup>

How does the empowering manager create such an environment? The authors describe three keys, each

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<sup>51</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *Empowerment*, v-vi.

<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that a manager needs not just *commitment* to empowerment, but a *set of skills* for cultivating it - which Blanchard and his colleagues go on to describe.

<sup>53</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 6.

<sup>55</sup> A self-directed team "consists of a group of employees with responsibility for an entire process or product. They plan, perform, and manage the work from start to finish" (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 60).

corresponding to one of the preceding qualities, and the first key is *sharing information*. When people have access to sensitive information, it makes them feel trusted.<sup>56</sup> They feel empowered to use the information, and, the authors contend, use it well: "People with information are compelled to act responsibly."<sup>57</sup> When information is *withheld* from employees, on the other hand, they don't feel trusted - and "effective decision making grinds to a halt."<sup>58</sup>

The second key to creating an empowering environment is *creating autonomy*.<sup>59</sup> People are motivated by opportunity for self-government, the authors contend. Somewhat counter-intuitively, this is done, the authors argue, *by defining boundaries*. Yes, people need a compelling vision - a picture of the future - in order to engage their capacities.<sup>60</sup> They also need *boundaries* so they know *where to engage* their capacities. The manager clarifies the vision, and, with input from everyone, breaks the big picture down into little pictures - "the specific role each person has to play in achieving the vision."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *Empowerment*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 34.

<sup>58</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 44.

The third key to creating an empowering environment, according to Blanchard and his co-authors, is replacing old boundaries with *self-directed teams*. "You can't just have an organization of autonomous people acting in isolation," contend the authors. "We need to depend on people working together... [building] off each other's specialized skills and knowledge."<sup>62</sup> Empowered individuals, Blanchard and his co-authors contend, must work together as empowered teams.<sup>63</sup>

These empowered teams are not easily birthed. The authors observe four stages in the development of an empowered team: orientation, dissatisfaction, resolution, and production.<sup>64</sup> Often, in the second stage, negative comments crescendo, willpower wanes, and everybody gives up and goes back to the known.<sup>65</sup> A team that presses through this uncomfortable stage can ultimately become a high-performing team.<sup>66</sup> Empowered teams are not easily created.

Untapped potential, latent in human beings, is fundamental to Blanchard and his colleagues' theory.<sup>67</sup> They

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<sup>62</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *Empowerment*, 59.

<sup>63</sup> This only works well, the authors note, when everyone is trained in team skills - and those in power continue to support the process (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 68).

<sup>64</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 100-101.

<sup>65</sup> Which all would agree is mediocre - but it works (somewhat), and it's familiar.

<sup>66</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, 100.

<sup>67</sup> The authors distinguish between disengaged power - which they term potential - and engaged power. This is helpful, and sharpens our understanding of the nature of power: it can be disengaged and latent,

view human beings much the same way as the apostle Paul views Christians - with access to "incomparably great power" working in and through them "for the common good."<sup>68</sup> In this, Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph's view is consistent with the biblical model of empowerment described earlier - though their optimism may be ill-founded when applied to those lacking the Spirit of God within.<sup>69</sup>

The authors' theory acknowledges the social nature of empowerment.<sup>70</sup> Empowered people, they contend, are inevitably "team people;" they do not merely savor the benefits of empowerment in isolation, but cooperate and collaborate with others in order to facilitate *their* empowerment. Empowerment, according to Blanchard and his co-authors, is intrinsically a community, not merely individual, project.

The authors' three characteristics of an empowering environment - *a place where people believe in others, feel free to engage their skills and abilities, and are*

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bringing no benefit to others... or engaged and productive, bringing benefit to others.

<sup>68</sup> Ephesians 1:19, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:7

<sup>69</sup> The Bible describes spiritual, growing processes that take place in redeemed human beings in Romans 5:3-5, Ephesians 4:11-13, Philippians 1:6, and elsewhere. While biblical principles are trustworthy in all environments, secular or sacred, there is power (and empowerment) that is only available to believers. (See 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2, for example.) We will explore the implications of fostering empowerment - with and without the indwelling Holy Spirit - in Chapter 4.

<sup>70</sup> I use "social" here in the broad sense of being and doing in community, in relation to others.

*organized into self-directed teams* - are consistent with the biblical view of empowerment. All three would be fitting descriptors of the spiritual, interdependent communities described in the New Testament - places where people know their part in the big picture and are entrusted with the resources and opportunity to pursue their specific part (Blanchard and colleagues' "small picture").<sup>71</sup>

The authors' theory presupposes authority as part of the human environment, and this makes their theory both biblical - see Romans 13, for example - as well as realistic. Power in the hands of other people is a reality grasped by even the youngest schoolboy at his first recess, and the authors offer helpful (and arguably *noble*) advice to the bearers of power about how to use it for others' betterment.<sup>72</sup>

Blanchard and his co-authors make room, in their model of empowerment, for mistakes. "Permission to take risks, make mistakes... opens up people's ability to learn and use

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<sup>71</sup> See the spiritual communities - local churches - described in Romans 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

<sup>72</sup> Blanchard and co-author Phil Hodges develop this more fully in their book *Lead Like Jesus* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005). They observe that Jesus managed the seemingly contradictory roles of servant and leader by setting the destination and the course - then doing what it takes for *others* to successfully run the race. "We must *lead* by setting course and direction," note Blanchard and Hodges, "and *serve* by empowering and supporting others in implementation" (Blanchard and Hodges, 84). They observe that self-interest is "the most persistent barrier to leading like Jesus" (Blanchard and Hodges, 39).

their talents.”<sup>73</sup> This is consistent with the biblical record - and the biblical model - of empowerment in which imperfect people receive and pass on empowerment imperfectly.<sup>74</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph’s theory, like the biblical model, is buoyed by the hope that human beings can live worthy lives in spite of foibles.

Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph’s theory is cast in the business environment and does not explicitly exalt God’s mission as the ultimate priority. Still, their theory acknowledges the importance of individuals knowing the big picture and their parts in it - key aspects of biblical empowerment.

Their theory also recognizes the importance of trust in motivating human beings to engage their latent capacities and move from potential to performance.<sup>75</sup> This too is consistent with a biblical model in which faith or trust engages God’s power (“you need only to be still,” Exodus 14:14) and fear hinders it (“The man who fears is not made perfect in love,” 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:18).

While not an explicitly Christian book, *Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute* presents a model of empowerment

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<sup>73</sup> Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *Empowerment*, 79.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix A, second table: *How Did These Men Empower Others?* for a look at how all the biblical heroes - save the perfect Jesus - failed to flawlessly empower others.

<sup>75</sup> I use performance here not in the sense of acting like someone you are not, but behaving like the one you are.

that is very compatible with a biblical view - *using the means at your disposal to help someone pursue God's purposes* - and affirms the necessity of faith and community to foster it. It also adds the *engagement of potential* idea to our developing conceptualization of empowerment.

#### Rick Warren

What about the young man who yearns to fulfill his destiny, but whose circumstances are less than empowering? Can he do anything, as an individual, to empower *himself*? Rick Warren's answer to that question is a confident "Yes," and his advice on how to do so - to set oneself up to experience life-changing power - is found in *The Purpose Driven Life*.<sup>76</sup>

Pastor Warren begins by challenging the *narcissism* so prevalent in today's culture.<sup>77</sup> In the first sentence of Chapter 1, he curtly informs the reader, "It's not about you!"<sup>78</sup> The secret to a fulfilling life, Warren contends, is not the pursuit of self-centered goals, ambitions, and dreams; it is, to the contrary, pursuing *God and His purposes* for you.

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<sup>76</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> Narcissism is, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, "self-love; excessive interest in one's own appearance, comfort, importance, abilities, etc."

<sup>78</sup> Warren, 17.

What are those purposes? Like Blanchard and Hodges in *Lead Like Jesus*, Warren sees becoming like Jesus as a goal - perhaps *the* goal? - for a human life. "Your heavenly Father's goal," he says, "is for you to mature and develop the characteristics of Jesus Christ."<sup>79</sup> *The overarching goal*, Warren contends, *is to be transformed so that the character of Jesus is expressed in your unique design.*<sup>80</sup>

This transformation requires intentionality, Warren believes, and it begins with soul searching. Warren believes that honest, intentional introspection is the starting point of coming to terms with your purpose and destiny. He challenges his reader to ponder the ultimate purpose of his life and answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?"

This transformation also requires daily discipline, argues Warren. "You must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow," he contends, if you really *want* to grow.<sup>81</sup> Warren, in forty chapters, tells his readers *how* to grow. Each chapter articulates one idea, one biblical truth

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<sup>79</sup> Warren, 179.

<sup>80</sup> Warren also asserts that there are *five purposes* - pursuant to the overarching purpose - that are common to all humanity; we were *all* made for worship (planned for God's pleasure), community (formed for God's family), transformation (created to become like Christ), ministry (shaped for serving God), and mission (made for mission). See Warren, 7-8.

<sup>81</sup> Warren, 179.



- complete with actions that he believes will lead to personal transformation.

Pastor Warren warns that living a balanced, purpose driven life is not easy.<sup>82</sup> He is very pragmatic, and provides spiritual direction for the person who wants to live a balanced life: Talk through the book with others. Evaluate yourself periodically. Journal about your spiritual journey. Pass on what's changed your life.<sup>83</sup>

Blanchard and his colleagues picture an empowering environment, and describe the methodology of bringing the potential out of others. Warren, on the other hand, directs *the individual* to empower *himself* - to set himself up to experience life-changing power. The former mentor us in how to empower others; Warren mentors us in empowering ourselves.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren affirms - as does the Bible, and as do Blanchard and his colleagues - the latent potential in human beings. Augmenting the conceptual

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<sup>82</sup> "We all tend to overemphasize the purposes we feel most passionate about," observes Warren, "and neglect the others" (Warren, 306).

<sup>83</sup> Warren, 306-309.

<sup>84</sup> Like Blanchard and his colleagues, Warren sees latent potential in human beings. Warren, however, seems to hold a different view regarding the *locus* of power. Blanchard and his colleagues imply that power lies untapped within the individual - he owns a chain saw, but needs fuel. Warren sees power as belonging to God - the chain saw and fuel are available at a nearby store. While this distinction may be of interest to the philosopher and theologian, it is probably of little interest to the individual who is happily sawing up firewood in the backyard, engaging the power he now wields.

with the pragmatic, he supplies practical, personal steps an individual can take to fulfill that potential - helpful to those wanting to take action on his ideas.<sup>85</sup>

The biblical view identified God's overarching mission as redemption of the world - a clearly theocentric, or God-centered, goal. Warren's theory does not focus on this "big picture," but personalizes it - an individual must do *his* part to fulfill *his* purposes and fulfill *his* destiny. In doing this Warren serves the individual by giving him a man-sized mission - and the hope of achieving his God-given destiny.

If Warren is right, this hope endures regardless of whether one finds himself in a particularly empowering environment or not; an individual can empower himself. This is consistent with the biblical view: "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me," claims David in Psalm 138 - even those who are "lowly" and "in the midst of trouble." For those in such non-optimal environments, Warren - and the Bible - offer hope of appropriating God's power and fulfilling one's destiny.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> We might say Warren displays *his* potential as teacher and spiritual guide as he succinctly teaches principles and provides clear, "do-able" steps to implement them.

<sup>86</sup> Again, faith - trust in a personal God - is involved. Warren - and the Bible - do not claim that this is easy.

Warren brings the issue of *destiny* into sharper focus. Living your life for God's purposes, he claims, directs you into your destiny - the future that God has in mind for you. This too is consistent with the biblical message and model of empowerment.<sup>87</sup> "Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD?" asks the psalmist; "[The LORD] will instruct him in the way chosen for him."<sup>88</sup> "In his heart a man plans his course," confesses the preacher, "but the LORD determines his steps."<sup>89</sup>

Some might argue that Warren's theory is man-centered and not God-centered. His clear statements regarding the primacy of God's glory, the superiority of God's purposes, and the importance of being transformed to become more like Jesus Christ render this accusation unfounded.

Warren's theory meshes with - and fleshes out - our nascent notion of empowerment: *using the means at your disposal to help someone pursue God's purposes*. We can also note that someone can use the means at his disposal to help *himself* engage his potential to pursue God's purposes.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See Psalm 138:8 and Psalm 57:2.

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 25:12

<sup>89</sup> Proverbs 16:9

<sup>90</sup> In this way, a man can be - as regards his own life - both an empowering agent *and* an empowered individual.

Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol and Ken McElrath<sup>91</sup>

*The Ascent of a Leader* is a book about leadership, and authors Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath state at the start that it is "about becoming the kind of leader whom others want to follow."<sup>92</sup> Their motives are *not* to propel their reader down the fast track, however. Rather, they want him to engage his capacities *and* develop his character - both, in their view, essential to having a positive, lasting influence in his family, community, and company.<sup>93</sup>

Thrall and his colleagues observe that many leaders don't finish well.<sup>94</sup> Many leaders fix their sights on fulfilling their potential: they discover what they can do, develop their capacities, acquire titles and positions, and attain - in terms of human measure - their potential.<sup>95</sup> On the climb, unfortunately, they often forego development of their character.

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<sup>91</sup> The current Leadership Catalyst team includes Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch. Ken McElrath was formerly involved with this ministry, and co-wrote *The Ascent of a Leader* with Thrall and McNicol.

<sup>92</sup> Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 5.

<sup>94</sup> This rather sobering reality is substantiated by the work of Robert Clinton, whom the authors quote as saying that more than 70 percent of leaders don't finish well (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, 14). Steve Farrar, somewhat more anecdotally, suggests 9 of 10 men don't finish well [Steve Farrar, *Finishing Strong* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 1995), 6].

<sup>95</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, Figure 2.1, 18.

The authors do not suggest squelching our desire to succeed. Like Blanchard and his colleagues in *Empowerment Takes More than a Minute*, Thrall and his colleagues recognize the inner desire we have to engage our capacities: "The desire to... fulfill our potential is a natural part of being human."<sup>96</sup> We can and should, they contend, endeavor to engage the capacities we were born with.<sup>97</sup>

Capacities alone, however, are not enough. They argue that we also need *character* to govern the pursuit of our potential:

Character [is] the inner world of motives and values that shapes our actions... It empowers our capacities while keeping them in check.<sup>98</sup>

Character is the necessary complement - the moral sideboards - to pursuit of our capacities. In fact, the authors contend, a man must value and intentionally pursue character in order to fully engage his capacities. Pursue character, they urge: entrust yourself to God and others, choose to be vulnerable with trustworthy colleagues, align your behavior with what is good and true, faithfully walk

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<sup>96</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Thrall et al. seem to use the word *capacities* to describe what Blanchard et al. call *potential* - latent power, residing within the individual, to accomplish something.

<sup>98</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 1.

out your commitments - and, in the end, discover your destiny.<sup>99</sup>

One does not settle for a lower level of accomplishment in order to pursue character, contend the authors. Pursuing a course that engages your capacities *and* grows your character may take longer than singularly pursuing your capacities; in fact, it probably will. But in the end, you will eventually fulfill your potential - without compromising your character.<sup>100</sup>

This pursuit of potential and character is not something a man can do alone; he needs an environment that upholds and empowers him.<sup>101</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath say this is a place where *grace* is practiced - where people don't get the bad they deserve and where people get treated better than they deserve.<sup>102</sup> In a grace-based environment, "people feel safe, they grow up, they trust each other, they live authentically, they celebrate each other..."<sup>103</sup> Grace, the authors argue, is a necessary component of empowerment - and grace is inherently a function of

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<sup>99</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, Figure 10.1, 140.

<sup>100</sup> This isn't easy, conceptually or in practice. Thrall et al. observe that "We must continually seek" - perhaps more accurately said, "labor"? - "to find ways to *integrate* our hearts with our hands, our agenda with our dreams, and our capacities with our character" (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 153).

<sup>101</sup> The title of Chapter 3 in *Ascent* is "Creating Environments that Uphold and Empower Us." See Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, 25-41.

<sup>102</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 30.

community. We need, the authors contend, supportive relationships.

Blanchard and his co-authors describe these people who bring out the best in us as skillful managers who are willing to serve their subordinates for the sake of accomplishing great things. Thrall and his colleagues describe them as good-hearted people who, for the sake of their friends, extend grace and don't desert them.<sup>104</sup> In so doing, they widen the venue of empowering agents - and the context of empowerment principles - from the business environment to society in general. In spite of the title of their book, Thrall and his colleagues therefore apply to the general population the principles of empowerment. Like each of our theorists so far, Thrall and his colleagues observe that every man has capacities to engage, potential to pursue, and a destiny to fulfill.

Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath do not clearly identify God's overarching mission of redemption which is explicit in the biblical view of empowerment. They speak in terms of "God's plan" and "destiny," however - and clearly counsel their readers to an unselfish, God-ward life of faith: "We can only live for the benefit of others when we cease

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<sup>104</sup> Blanchard and colleagues write from the perspective of company managers, and Thrall and colleagues write from the perspective of Christian leadership developers. Their characterizations are compatible, and, I would contend, germane in their respective spheres.

living solely for ourselves and live as the Creator intended: loving God and loving others.”<sup>105</sup>

Some, saddled with difficult and unfortunate circumstances, spend their lives wishing life would improve. Thrall and his colleagues, like Warren, give specific counsel to the individual: they direct the individual to set himself up to engage his capacities, achieve his potential, and fulfill his destiny - to self-empower. They recognize, and perhaps with more eloquence than the other authors in this section, describe the partnership an individual has with God in engaging his capacities and fulfilling his destiny:

In the making of our own lives, some choices must inevitably be left to the Master. But God leaves many of the choices to us. We participate in the creation of this work of art called our life.<sup>106</sup>

At this juncture, we will add into our developing conceptualization of empowerment the notion of *engaging capacities* - so eloquently articulated by Thrall and his colleagues, endorsed by Warren, identified by Blanchard and his colleagues, and explicit in the Bible. Our working conceptualization of empowerment at this juncture is: *Using the means at your disposal to help someone engage his capacities to pursue God's purposes*. Implied are helping

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<sup>105</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 179.

<sup>106</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 181.



him understand the big picture and his place in it as well as providing supportive community. Possible ingredients include gracious people and optimism.

We now turn our attention to the academic world and ask the question: What does science tell us about the process of empowerment?

### **Empowerment in the Academy**

Does science corroborate a biblical view of empowerment? Here is what key academic researchers have found in three decades of empowerment research.

Julian Rappaport

Julian Rappaport - a scientist who has published in a startling array of disciplines including biochemistry, urban economics, anthropology, and community psychology - broached the subject of empowerment in 1981.<sup>107</sup> In his seminal work - cited over 800 times in subsequent literature - Rappaport poses a question to those interested in helping others: Are we intent on *helping* them, like a parent helps a child... or *empowering* them, like an advocate helps a victim? Do we offer help based on another's *need*,

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<sup>107</sup> Julian Rappaport, "In Praise of Paradox: A Social Policy of Empowerment over Prevention," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 9, no. 1 (1981).

or do we offer ourselves and our resources based on their *right* to such help?

Rappaport's thesis is that the answer to that question is a paradox, and we need to reconcile ourselves with that reality.<sup>108</sup>

...the most important and interesting aspects of community life are by their very nature paradoxical... our task as researchers, scholars, and professionals should be to "unpack" and influence contemporary resolutions...<sup>109</sup>

Rappaport thus observes that there is *paradox* implicit in empowerment - but it shouldn't stop us from trying to empower others.

Rappaport continued searching for answers. In an article written with Kenneth Maton, Rappaport qualifies empowerment as "interpersonal behavior change in the direction of group ideals."<sup>110</sup> Thus, Rappaport and Maton observe two things: one, that empowerment is a group process - *it requires community*, and two, empowerment involves progress - specifically, *progress toward a goal that is both personal and shared*.

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<sup>108</sup> A paradox is "a statement that seems contradictory, unbelievable, or absurd but that may actually be true in fact" (Webster's New World Dictionary).

<sup>109</sup> Rappaport, "In Praise of Paradox," 1.

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth I. Maton and Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment in a Religious Setting: A Multivariate Investigation," *Prevention in Human Services* 3, no. 2-3 (Winter-Spring 1984), 37.

Interestingly, in their research in religious settings, Rappaport and Maton observe that "those seen by themselves and by others as empowered were committed to a relationship with God and with others in the setting."<sup>111</sup> Empowerment, they observe, *takes place in the context of commitment*. This supports the observation of Thrall and his colleagues that achieving our potential requires committed, trustworthy relationships. It also supports the view of Blanchard and his colleagues that a safe environment - where people have permission to make mistakes - is essential to engage their capacities.<sup>112</sup> Mistakes, it seems, don't automatically terminate relationships in a committed community.

Environments where people have the opportunity to tell their stories - and listen to others' stories - are empowering too, Rappaport found.<sup>113</sup> "There are many individual and collective stories waiting to be told," he observes, and "helping people to identify, create, and tell their own stories... is an endeavor consistent with the

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<sup>111</sup> Maton and Rappaport, "Empowerment in a Religious Setting," 37.

<sup>112</sup> In such an environment, people are also more likely to be happy. Follow-up data to Rappaport and Maton's study indicate "a relationship between commitment and life satisfaction" (Maton and Rappaport, "Empowerment in a Religious Setting," 37).

<sup>113</sup> Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative: Listening to Stories and Creating Settings," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (October 1995).

development of empowerment."<sup>114</sup> Rappaport found that *listening is empowering*.

At least part of the empowering effect of membership in a community that values story is that the individual is supplied a collective story to be part of - and "everyone needs a community narrative to support one's personal life story."<sup>115</sup> A Swahili proverb observes that *Mtu ni watu* - "person is people." Community provides a shared identity for individuals.

Community provides yet more for the individual, observes Rappaport - it provides the support necessary for ongoing change:

People who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new communal narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story.<sup>116</sup>

*Community, observes Rappaport, empowers the individual to sustain their effort to grow and change.*

Summarizing the current article, Rappaport states "narrative theory and methods are a powerful means to further describe, understand, and foster these [empowering]

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<sup>114</sup> Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 799, 802.

<sup>115</sup> Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 804. Rappaport offers this helpful distinction: a "story" refers to "an individual's cognitive representation or social communication of events that are unique to that person," and "narrative" refers to "stories that are not idiosyncratic to individuals" (Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 803).

<sup>116</sup> Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 796.

processes."<sup>117</sup> I agree, both intuitively and in light of more substantive evidence.

Intuitively, I agree because I find that when others listen to my story, I feel validated and somehow believe in myself a little more strongly; their interest begets passion to pursue my sense of calling: I am empowered.

More rationally, I agree because the womb of my understanding of empowerment is the Bible - and the Bible is full of stories, all of which reveal God's story. From my worldview (see *Assumptions of the Study*, Chapter One), the Bible is God's narrative and is, to echo Rappaport, "a powerful means to... describe, understand, and foster these [empowering] processes." The Bible, with its grand theme of redemption through Jesus Christ, provides the grand narrative in which every person's individual narrative finds its place - like threads in a tapestry. Rappaport's theory aligns with this perfectly.

Additionally, Rappaport's empowerment theory includes community and commitment - both of which appear to be asserting themselves as necessary components of empowerment. The scientist seems to commend to his reader *committed participation in a hopeful community of people who know how to listen to each other.*

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<sup>117</sup> Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 799.

In the various articles authored by Rappaport included in this literature review, his tone is optimistic and hopeful - an attitude in alignment with the biblical view in which "all things [in an individual's life] work together for good."<sup>118</sup>

In summary, Rappaport - arguably the "father" of modern empowerment research - identifies empowerment as a social process that enables people to discover and live their individual stories in the context of a larger story. He acknowledges the importance of individual commitment, yet makes it clear that the empowerment process is enhanced by a committed community that cares about individuals' stories.<sup>119</sup> He models and commends optimism.

While Rappaport does not explicitly identify God's overarching mission as the narrative in which all individual narratives find meaning, his theory supports our current conceptualization of empowerment: *using the means*

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<sup>118</sup> See Romans 8:28. Admittedly, the perceived *tone* of another's writing is a subjective measure. Still, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34).

<sup>119</sup> Rappaport observes that "empowerment can be a conceptually complex and highly nuanced idea." This makes it challenging to nail down a simple conceptualization of empowerment. Then - making the challenge even more intimidating - he notes that in the rising tide of literature on the subject, authors write about "several different forms of empowerment" (Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 797). The discipline of community psychology took a sustained interest in empowerment, and writers in this field normally speak of *psychological empowerment* - which the next author describes.

*at your disposal to help someone engage his capacities to pursue God's purposes.*

Marc A. Zimmerman

Making his debut in empowerment research a few years after Julian Rappaport, Marc Zimmerman published his first article - co-authored with Rappaport - on the subject in 1988. Zimmerman and Rappaport offer, in this work, a definition of psychological empowerment:

Psychological empowerment could be described as the connection between a sense of personal competence, a desire for, and a willingness to take action in the public domain.<sup>120</sup>

In articulating this definition, Zimmerman and Rappaport limit the discussion to *the experience of the individual*. This narrowing proves helpful in focusing both their research and the ongoing conversation in community psychology - but, I will observe, excludes (or at least downplays) the community aspect of empowerment that previous authors, including Rappaport, have found important.

The authors synthesize the literature on citizen participation with research on perceived control [over one's circumstances], and find that in various studies,

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<sup>120</sup> Marc A. Zimmerman and Julian Rappaport, "Citizen Participation, Perceived Control, and Psychological Empowerment," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 16, no. 5 (Oct 1988), 725.

"individuals reporting a greater amount of participation scored higher on indices of empowerment."<sup>121</sup> Being involved, they found, enhances empowerment.

Zimmerman continued to pursue the relationship between participation and empowerment, and in 1990 published "Toward a Theory of Learned Hopefulness."<sup>122</sup> Having tested a model connecting participation and empowerment with a model lacking such connection, Zimmerman identifies a "direct effect of participation... on psychological empowerment."<sup>123</sup> Whereas a "victim mentality" saps an individual's aspiration and motivation - *disempowers* his dreams and drive - participation in voluntary organizations causes an individual to "learn" hopefulness:

Learned hopefulness suggests that empowering experiences - ones that provide opportunities to learn skills and develop a sense of control - can help individuals limit the debilitating effects of problems in living. Voluntary organizations are... natural settings that enable individuals to develop a sense of psychological empowerment.<sup>124</sup>

In 1995, the *American Journal of Community Psychology* published a special issue on empowerment.<sup>125</sup> Zimmerman and Douglas Perkins, in the introductory article, concede that

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<sup>121</sup> Zimmerman and Rappaport, "Citizen Participation," 725.

<sup>122</sup> Marc A. Zimmerman, "Toward a Theory of Learned Hopefulness: A Structural Model Analysis of Participation and Empowerment," *Journal of Research in Personality* 24 (1990).

<sup>123</sup> Zimmerman, "Toward a Theory," 71.

<sup>124</sup> Zimmerman, "Toward a Theory," 71.

<sup>125</sup> The introductory article noted that problems associated with "a proliferation of interest in empowerment" were responsible, at least in part, for the special issue.



all the interest in empowerment had resulted in a variety of definitions.<sup>126</sup> They suggest that most of the literature on the topic is consistent with a definition penned by the Cornell Empowerment Group that defines empowerment as

An intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.<sup>127</sup>

Perkins and Zimmerman, apparently, find this definition deficient, and supply the following definition of empowerment:

[Empowerment is] a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to social policy and social change.<sup>128</sup>

I see this definition as very mediocre. It's shorter, and therefore lacks the thoroughness of the Cornell definition (above). But even though it's shorter, this definition lacks both logical and emotional focus. It appears to be an attempt to widen the definition of psychological empowerment to include the social justice

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<sup>126</sup> Douglas D. Perkins and Marc A. Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory, Research, and Application," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (October 1995). Perkins and Zimmerman believe empowerment is sometimes confused with self-esteem and competency, but argue that it's more than a psychological construct (570).

<sup>127</sup> Perkins and Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory," 571 - here quoting Cornell Empowerment Group's "Empowerment and Family Support," *Networking Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (1989).

<sup>128</sup> Perkins and Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory," 569.

dimension, and it ends up skinny but bloated. I vote for Zimmerman's original 1988 definition.

Zimmerman's work (as well as his 1988 definition) brings out the role that believing in yourself - "a sense of personal competence" - has in empowerment. In order to experience empowerment, it seems, an individual has to leave his "learned hopelessness" behind and learn hopefulness by his successes in engaging his capacities. This can happen in Blanchard's safe environment, in Thrall's environment of grace, and in a community where "there are different kinds of service" and "love covers over a multitude of sins."<sup>129</sup> Success begets confidence and is empowering.

Zimmerman also brings out the place that participation in a cause bigger than oneself plays in empowerment. In his view, the individual has to want - or at least be willing - to "take action in the public domain." None of the biblical heroes we examined were hermits; they accepted their divine calls and lived them out in the context of relationships.<sup>130</sup> A high functioning team is always a group of people working toward a common goal.<sup>131</sup> An environment of grace always includes people who hold the individual accountable to

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<sup>129</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:5, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:8

<sup>130</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>131</sup> "A team of empowered people is far more powerful than a disconnected set of individuals" (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph, *Empowerment*, 60).

something.<sup>132</sup> A community that cares about individual stories is made up of other individuals that value a common story.<sup>133</sup> There is an aspect of unselfish, noble endeavor that seems implied in Zimmerman's public participation - and in empowerment.

Zimmerman, like Rappaport, does not identify God's big picture as the defining narrative for each individual. Still, his research and theory support our developing conceptualization of empowerment: *using the means at your disposal to help someone engage his capacities - in the public arena, in community - to pursue God's purposes*. The result should be learned hopefulness: "I can do this."

Lauren Bennett Cattaneo and Aliya R. Chapman

Lauren Cattaneo and Aliya Chapman conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on empowerment, and they summarize their findings - and propose a new model of

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<sup>132</sup> "Any community... must create and follow guidelines to enable each person to express his or her own uniqueness... alignment requires mutual, supportive, accountable relationships" (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, *Ascent*, 103, 105).

<sup>133</sup> "The goals of empowerment are enhanced when people discover, or create and give voice to, a collective narrative that sustains their own personal life story in positive ways" (Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 796).

empowerment - in their 2010 article in *American Psychologist*.<sup>134</sup>

The authors observe that "the notion of empowerment is compelling and much employed" - but unfortunately, while the popularity of the term is easy to demonstrate, the term itself is not very well defined.<sup>135</sup>

Cattaneo and Chapman review the definitions employed by fellow scientists over the last three decades and find a fundamental flaw:

*all* [italics mine] of these studies have taken different elements of interest out of the larger process at work... [and consequently] they equate any piece of the process with the whole.<sup>136</sup>

An egg yolk, they contend, is not an egg.<sup>137</sup>

They argue forcefully the necessity of defining empowerment as a *process* - and that the importance of doing so "is not just academic."<sup>138</sup> Defining it as a process allows a helping professional, for example, to consider herself genuinely helpful when she facilitates an increase in one component of a client's empowerment.

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<sup>134</sup> Lauren Bennett Cattaneo and Aliya R. Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment: A Model for Use in Research and Practice," *American Psychologist* 65, no. 7 (2010).

<sup>135</sup> In fact, the authors suggest that the plurality of definitions allows their fellow academics to "pick from a menu of related, and at times vague, concepts" (Cattaneo and Chapman, 646).

<sup>136</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 649.

<sup>137</sup> The authors *do* provide a summary of their colleagues' models, noting their various foci: empowerment as mastery, as participation, as a forwarder of social justice, as goal achievement, and as an individual psychological process. See 648-649 for this very helpful summary.

<sup>138</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 650.

Such help does not take place in isolation, however, and the authors note that while an increase in one area of empowerment "*might* facilitate the empowerment process," links to other parts of the process "are critical to assess."<sup>139</sup> Thus, contend the authors, the need for understanding empowerment as an *iterative* process: make a shot at cultivating empowerment, assess results - and set yourself (and others) up to improve your efforts.

Cattaneo and Chapman see a comprehensive model of empowerment as containing six criteria. The first is *setting personally meaningful and power-oriented goals*. "Identifying personally meaningful goals is a key step in making positive changes."<sup>140</sup> Additionally, the goal has as its aim the increase of power in social contexts - "to increase one's influence in social relations."<sup>141</sup> An individual who wants to experience empowerment has to identify, "This is what I want."

The second criterion, say the authors, is *self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy is "the individual's sense of agency - the individual's beliefs about his or her abilities."<sup>142</sup> Zimmerman's definition includes this, too, when he asserts an empowered individual has "a sense of

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<sup>139</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 650.

<sup>140</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 651.

<sup>141</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 652.

<sup>142</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 652.

personal competence." The individual aspiring to empowerment has to believe, "I can do this."

The third criterion of empowerment is *knowledge*. "After identifying a goal and feeling that one can accomplish it," explain the authors, "one must identify a course of action."<sup>143</sup> They define knowledge as "an understanding of the relevant social context, including the power dynamics... possible routes... resources needed... ways to obtain them."<sup>144</sup>

The fourth criterion is *competence*. "Once an individual knows what is required to reach a goal," Cattaneo and Chapman explain, he or she has to acquire the skill to pursue it.<sup>145</sup> This is more than a sense of competence; it is the skill itself, and may require "identification of skill deficits and learning new skills."<sup>146</sup>

The fifth criterion is *action*. "In order to actually achieve goals," the authors observe, "one must take action."<sup>147</sup>

The sixth criterion is *impact*. After the individual takes action, it's necessary to assess the results. When he

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<sup>143</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 652.

<sup>144</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 652.

<sup>145</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 653.

<sup>146</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 653.

<sup>147</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 653. This is perhaps the most simple of the six components - and the most difficult for many.

sees change ("an environmental response") in the direction of his goals, the individual sees the outcome as related to his behavior, and his sense of self-efficacy grows.<sup>148</sup>

The authors describe the process *in toto* when they offer their definition of empowerment:<sup>149</sup>

[Empowerment is] an iterative process in which a person who lacks power sets a personally meaningful goal oriented toward increasing power, takes action toward that goal, and observes and reflects on the impact of this action, drawing on his or her evolving self-efficacy, knowledge, and competence related to the goal. Social context influences all six process components and the links among them.<sup>150</sup>

The authors also observe that the empowerment process is not linear. They observe that "A person may cycle through components repeatedly."<sup>151</sup>

My initial response to this article by Lauren Cattaneo and Aliya Chapman was to file it away and pretend I hadn't found it. I was finally getting a sense of empowerment, thanks to the Bible, Julian Rappaport, Marc Zimmerman, and others - and I discover this article by a couple of spunky academics that upset the proverbial apple cart. While offering a courtesy nod to those I had come to trust as the experts on empowerment, these two scientists shake their

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<sup>148</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 653. Note the scientists provide a helpful summary chart of these six components of the empowerment process on page 657 of their article.

<sup>149</sup> *In toto* means, according to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, "totally, entirely."

<sup>150</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 647.

<sup>151</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 647.

predecessors' theories through a fine screen... and come up with something different.

The authors' knowledge of empowerment, however, is broad, their logic - in my view - is flawless, and their model is cohesive and sensible. They grasp the obvious: empowerment is about increasing one's power. They grasp the not so obvious: empowerment is a process, and a very individualized process that takes place in the context of other people.

The authors' observation that empowerment is not linear is helpful, in practice. We cannot assume to be empowering others successfully - we are, after all, just part of their environment - or that the process is finished, and our responsibility to facilitate another's empowerment has been checked off.

Cattaneo and Chapman's goal in writing their article was essentially the same as my own in my research: "to articulate the process of empowerment in a way that is both precise... and broad enough... to apply across contexts."<sup>152</sup> I do find their model, as I stated, cohesive and sensible. It does not, however, meet my criterion of being serviceable. While their model provides an overarching paradigm or

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<sup>152</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 647.



rubric under which to discuss empowerment, it is simply too unwieldy for everyday use.<sup>153</sup>

The authors acknowledge that their model doesn't discriminate among individual goals; "it does not prioritize goals that maximize the empowerment of others."<sup>154</sup> It allows, therefore, for one to establish "personally meaningful power-oriented goals" that "trample on others' rights."<sup>155</sup> They make an effort to curb this risk by, at the end of their article, urging fellow researchers and practitioners to be wary of empowering some at the expense of others and to cultivate an awareness of their own values. They acknowledge, then, that the model itself is amoral. While this is no discredit to them as scientists, it does - in light of my worldview - leave the model wanting for moral underpinnings.

Still, the authors' summary of the scientific record and their articulation of a full-orbed model of empowerment provide research-based parameters of empowerment - parameters that strengthen the conceptualization that we have been developing in this project. Nothing in their

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<sup>153</sup> In all fairness, the authors must be given credit for their service to the academic community, and I suspect their comprehensive model of the process of empowerment will stand the test of time. However, when the subtitle claims their model to be "a model for use in research and practice," I think the practice they refer to must be assumed to be that of the academy.

<sup>154</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 658.

<sup>155</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman, 658.

complete definition discredits our solidifying (and purposefully svelte) definition of *using the means at your disposal to help someone engage his capacities to pursue God's purposes*.

Cattaneo and Chapman do for the academic community what Rick Warren did for the Christian community. While Warren in *The Purpose Driven Life* breaks discipleship down into discrete, easy-to-grasp steps, Cattaneo and Chapman break empowerment down into discrete, easy-to-grasp steps. They take what Zimmerman prescribes - "taking action in the public domain" - and clarify what it means: if you want to experience empowerment, you must personally decide what is important to you ("set personally meaningful and power-oriented goals"), must "identify a course of action," purposefully acquire skills, intentionally take action, and periodically assess how you're doing. Cattaneo and Chapman provide discrete, do-able action steps for the person who wants to experience more power.

While Cattaneo and Chapman's model lacks a moral compass - and, like most of the preceding theorists, does not identify God's grand scheme to redeem as its subject - it provides very helpful action steps for the person seeking to set himself up, in the human economy, for empowerment. Cattaneo and Chapman leave no room for self-

proclaimed victims; their theory always points the individual to bettering himself.

Additionally, Cattaneo and Chapman's recognition of empowerment as an iterative process allows all parties to acknowledge incremental change - and we all, in the often difficult journey of life, need regular occasions for celebration.

David M. Fetterman

The final academic voice I'll mention is David Fetterman, likely the most familiar voice regarding *evaluating* empowerment. The prolific Fetterman commends his *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* as "a window into the heart and soul of empowerment evaluation," articulating ten principles that, in his view, guide "every part of empowerment evaluation":

1. Improvement
2. Community ownership
3. Inclusion
4. Democratic participation
5. Social justice
6. Community knowledge
7. Evidence-based strategies
8. Capacity building
9. Organizational learning
10. Accountability<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> David M. Fetterman, "A Window into the Heart and Soul of Empowerment Evaluation," in *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 2.

Evaluation, to some, may imply a clinical or values-free assessment. To Fetterman, however, no such constraint is necessary - or even desirable. In fact, increasing empowerment is, in Fetterman's view, "one of the primary goals of empowerment evaluation"<sup>157</sup>

With such a statement - and the clear articulation of such goals as inclusion, social justice, and democratic participation - it's obvious that the author has no qualms about including values in the guiding principles of empowerment, that good social science does not require principles shorn of values.

Fetterman - and other empowerment evaluators - are apparently not dispassionate researchers or lecturers, but people who care about other people and their well being. In another article in the book just mentioned, Abraham Wandersman and his colleagues state that "the fundamental assumption" in empowerment evaluation theory and practice is "positive results (education, health, social welfare) in the lives of those affected by the program."<sup>158</sup>

One might make that case that empowerment evaluators, at times, are guilty of mushy thinking - that the more

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<sup>157</sup> Fetterman, "A Window," 8.

<sup>158</sup> Abraham Wandersman, Jessica Snell-Johns, Barry E. Lentz, David M. Fetterman, Dana C. Keener, Melanie Livet, Pamela S. Imm, and Paul Flaspohler, "The Principles of Empowerment Evaluation," in *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 29.

objective best practices of science are less important than the more subjective betterment of people's lives. In fact, *Empowerment Evaluation* includes an article by "a critical friend" of empowerment evaluation, J. Bradley Cousins.<sup>159</sup> In this article, Cousins challenges "empowerment evaluation enthusiasts" to "invest heavily in the prospect of empirical inquiry... by engaging in established modes of research."<sup>160</sup> This seems a polite reminder to not let "chicken soup stories" distract empowerment evaluators from fidelity to scientific method.<sup>161</sup>

Fetterman and fellow evaluators acknowledge the importance of clear and critical thinking. In fact, in his closing article in *Empowerment Evaluation*, Fetterman notes the importance of "evaluative capacity," though even this he defines in terms of both process and results "which promote sensitivity, relevance, rigor, and improvement."<sup>162</sup>

Fetterman, in his ten principles, identifies the necessity of *accountability* - something not all other authors have clearly identified. If it is true, as I have

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<sup>159</sup> J. Bradley Cousins, "Will the Real Empowerment Evaluation Please Stand Up?" in *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 183-208.

<sup>160</sup> Cousins, 204.

<sup>161</sup> This is my idiom, referring to the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books by Jack Canfield and others which contain numerous stories intended to warm the heart and create hope.

<sup>162</sup> David M. Fetterman, "Conceptualizing Empowerment in Terms of Sequential Time and Social Space," in *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 211.

suggested, that empowerment involves *authority* - specifically, authority that can be used to empower - it is reasonable to hold the bearer accountable to so employ it. Some would argue, and I would agree, that accountability to use one's authority to benefit others is morally necessary.<sup>163</sup>

I credit Fetterman with having a sense of morality - and wrestling to integrate it with his science. However, I share Cousins' view that Fetterman and others in the academic community should make their case via scientific method, not anecdotal success stories.

This concludes my survey of empowerment literature. While we have yet to examine empowerment in the contexts of human development and culture, we have wrestled to develop a cogent and serviceable definition. From the preceding survey of biblical and extra-biblical literature, we see empowerment as an individual, social, and moral phenomenon that moves somebody along the path from potential to fulfillment of potential.

Empowerment is an individual phenomenon in that it is a very personal path: an individual - in our case, a young

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<sup>163</sup> The biblical author, in Hebrews 13:17, urges Christians to obey their leaders and "submit to their authority." He immediately then describes leaders as *accountable* to bear their authority well, describing them as "men who must give an account" for their leadership and use of authority.

man - stands at a point in time, with all his objective capacities and subjective dreams, looking ahead to a unique journey that no one but him will ever travel.

It is a social phenomenon in that the young man is surrounded by people who will either help him or hinder him, serve him or use him - empower or disempower him.

It is a moral phenomenon in that its goal is shaped by values. In my view, these values involve young men fulfilling their individual destinies in the context of God's big picture, the redemption of the world.<sup>164</sup>

I therefore offer this concise conceptualization of empowerment as an individual, social, and moral phenomenon, for use in this study, and perhaps beyond: *using the means at your disposal to help someone else engage his capacities to pursue God's purposes.*<sup>165</sup>

### **From Boyhood to Manhood**

Having wrestled to conceptualize empowerment - a phenomenon that occurs in a human life, in human community - I'd now like us to ponder the transition *from boyhood to*

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<sup>164</sup> See assumptions of the study in Chapter 1 as well as the earlier section in this chapter on empowerment as a biblical concept.

<sup>165</sup> By excluding, in this definition, the aspect of self-empowerment, I am not rejecting it as unimportant. In fact, I consider it biblical, consistent with the theory we've examined, and logically necessary. However, I felt it would be distracting and cumbersome to include the notion in the lean, focused definition we have been forging.

*manhood*, a phenomenon that occurs in a human life, in the human life span.<sup>166</sup> So before parting company with the academy, I'd like to gather some insight on human development. We'll begin this section by looking at a research project that made an unexpected discovery about the male life cycle... and then consider what several Christian writers have to say about manhood.

Daniel J. Levinson

In their research leading to the release of *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel J. Levinson and his colleagues made a startling discovery. They were aiming to develop "an overarching conception of development" for the adult male.<sup>167</sup> They found - as we found earlier to be true about empowerment - that male development is a social and psychological process.<sup>168</sup> To their surprise, however, Levinson and his colleagues discovered that

*the [male] life structure evolves through a relatively orderly sequence during the adult years... It consists of a series of alternating stable (structure-building) periods and transitional (structure-changing) periods.*<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Somewhat simplistically, we could say that empowerment is a social phenomenon, and the transition to manhood a psychological one. Both occur over the course of time.

<sup>167</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, Charlotte N. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson, and Braxton McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 8.

<sup>168</sup> Levinson et al., xii.

<sup>169</sup> Levinson et al., 49; cf 317-318.



The scientists discovered that men go through a *surprisingly predictable* series of periods - which they call "seasons" - as they mature.<sup>170</sup>

The first season, from roughly age 17 to 22, is the *Early Adult Transition*.<sup>171</sup> Obviously, this is "college age," but collegian or not, the young man in this period has the unenviable task of crossing the no man's land between childhood and adulthood.

Making this trek requires questioning the nature of the pre-adult world and one's place in it.<sup>172</sup> It requires beginning to separate from one's parents - removing one's family of origin from the center of his life - to "begin a process of change that will lead to a new home base for living."<sup>173</sup> The feelings during this period include a very real sense of loss, grief, fear - as well as hope and anticipation of a brighter future.<sup>174</sup> The young man must, it seems, *feel* his way into adulthood.

He then finds, like it or not, that he is *Entering the Adult World* - from age 22 to 28 - somewhat forcibly shoved

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<sup>170</sup> It may prune back perceptions of our individuality and uniqueness, but the researchers found the life cycle of men is a lot more predictable than most of us may realize!

<sup>171</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 21.

<sup>172</sup> Levinson et al., 73.

<sup>173</sup> Levinson et al., 75.

<sup>174</sup> Levinson et al., 75.

forward to make "full entry into the adult world."<sup>175</sup> This period requires him to take a shot at building a life structure: choose a vocation, often a life partner, and a lifestyle.

Often, the life formed in this period is *quite different from one's parents*; in fact "the great majority" of men in Levinson's study of forty men "formed a life in early adulthood quite different from that of their parents."<sup>176</sup> It's no surprise that "very few young men build that first adult life structure without considerable difficulty and occasional crisis!"<sup>177</sup> In fact, 70% of the men in the study experienced "at least a moderate crisis" in their late teens and twenties.<sup>178</sup>

Yet for all the effort expended to find his place, a man typically approaches the end of his third decade unsatisfied.<sup>179</sup> He is in the *Age Thirty Transition*, and he finds himself evaluating the past and considering the future with a heretofore unknown sense of urgency.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 79.

<sup>176</sup> Levinson et al., 76.

<sup>177</sup> Levinson et al., 82.

<sup>178</sup> Levinson et al., 81.

<sup>179</sup> Over half the men in Levinson's research "experienced their lives as incomplete, oppressive, not going anywhere or heading in the wrong direction" in their late 20's! See Levinson et al., 83.

<sup>180</sup> Perhaps this sense of urgency sneaks up and surprises other men as it did me.

For some, the period goes smoothly. For most, it means crisis.<sup>181</sup> Looking at *the world he lives in*, the man has "serious doubts about the value and the viability of... society." Looking at *his own life*, he has serious doubts "about the possibility of forming a life structure worth having."<sup>182</sup> The path for a young man during this period often takes him along the shores of the Sea of Despair - and sometimes he falls in.

The authors not only devote considerable attention to these three periods; they see them collectively, as a unique phase in the male life cycle: the *Novice Phase*. It's no easy phase, the authors admit, and much more than "delayed adolescence." Young men in this season - whether they want to or not - take on developmental tasks very much characteristic of adulthood.<sup>183</sup>

The primary, overriding task of the novice phase is to make a place for oneself in the adult world and to create a life structure that will be viable in the world and suitable for the self.<sup>184</sup>

I find the *The Seasons of a Man's Life* both credible and helpful. The authors' conceptualization of male development provides a sensible and serviceable model of the male life cycle. Their model enables me to place my

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<sup>181</sup> This is not the much debated and discussed midlife crisis, but a prescient echo.

<sup>182</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 87.

<sup>183</sup> Levinson et al., 71.

<sup>184</sup> Levinson et al., 72.

life, and others' lives, on a single map that I can look at and make sense of.

What I find most helpful is the authors' conceptualization of the Novice Phase. Levinson and his colleagues, by way of this phase, provide specific *parameters* for the "young man" moniker - a man between the ages of 17 and 33 (plus or minus two years at either end).<sup>185</sup> Their narrative also provides *descriptions* - often painfully clear! - of what life is like during this exciting yet unsettling season.

The authors, in fulfilling their aim of creating "an overarching conception of development," *do not* describe - except by way of illustration, through case studies - empowerment as a concept, the qualities of empowering environments, or empowering agents. They *do*, however, provide the structure within which one can discern order in the seeming chaos of young adulthood. It is within the typical realities of the Novice Phase that young men must be empowered.

If it is true that empowerment must in any way be *personalized* - that an empowering agent, or an empowering community, seeks to understand the lot of the individual prior to intentionally empowering him - then Levinson and

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<sup>185</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 71.

his colleagues' model is keenly practical. Helping an eighteen year old man get settled at college - empowering him to succeed in living for God's purposes as a single college freshman - is going to look different than helping a twenty-eight year old husband and father of two flesh out godly living in *his* circumstances. Levinson et al. help would-be empowerers know the kind of weather the young man is likely flying through.

Levinson and his colleagues provide both *structure* and a *timeline* for manhood. The following two authors offer - from a distinctly Christian perspective - insight into the *nature* of manhood: what it means to be a man.

#### Stu Weber

In *The Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, Stu Weber - Green Beret soldier turned pastor - calls men to examine their notion of manhood. Weber thinks Western culture is confused; he is convinced that "our culture has struggled with the meaning of manhood for decades" - and the result is a crisis in men's souls.<sup>186</sup> Weber throws down blueprints and summons men - and the church - to rebuild using God's design.

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<sup>186</sup> Stu Weber, *The Four Pillars of a Man's Heart* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 1997), 33.

Manhood begins, Weber contends, with becoming a radical follower of Jesus. He confesses that turning twenty-one, getting a college degree, getting married, having a son, and wearing a Green Beret hadn't made him a man. "But when I decided to follow Christ without reservation," he testifies, "I became a man."<sup>187</sup>

To walk out his manhood, says Weber, a man must embrace four roles: King, Warrior, Mentor, and Friend.

In his King role, a man casts vision for those he leads and *provides* for. To shrink back from this role is to abdicate, and to overplay it is to dominate. "There is no room in Christ's camp," warns Weber, "for those who 'lord it over' others."<sup>188</sup> A sense of personal inadequacy is necessary, in fact, to fulfill this role well.<sup>189</sup>

In his Warrior role, a man uses his strength to *protect* others.<sup>190</sup> To shrink back is cowardly, and to overplay is brutish. Weber cites a painful example of his own failure: once, when confronting his son for sassing his

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<sup>187</sup> Weber, *The Four Pillars*, 20.

<sup>188</sup> Weber, 72.

<sup>189</sup> Weber, 123.

<sup>190</sup> This idea is unpacked by Weber in another book, *Tender Warrior* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 2006).

mother, he knocked his son down - and immediately dropped to his knees and asked him for forgiveness.<sup>191</sup>

In his Mentor role, a man shares his wisdom with others; he's a *teacher*. To shrink back is to be a dunce, and to become preoccupied with one's wisdom is to be a bore. It doesn't require great wisdom, but rather that you "love those around you" and "live out your own biblical values."<sup>192</sup>

In his Friend role, a man shares God's love with others, *connecting* with people. The loner runs away, and the smotherer victimizes others with self-serving affection. Weber holds up the apostle Paul as a model, quoting from his letter to the Philippians: "I have you in my heart... I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."<sup>193</sup>

To lay hold of these four roles, according to Weber, is to be a good steward of your masculinity.<sup>194</sup>

Weber, I would observe, believes using authority and influence well is what manhood is all about. He believes - as do the Bible, Blanchard et al., Cattaneo and Chapman, and Fetterman - that authority and influence are to be

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<sup>191</sup> This regrettable account is typical of examples in this book - helpful in that it is a mental YouTube video of what failure looks like... and what a manly recovery can look like.

<sup>192</sup> Weber, *The Four Pillars*, 194.

<sup>193</sup> Weber, 222 (quoting Philippians 1:7-8).

<sup>194</sup> Weber, 55.

exercised for others' sake. According to Weber, this means providing for them, protecting them, teaching them, and connecting with them. Weber provides simple "handles" for using authority for others' benefit and living a godly, manly life.<sup>195</sup>

Using power to protect others, however, is not the same as *sharing* power with them. Weber's theory is individualistic: how a man bearing influence and authority should discipline himself to use them for others. The benefit to others remains, in Weber's theory, more of a presumed positive outcome. It would be logically possible to be a strong leader by Weber's standards, and not be empowering - so consumed with "playing the man" that you don't give attention to setting *others* up to engage *their* capacities and fulfill *their* calling.<sup>196</sup>

That said, Weber's theory is, in my view, consistent with empowerment. A man living out Weber's four roles could easily - at least in concept - "set the stage" for his teenage son, for example, to live out the four roles as well: sharing his spiritual journey, helping him understand

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<sup>195</sup> I recognize the value of conceptually simple roles and tasks that can be easily communicated, grasped, and implemented by others! Concrete "to do's" do not get lost nearly as often as abstract concepts on the journey from our ears to our brains to our arms and legs.

<sup>196</sup> True, the exercise of Weber's theory leaves room for courageous, benevolent manhood... that remains condescending. Living out the *empowering agent* role as part of the *Mentor* role, however, would prevent this perpetuation of hierarchical distance.



his unique strengths and his place in God's big picture, trusting him with various things of value, blessing him... helping him set "personally meaningful power-oriented goals," helping him acquire teamwork skills, initiating assessment of his progress. An ardent Weberian man could quite possibly be a very effective empowering agent.

In fact, I will suggest that Weber's "four pillars" of manhood - king, warrior, mentor, friend - were modeled by Jesus, and are contained in the empowered manhood to which every man is capable and called. So while Weber does not specifically mention empowerment as a goal of manly behavior, such behavior is clearly consistent with empowerment - *using the means at your disposal to help others engage their capacities to pursue God's purposes.*

#### John Eldredge

John Eldredge, as a critic, sees many men as simply bored with their lives - and with church. Men, he contends, need something besides a list of things they ought to do for reasons they ought to care about. No, says Eldredge, men need something else: a deeper understanding of *why* they long for adventure, and battles, and a beauty - and

permission to pursue them.<sup>197</sup> They're God-given longings, he claims, the image of God in a male frame. They are *not* rebellious and self serving, in their pure form, but brave, noble, and godly.

Men *need*, says Eldredge, a battle to fight. If we believe that man is made in the image of God, "then we would do well to remember that 'The LORD is a warrior'" (Ex. 15:3).<sup>198</sup> The fierce desire to fight for something worth fighting for, even dying for, says Eldredge, is there by divine design.

Eldredge contends men *need* an adventure to live - something that puts them to the test. "Though we may fear the test," he concedes, "we yearn to be tested, to discover that we have what it takes."<sup>199</sup>

Men *need*, he passionately contends, a beauty to rescue. While it is true that some men, by God's design and destiny, are called to the unmarried life, most of us are designed and destined to win, care for, and protect a wife.<sup>200</sup> We want, says Eldredge, to be our wife's hero.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), xi.

<sup>198</sup> Eldredge, *Wild*, 10.

<sup>199</sup> Eldredge, 14.

<sup>200</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 is not easy to understand, seeming to extol the virtues of both singleness and marriage above the other. A considered understanding of this text, I believe, acknowledges that biblical manhood can be lived out in either condition.

<sup>201</sup> Eldredge, 15.

Eldredge argues that the male soul is very much rooted in the character of God: God fights for those he loves; God lives the adventure of uncertain relationship; God longs to be with his bride, the redeemed Church. God knew, Eldredge contends, that creating the human race would bring him heartbreak, suffering, and devastation.<sup>202</sup> Yet in spite of certain human fickleness and failure, God cut the ribbon and started the human race. His design and destiny is for a man to do the same: to fight for those he loves, to live the adventure, and to pursue his bride.

Eldredge, like Weber, describes some of the ways a man can deviate from God's best for him. Most men, for example, are haunted by the question, "Do I have what it takes?"

This is every man's deepest fear: to be exposed, to be found out, to be discovered as an imposter, and not really a man.<sup>203</sup>

In our brokenness, men have inside them profound doubt and shame - afraid that if people find out what we're really made of, they'll see the laughable excuse of a man we really are.<sup>204</sup> "Most of what you encounter when you meet a man," Eldredge observes, is "a brilliant disguise."<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Eldredge, *Wild*, 31.

<sup>203</sup> Eldredge, 45.

<sup>204</sup> "We are hiding," notes Eldredge, "every last one of us...desperately afraid of exposure, terrified of being seen for what we are..." (Eldredge, 52).

<sup>205</sup> Eldredge, 52.

The only hope, says Eldredge, is to hear the voice of the Heavenly Father. God in heaven longs to bring us back to the original design, to a life of "adventure, battle and beauty," to live the "unique place in his story" for which we were created.<sup>206</sup> Here Eldredge begins to sound like Warren, acknowledging that men have individual, God-given destinies to be fulfilled.

Many of us were psychologically wounded by our earthly fathers, says Eldredge, and even the best of them can only take us to the beginning of our adventure with God. "There comes a time," he says, "when you have to leave all that is familiar, and go on into the unknown with God."<sup>207</sup> Re-programming your mind with what God thinks, not what your human dad or you think about you, is necessary - "an ongoing, intimate relationship with God."<sup>208</sup>

John Eldredge is not a psychologist or a theologian, but he seems to understand the psychology and theology of our brokenness, which I find helpful. He also seems to understand three critical drives in men - including young men - and explains these in terms of psychology and theology as well. Again, I find this helpful.<sup>209</sup> If

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<sup>206</sup> Eldredge, *Wild*, 103.

<sup>207</sup> Eldredge, 104.

<sup>208</sup> Eldredge, 214.

<sup>209</sup> Eldredge's model may be simplistic - can his three "longings" summarize manhood any more than Weber's four "pillars"? It is, however,

Eldredge's three longings are true for the adult male, then empowering agents have three logical arenas in which to empower young men.

Eldredge seems, to me, more spiritual than the other authors reviewed. If it is true that modern culture has persistently slighted human spiritual longings, Eldredge issues a necessary corrective when he points men to an "ongoing, intimate relationship with God." Certainly, in giving young men resources with which to pursue their part in God's big picture, we ought to share the spiritual life that is for us a fountain of life.<sup>210</sup>

Like Weber, Eldredge does not explain empowerment, but exhorts individuals to manliness. However, Eldredge seems to grasp a bigger picture, calling men out of a life characterized by inertia to a life characterized by faith, risk, and adventure.

If he is right, and I believe he is, then empowering others - *using the means at your disposal to help others engage their capacities to pursue God's purposes* - can be, and should be, a colorful, sometimes pulse-quickenning *adventure*.

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based on a biblical view of God and the assumption - I believe a valid one - that men are made in God's image. See Genesis 1:26-27.

<sup>210</sup> See John 7:38.

This concludes the section in which we consider the insight that several theories of human development and manhood contribute to our understanding of empowerment. While none of these authors specifically address empowerment, they do provide significant help: Levinson and his colleagues provide helpful insight regarding the struggles each young man must go through in order to find his place in society, and Weber and Eldredge provide biblical descriptors of the manhood to which young men are destined and called.

Next, we will examine the influence that culture has on the process of empowerment.

### **Empowerment in Contemporary Culture**

Every person lives and dies in a place in time, surrounded by people. Every person's life setting is culture, "the concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, institutions, etc. of a given people in a given period."<sup>211</sup> In this next and final section of our review of literature, we will explore the culture - American culture in general, and youth and church subcultures in particular - in which empowerment of today's young men occurs.

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<sup>211</sup> Definition of *culture* is from *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).

## Dan Kimball

Dan Kimball's *The Emerging Church* is one of the most helpful books I've read in the last decade. In *The Emerging Church*, Kimball describes contemporary culture - global culture, American culture, and American church culture - past and present.<sup>212</sup>

Kimball contends we are in the midst of a mega-shift in global culture - from modernism to postmodernism. In the *modern* era - roughly A.D. 1500-2000 - people grew up in a culture that held, in general, to monotheism, used rational and logical inquiry to teach and learn, systematized knowledge, and held truth as absolute.<sup>213</sup>

According to Kimball, things have changed. In this *postmodern* era, there has occurred, and is occurring, a *shift* in the way our culture, as a whole, looks at life.<sup>214</sup> We look at *spirituality* differently; people typically believe "there are many gods, many faiths, many forms of spiritual expression;" we more and more believe in religious pluralism.<sup>215</sup> We look at *learning* differently; learning is now more experiential, mystical, and given and

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<sup>212</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>213</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 58-59.

<sup>214</sup> Kimball is quick to note, however, that "since postmodernism is still in the process of developing, we can't fully define the word... yet" (Kimball, 49).

<sup>215</sup> Kimball, 59. Pluralism is "the theory that reality is composed of a multiplicity of ultimate beings, principles, or substances: it opposes the position of monism that reality is ultimately one..." (*Webster's New World Dictionary*).

received via story.<sup>216</sup> We look at *truth* differently; it is not something we consider absolute.

Kimball believes the transition from modernism to post-modernism - as the dominant philosophy in American culture - is inescapable: "We are now in transition."<sup>217</sup> Postmodernism, it appears, is here to stay.<sup>218</sup>

What can churches and ministries do, Kimball asks, in the midst of this transition? We will explore this more fully in Chapter 4, but Kimball makes several suggestions - beginning with the observation, familiar to any missionary, that "we cannot assume that everyone is going to learn, relate, and think the same way [that we do]."<sup>219</sup>

Secondly, counsels Kimball, we cannot "blame emerging generations for believing what they believe."<sup>220</sup> We are all products of the age in which we grew up. Older generations may not agree with a pluralistic view of truth, but it has become normal, in contemporary culture, for people to think - perhaps more accurately, *to believe* - that way.

Thirdly, Kimball says, we cannot expect emerging generations to someday "grow up" and return to Christian

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<sup>216</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 60.

<sup>217</sup> Kimball, 61.

<sup>218</sup> I will also observe that the transition from modernism to postmodernism, as a global phenomenon, will last longer than any of us alive today will last in our mortal bodies; this cultural mega-shift is, while inevitable, slow and sloppy.

<sup>219</sup> Kimball, 63. I draw here from my experience growing up in Europe as well as my years as a missionary in Africa.

<sup>220</sup> Kimball, 63.



roots.<sup>221</sup> "Teens and young adults," he observes, "simply have no Judeo-Christian roots to return to!"<sup>222</sup> They cannot re-embrace something they've never embraced.<sup>223</sup>

Kimball does not pretend that older Christians will have an easy time coping with all this. "Our modern categories and values," he warns, reminding older Christians of *their* philosophical heritage, "just might need to be rearranged if we want to reach emerging generations."<sup>224</sup> Kimball wants older generations to see how *their* upbringing has influenced *their* "normal," *their* "comfort zone."

This is exactly what Kimball calls us to. True, many in emerging generations *don't want anything to do with* church or other "organized religion."<sup>225</sup> But they *do want*, Kimball observes, a spiritual life; emerging generations have "an extreme openness to spiritual things!"<sup>226</sup> Kimball sees this church-averse, yet spiritual, culture as a door of opportunity:

I believe we are living in times of incredible promise and hope. What a wonderful and adventurous privilege to live in this moment of history when emerging

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<sup>221</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 64.

<sup>222</sup> Kimball, 58.

<sup>223</sup> In a sidebar, seminary professor and mentor Howard Hendricks makes this comment: "That we should not expect postmoderns to grow up and become modern is a very helpful insight" (Kimball, 64).

<sup>224</sup> Kimball, 65.

<sup>225</sup> Kimball explores this more fully in another book, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

<sup>226</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 86.

generations are so open spiritually... May we seize this moment in history and become missionaries again...<sup>227</sup>

I love Dan Kimball's faith and optimism. While he, like the previous three authors, does not speak directly to empowerment, he does provide two valuable tools to those who want to empower young men:

1. a snapshot of contemporary culture - the world in which today's young men are forming their beliefs, their sense of self, and their life structure; and
2. a clearly Christian and compassionate approach to helping today's young men overcome "church aversion" - and connect with Christ and the Church

The spiritual openness that Kimball observes is a boon, in my view, to empowerment. While the religious pluralism of emerging generations can cause them to push back from exclusive claims to truth, it also causes them to listen to others who search for and wrestle with spiritual truth. If understanding God's big picture is empowering, the openness of emerging generations to discuss spiritual things provides an opportunity to empower them with this truth.

Kimball also says emerging generations learn more experientially - another boon, in my view, to empowerment. Their openness to participate in activities and projects gives empowering agents the opportunity to organize worthwhile activities and projects - and in these contexts,

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<sup>227</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 89.

help individuals see their “small picture” in God’s big picture. In such participation, they have the opportunity, in Zimmerman’s words, to “learn hopefulness” and develop a sense of self-efficacy.

If Bill Thrall, Julian Rappaport, and others are right – if one’s environment really does have a profound effect on how well one engages his capacities and walks out his story – then those interested in empowering young men should take Kimball’s analysis of culture seriously.

#### Tim Elmore

Tim Elmore, like Dan Kimball, is optimistic and talks about culture. In *Generation iY*, Elmore meticulously and compassionately describes contemporary youth culture in America.<sup>228</sup> He also explains how the values of youth culture ought shape our efforts to disciple and empower them.<sup>229</sup>

Elmore begins by describing “Generation iY.” A moniker of his own making, Generation iY is a subgroup of Generation Y – those born between 1984 and 2002, also known as Millennials, Mosaics, Nexters, and Screenagers.<sup>230</sup>

[These] younger Millennials, born after 1990, resemble their earlier Gen Y counterparts in many ways, but in

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<sup>228</sup> Tim Elmore, *Generation iY* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010).

<sup>229</sup> Elmore’s *Generation iY* is the most insightful and practical book I’ve encountered on discipling emerging generations.

<sup>230</sup> Elmore, 18.

volumes of other ways they stand in stark contrast to them...<sup>231</sup>

The younger cohort of Generation Y, claims Elmore, differs from the older set. "More than any previous generation," he observes, "this younger population has been defined by *technology*."<sup>232</sup> Technology is second nature to them - they've never known life without iPods, iPhones, and iPads. "They are... the first generation," says the author, "that doesn't need leaders to get information; they have electronic access to every piece of data you can imagine."<sup>233</sup>

This helps explain, Elmore says, why Generation iY can be characterized by the word *overwhelmed* - overwhelmed with data from the internet and portable electronic devices, with expectations from doting parents, with expectations from within to live up to the "you're the best" message they've been raised on. A recent survey by the American College Health Association revealed that 94 percent of students felt overwhelmed by their lifestyles.<sup>234</sup>

This generation, says Elmore, is *overconnected*. "Many of the devices that Generation iY depends on are

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<sup>231</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 13.

<sup>232</sup> Elmore, 13, italics mine.

<sup>233</sup> Elmore, 19.

<sup>234</sup> Elmore, 19.

addictive."<sup>235</sup> The result is that this generation is full of kids who can send a text message faster than you can open a can of soup - but can't carry on a face to face dialogue comfortably. Rachel, a college sophomore, had her cell phone and her computer crash the same week a big paper was due. With her technology down, she "plunged into despair" and took an incomplete for the term; she didn't think to borrow a friend's phone or go see the professor to negotiate an extension for her paper.<sup>236</sup>

Elmore says this generation is *overprotected*:

We have given Generation iY safety seats, safety belts, and safety policies on everything. They can't ride a bike without a helmet... [go] places on their own... [face] financial realities...<sup>237</sup>

Safety is important, but we've made it an idol. "This generation," says Elmore,

has been so sheltered by their parents, teachers, counselors and an overregulated government that many have trouble developing strong, independent coping skills.<sup>238</sup>

We've become obsessed with protecting our children, and they're having trouble coping with real life on their own.

This generation, Elmore observes, is *overserved*; most of their lives they've been served, not taught and

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<sup>235</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 22.

<sup>236</sup> Elmore, 21-22.

<sup>237</sup> Elmore, 22.

<sup>238</sup> Elmore, 23.

challenged.<sup>239</sup> One result is a growing number of kids with Narcissistic Personality Disorder.<sup>240</sup> Back in the 1970's, the mantra was, "I'm okay. You're okay." These days, says Elmore, it's "You're okay. I'm perfect."<sup>241</sup> Many have "an overinflated idea of their own importance... [and] they feel entitled to special treatment as they enter the adult world."<sup>242</sup>

Elmore does not blame everything on technology and coddling.<sup>243</sup> Nor does he advocate giving up. In fact, in spite of the gloomy analysis, he stays upbeat and - like the God of the Bible - redemptive.<sup>244</sup>

Elmore says the answer is to connect with Generation iYers - to take them where they are - and coach them into becoming all they can and should be.<sup>245</sup> Like Warren, he sees God-given potential in each young person. He spends the

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<sup>239</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 25, 27.

<sup>240</sup> According to the Mayo Clinic, "Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for admiration... [they] believe that they're superior to others and have little regard for other people's feelings." See *Narcissistic Personality Disorder*, November 4, 2011. <[www.mayoclinic.com/health/narcissistic-personality-disorder/DS00652](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/narcissistic-personality-disorder/DS00652)>, (November 5, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 26.

<sup>242</sup> Elmore, 25.

<sup>243</sup> Elmore (see 31-32) also "blames" American affluence, an erroneous model of teaching and learning in public education, postmodernism, and a culture - the broader American culture - that overvalues convenience and undervalues commitment.

<sup>244</sup> This is, I believe, commendable, and an expression of the author's faith in God. He describes iYers in a variety of formats in other sections of the book, most of which require faith to face with hope.

<sup>245</sup> Elmore, 49.

second half of the book explaining how to empower Generation iY.

It takes, Elmore observes, a *balancing act*. Young people need adults to be both responsive *and* demanding - to pay attention to them and support them, *and* establish and support high standards for them.<sup>246</sup> Parents and older adults can and should "lean into relationship" with iYers - *and* require them to "practice maturity" and be responsible.<sup>247</sup>

Empowering Generation iY requires accepting the job of preparing young people for the future, *not* protecting them from it. "Our job," says Elmore, "is to prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child."<sup>248</sup> Mix generations. Teach practical skills - how to plan a trip, and budget. Build in service - actively help other people together. Set boundaries. Applaud appropriately - and develop rituals that "solemnize rites of passage."<sup>249</sup>

Empowering Generation requires *moving toward truth*.<sup>250</sup> In spite of the fact that truth is the only pathway to emotional health, lasting relationships, and satisfying careers, we've done a poor job, Elmore says, of telling

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<sup>246</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 66. Like all of us, young people need a balance of nurture and accountability, as Paul's instructions to Timothy illustrate - compare, for example, 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:24 and 3:16.

<sup>247</sup> "Lean into relationship" is an idiom, learned from my wife Jill, that I have found particularly helpful in engaging with others. "Practice maturity" is Elmore's idiom (Elmore, 69).

<sup>248</sup> Elmore, 68.

<sup>249</sup> Elmore, 69-70.

<sup>250</sup> Elmore, 122.

this generation the truth. The last thing we want to do is hurt our kids, but "we have fed them 'lines' to help them feel good about themselves."<sup>251</sup> What they really need, says Elmore, is "to learn some timeless values and relationship skills... There's no need for virtual reality. Generation iY needs a healthy dose of *actual* reality." If we really love them, we'll tell them the truth.<sup>252</sup>

We need to help Generation iY, Elmore contends, *interpret reality*.<sup>253</sup> Fearful parents isolate their children from the world. Undiscerning parents abdicate their children to the world. Wise, courageous parents teach their children to interpret the world. Teaching your children to interpret the world

is a response of wisdom and concern that involves teaching young adults how to think critically and translate current events. They must interpret both the good and the bad in a culture in order to transform it.<sup>254</sup>

We need, it seems, to help our children learn how to think.

Finally, discipling and empowering this generation means *helping them find their way* - to discover their passions and strengths, and the vocation for which they are

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<sup>251</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 111. These well-intentioned lies - "You can be anything you want to be," "It's always your choice," "You are special," etc - are still lies, and they've given a generation a faulty perception of themselves and the reality around them. It's *not* all about them!

<sup>252</sup> Elmore, 124.

<sup>253</sup> Elmore, 146.

<sup>254</sup> Elmore, 146.



suites.<sup>255</sup> "When we enable Generation iY to discover their vocation," exhorts Elmore, "they'll become people of influence, true life-giving leaders."<sup>256</sup> We need to do more than exhort them to quit doing bad things, Elmore argues; "we must ignite them with a vision for their future, based on what is inside of them."<sup>257</sup>

Of the literature reviewed for this project, *Generation iY* provides the most thoroughgoing analysis of contemporary youth culture. For the person who wants to disparage this generation, he'll find ammunition here. For the person who wants to understand this generation, he'll find a well-researched dossier on their habits, attitudes, and values that will equip him to empower them.

In the second half of *Generation iY*, Elmore makes it clear that he wants to help its members find their places in the world - their small pictures in the big picture: "We must ignite them with a vision for their future, based on what is inside of them."<sup>258</sup> Like Warren and Blanchard and his colleagues, Elmore sees the potential latent in individuals - and the clear (and urgent) opportunity older

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<sup>255</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 157.

<sup>256</sup> Elmore, 158.

<sup>257</sup> Elmore, 159. Elmore goes on to identify five critical decisions we can help them think through: What are my values? What vision do I want to pursue? What is my virtue? What's the best venue for me? What vehicles will I employ to help me reach my goal?

<sup>258</sup> Elmore, 159.

adults have to help them engage it. Elmore's view of empowerment clearly includes unselfish investment of resources, trust, and blessing in emerging generations - intentionally and carefully.

Generation iY may be slower to embrace the quest for character - a slow, sometimes painful quest, according to Thrall and his colleagues. But if the Bible, and Thrall and his colleagues, are right, developing character is necessary to fulfill one's potential - and empowering agents must patiently endeavor to recruit Generation iY to the quest for character.

Since empowerment always takes one from latent potential to fulfilled potential, it leads a man into a greater manifestation of manhood. Elmore, like Weber and Eldredge, recognizes this - and the importance of coaching young men in the essentials of manhood. Elmore's view of empowerment insists, as do Weber's and Eldredge's - that we help young men understand and practice robust masculinity. Empowered young men cannot be "lost in Neverland."<sup>259</sup>

I see in Tim Elmore an approach to empowerment that is remarkably similar to that employed by God in setting men up to succeed: revealing to the individual the big picture

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<sup>259</sup> Elmore devotes an entire chapter to this topic: "Lost in Neverland: The Special Challenges of iY Boys;" see Elmore, *Generation iY*, 73-91.

and his place in it, and providing him resources, trust, and blessing as he imperfectly walks it out.

I also see his approach to empowerment remarkably similar to Cattaneo and Chapman's: helping the individual set goals, develop a sense of self-efficacy, learn necessary skills, and identify and take a course of action. Elmore is an example of someone who rarely uses the word *empowerment*, but - in my view - practices it enthusiastically, skillfully, and faithfully.

#### Thom and Sam Rainer

Tom and Sam Rainer in *Essential Church?* describe the culture of the American church.<sup>260</sup> In approaching their book, I broaden my scope to look at the national picture and ask the question: Is the American church empowering young people - and in particular, young men?

The authors' premise is that people, including emerging generations, will get involved in church and stay involved in church *if it becomes essential to their lives*.

Most young Americans don't think it is essential. "Most young adults," say the Rainers, "see church today as

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<sup>260</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church?* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2008).

just another take-it-or-leave-it option - no more important than work, leisure activities, or simply doing nothing."<sup>261</sup>

There is a critical period of time, according to the Rainers, when this attitude solidifies. In the three years following their sixteenth birthday - "unsweet sixteen" - most church-going students make the decision to drop out of church.<sup>262</sup> The Rainers share a memorable, sad statistic: *"More than two-thirds of young churchgoing adults in America drop out of church between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two!"*<sup>263</sup>

Young people quit going to church for all sorts of reasons. Some just want a break from church. Some get tired of "the hypocrites." Some move to college and never get around to finding fellowship in their new town. Some just get "too busy." Some have to work on Sundays. The scenarios are many, but the result is one: the priorities and activities of young Americans do not leave them with interest or time for church.<sup>264</sup>

Most young people, observe the authors, don't *plan* to leave the church: "An overwhelming majority (80 percent) of high school students *do not plan to leave their church once*

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<sup>261</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, frontispiece.

<sup>262</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 15.

<sup>263</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 2.

<sup>264</sup> See pages 3-4 for a list of the 10 top reasons "dechurched" - as Rainer and Rainer call them - young people gave for leaving church.

*they graduate.*"<sup>265</sup> Instead, they just find that once they do take a break from church, there's nothing compelling them to return; the church is not essential to living out their spirituality.

Thom and Sam Rainer ask why, and here is what they found. Students don't want superficial spirituality. They don't want to "go to church;" *they want to connect with God.* One church dropout told the authors, "I never saw how my faith and my church connected."<sup>266</sup> Students, the authors find, *want to be told and shown - disciplined - how to connect with God.*<sup>267</sup> A church that is considered essential by a young adult is a church that provides opportunities to connect with God.

*Young people want,* discovered the Rainers, *to connect with one another.* "One of the greatest needs within the young adult generation," they observe, "is building relationships and connecting with one another."<sup>268</sup> *Emerging adults are looking for authentic relationship, and if they cannot find it in church, they will go looking someplace*

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<sup>265</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 28, italics mine.

<sup>266</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 26.

<sup>267</sup> Interestingly, students don't require perfection on the part of potential disciplers or the church. One student pleaded: "Just let us know how we can become more mature spiritually. It probably won't be a perfect process, but it will be better than... no process at all" (Rainer and Rainer, 148).

<sup>268</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 37.

else for it.<sup>269</sup> The essential church is a safe place for young people to fulfill their God-given desire to connect with others.<sup>270</sup>

Disappearing students, say the Rainers, are not running from responsibility. To the contrary, *they want some!*<sup>271</sup> They want to help take on the world's problems. "Most young adults," they observe, "don't just want more done for them. They want to do more for others."<sup>272</sup> If we show young adults that church is not about warming chairs but about engaging their God-given gifts, they are less likely to want a break from church.<sup>273</sup> The essential church offers opportunities for emerging adults to engage their unique strengths and calling - even though they are green and unproven.

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<sup>269</sup> The word *authentic* includes the idea of being *worthy of acceptance or belief* (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*); we will define *authentic relationship* as *relationship in which acceptance and truthfulness are valued*. It is interesting - and I will suggest significant - that the Bible describes Jesus in the same terms: "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Authentic relationship as a value will figure prominently in our conceptualization of empowerment - as well as our recommendations in Chapter 4.

<sup>270</sup> "It is ironic that the church, which is supposed to be the locus of community, does not provide a sense of community for many of the dechurched. And as a consequence, these young people move to different places to connect with others" (Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 46).

<sup>271</sup> "Students are not looking for freedom; they desire responsibility" (Rainer and Rainer, 29).

<sup>272</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 237.

<sup>273</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 36.

The Rainers suggest a simple strategy for keeping young adults in church and growing spiritually.<sup>274</sup> One, define and communicate a clear and compelling purpose for the church - "a clear path of discipleship."<sup>275</sup> Two, focus on becoming. Assume transformational discipleship is a process.<sup>276</sup> Three, pursue alignment of ministries with the church's purpose.<sup>277</sup> And four, focus: "get rid of anything that gets in the way of spiritual transformation."<sup>278</sup>

This approach to deconstructing a complicated, unwieldy church structure is interesting to me, and I believe potentially useful to church leaders who need help with strategy. Church leaders can and should, in my view, evaluate the effectiveness of church structure and intentionally recreate structure that sets the stage for making disciples - we *should* listen, and respond, to the student who pleads, "Just let us know how we can become more mature spiritually"!

I find more useful, and more compelling, the example of one church in the book - the church whose pastor made no mistake, whenever he spoke, about their purpose as a

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<sup>274</sup> The senior Rainer (Thom), with coauthor Eric Geiger, describes this strategy at length in *Simple Church* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006).

<sup>275</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 164.

<sup>276</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 168.

<sup>277</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 171.

<sup>278</sup> Rainer and Rainer, 175.

church: "Connect to God; connect to others; connect to the world."<sup>279</sup> This mission is focused on life in relationship.

Such a mission - focused on life in relationship - sets the stage for empowerment. It establishes a culture in which people connect - and help one other do and be all that God designed them to do and be. This is a culture where people *use the means at their disposal to help others engage their capacities to pursue God's purposes.*

In a culture where characters inspire more than logic, I see a lot of utility in three characters (or roles) that correspond to the preceding kinds of connection: *lover* (made to connect with God), *friend* (made to connect with others), and *minister* (made to connect with the world - and give them heaven!). I believe it would appeal to noble, God-given (and inborn) desires in young men to call out of them - to empower them to be - the *lover*, *friend*, and *minister* that God has put in them.

### **Summary**

I began my search of literature with the notion of empowerment as "setting someone up to succeed," and examining the lives of salient biblical heroes yielded this more substantial conceptualization of empowerment: *using*

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<sup>279</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 139.



*the means at your disposal to help someone else pursue God's purposes.* Specifically, this involves revealing to the individual God's big picture and his place in it, and providing him resources, trust, and blessing as he imperfectly walks it out.<sup>280</sup>

An examination of several prominent Christians - those with particular interest in developing others - added this idea: empowerment requires *engaging capacities* or potential.<sup>281</sup> Warren writing at the individual level, Thrall and his colleagues writing at the collegial level, Blanchard and his colleagues writing of the business environment - all these theorists emphasize the necessity of *engaging capacities*. Empowerment requires, I conclude, an empowering agent using his capacities - as well as other means at his disposal - to set someone else up to engage *his*.

The academics who write about empowerment all seem to want individuals to better themselves, and want those who wield power to give them something to believe in - including themselves. The academics want to give

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<sup>280</sup> One might argue that this was "special care" given by God to "special people" - those chosen for special favor. In light of various scriptures speaking to the special capacities and calling given each individual who trusts and obeys him - 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:1ff, Ephesians 2:10, for example - I conclude that God's treatment of the five heroes reflects his posture toward other God-seekers as well.

<sup>281</sup> Importantly, I will note that these capacities are God-given - bestowed on (or, one might say, "designed into") the individual as God formed him as a human being. (Cf Psalm 139:13-16 and Ephesians 2:10.)

downtrodden people *hope* - by an opportunity to find their story in the context of a larger one (Rappaport), by learning hopefulness through success (Zimmerman), by accepting empowerment as a process (Cattaneo and Chapman) - and by someone making the effort to measure progress (Fetterman)! Empowerment requires, I conclude, giving and receiving *hope*, and involves individual *belief* that the future can be better and *action* in the direction of that future.

Examination of several authors writing about male development and masculinity yielded this: empowerment (in and for men) is about *identity*, about actualizing the roles of manhood. Young men have the inescapable task of finding their place in adult society (Levinson et al.) - and the inborn drive to achieve this by fulfilling unique masculine roles (Weber, Eldredge).<sup>282</sup> Empowerment requires, I conclude, helping young men step into their unique *identity* as men.

Those who provide commentary on contemporary culture emphasize the importance, in contemporary empowerment, of relationship - human *connection*.<sup>283</sup> Kimball, Elmore, the

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<sup>282</sup> Elmore also addressed this, but it was not the focus of his argument in *Generation iY*.

<sup>283</sup> Postmodernism, many would contend, is a mixture of positive and negative influences on culture. I suggest that the high value postmodernism places on relationships provides a needed corrective to a

Rainers, and the Bible all imply that empowerment is fundamentally relational.<sup>284</sup> Empowerment requires, I conclude, meaningfully *connecting* - authentic relationships between young men and those who wish to empower them.

All these aspects of empowerment can be combined into one definition: *Empowerment is helping someone (a) understand his place in God's big picture and (b) engage his God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes. It requires authentic relationship - your resources, trust, and blessing.*<sup>285</sup>

I will observe that empowerment requires *faith* on the part of the empowering person, and that the relationship engages *the whole person* - heart, soul, mind, and strength - as explained by Jesus.<sup>286</sup>

I will also acknowledge that empowerment is a process, and it involves one's time, personally, as well as a period of time, chronologically.

I realize that this definition re-frames the definition in terms of the empowering agent. As I am

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pragmatic form of Christianity that calls some things successful that are bereft of genuine personal relationship with the body of Christ.

<sup>284</sup> God loved the world so much, John 3:16 tells us, that he sent someone related to him - his Son - to give people the opportunity to have an eternal, familial relationship with him.

<sup>285</sup> I will, for sake of clarity, replace the phrase "using the means at your disposal to help" with simply "helping." I feel this makes the conceptualization easier to grasp and therefore more useful. The word "helping" implies using the means at your disposal.

<sup>286</sup> See Mark 12:28-31, also known as "the Great Commandment."

primarily writing to leaders and pastors who want to empower young men, I feel this is appropriate for this project.

Are young men in Myrtlewood Association churches *experiencing* empowerment? In the next chapter, we'll hear what ten young men told me.

### Chapter 3

#### EXPERIENCES OF EMPOWERMENT: THE STORIES OF YOUNG MEN IN MYRTLEWOOD ASSOCIATION CHURCHES

*"Myrtlewood Association churches are giving young men opportunities - and trust - to engage their capacities in organized church ministry." - Excerpt, Chapter 3*

I closed my computer, shut my books, and called Myrtlewood Association pastors: Will you help me connect with young men in your churches, so I can talk with them and find out if church is working for them?<sup>287</sup> With a refreshing show of cooperation, my fellow pastors helped arrange interviews with various men in their congregations between the ages of 17 and 33.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> There are currently eight churches in the Myrtlewood Association, a group of churches associated with the regional entity CBNorthwest.

<sup>288</sup> In facilitating confidential meetings with young men in their churches, these pastors "let go of the reins" and let me find out what I may. I acknowledge and am grateful for their humility and trust in doing this. This age bracket (17-33 years) coincides with the Novice Phase of adult male development as theorized by Levinson et al. in *The Seasons of a Man's Life* - and is assumed (see Chapter 1, Key Terms) to provide the beginning and the end of the "young man" stage of life.

Several of the churches in the Myrtlewood Association have no men in this age range.<sup>289</sup> With the exception of these churches and one church that was in a significant transition at the time of the interviews, I spoke with men from all Myrtlewood Association churches.

I interviewed men representing each of the three seasons comprising the Novice Phase identified by Levinson et al. in *The Seasons of a Man's Life: Early Adult Transition* (17 to 22 years), *Entering the Adult World* (22 to 28 years), and *Age Thirty Transition* (28 to 33 years).<sup>290</sup> In spite of little tangible incentive beyond a cup of coffee and a muffin, I found the men willing, in good humor, and transparent.<sup>291</sup>

This chapter is based on my interviews with these men, and throughout the chapter I try to give an account, as honestly and fairly as I can, of their experiences with church. In doing this, I am using a means at my disposal - this chapter - to call attention to their stories.

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<sup>289</sup> Three of the eight churches in the Myrtlewood Association are in this category.

<sup>290</sup> Daniel J. Levinson, Charlotte N. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson, and Braxton McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

<sup>291</sup> Counselors sometimes make a distinction between *transparent* and *vulnerable*: while being *transparent* means being relatively open with one's thoughts and feelings, being *vulnerable* means doing so to the point of risking one's reputation - of disclosing things that might be used as evidence of fault. The men I interviewed all seemed generally transparent; a few seemed vulnerable.

The Law of Moses requires two or three witnesses to establish something as true.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, we will assume that interviewees were generally honest and truthful, and their accounts of their experiences a reasonable representation of reality. We will take these men's reflections, and comments about empowerment, seriously.

Not all the men I interviewed seemed to grasp the notion of empowerment.<sup>293</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to infer possible connections between interviewees' comments and empowerment. When I do this, I will identify my comments as inferences and therefore only possible evidence of empowerment or absence of empowerment.

I am trying, in this chapter, to make sense of these young men's stories in terms of empowerment. This means I am listening, in their stories, for evidence that others have *helped them understand their place in God's big picture and engage their God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes*. I am looking for evidence of *authentic relationship*, evidence that people have given these young men *their resources, trust, and blessing*.

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<sup>292</sup> Deuteronomy 19:15. Apparently, more than one set of eyes helps moderate skewed perceptions.

<sup>293</sup> This cannot necessarily be attributed to lack on the part of the interviewees, however; I did not always, while interviewing, broach the subject of empowerment directly or define it clearly.

There is one overarching question in this chapter: *How are young men in Myrtlewood Association churches experiencing empowerment?* In pursuit of this, I will ask three, more specific, questions of the interview data: *What do these men say is empowering? What do they say diminishes empowerment? What contribution are they - as empowered young men - making to church life?*

### **Their Stories**

Before answering these three questions, I'd like to introduce each of these men, in brief, starting with the youngest.

#### Early Adult Transition (17 to 22 years)

Ernest is the only man in the youngest age bracket that I talked with.<sup>294</sup> He came across as well-behaved, self-assured but not cocky, and willing, but not eager, to talk. He is right on the cusp between high school and college, though he already has a vocation in mind for the future and has begun to take steps to prepare for it.

Ernest has a lot of history with church - as a boy in a church-going family, as a young man involved as a

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<sup>294</sup> This is not his real name; all interviewees, for the sake of anonymity, are referred to by pseudonym.



participant in age-graded ministries, as volunteer ministry staff in children's ministry, as a short term mission team member.

Though empowerment seemed somewhat abstract to him, Ernest acknowledged that leaders in the church had believed in him and entrusted him with leadership in various ministries.<sup>295</sup> Others had engaged their capacities, too, to disciple him; he recalled with satisfaction how he had worked with other men on work projects, including an adventurous project in a developing country.<sup>296</sup>

Ernest has successfully established a variety of relationships within the church; "I connect a lot more with people at church," he noted, "than at school." While a man of relatively few words - he said he probably had "serving" gifts as opposed to "speaking" gifts - Ernest said he was "good at keeping the peace" between people. When asked what he'd attempt if he had no fear of the future, he replied, "I'd share my faith with more people."

Ernest seems to have understated strength and courage. Though well-mannered and self-controlled in demeanor, he

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<sup>295</sup> After I explained empowerment to him, Earnest only nodded that yes, he understood the idea. When I asked an open-ended question regarding his experience, he did not have anything to say. When I reflected back to him that I had heard him describe substantial ministry involvement, however, he acknowledged that the church had obviously believed in him and trusted him.

<sup>296</sup> I can imagine John Eldredge standing up and cheering at this!

enjoys martial arts, adventure sports - and envisions working internationally at some point in the future.

Ernest gave evidence of intentional Christian parenting - in fact testifying to getting "a firm foundation" from his parents. When prompted about what "a firm foundation" was, he immediately described it as 1) "knowledge of what it means to be a Christian," and 2) "an opportunity to figure out what it takes to live the Christian life." While he did not specifically mention God's plan of redemption, Ernest gave strong evidence of being mentored by his parents in following God.

Levinson notes two major tasks in the Early Adult Transition: leaving the pre-adult world, and making "a preliminary step into the adult world."<sup>297</sup> Ernest, though on the lower end of the age range, seems to be making a good start.

Ernest's church, it seems, has done for him what Tim Elmore prescribes in *Generation iY* - they have worked side by side with him to help other people, taught him how to interpret the world, and helped him discover his gifts and passions.

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<sup>297</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 73.

### Entering the Adult World (22 to 28 years)

I interviewed four men in this season of life - a period in which, according to Levinson and his fellow researchers, "a young man has to fashion and test out an initial life structure."<sup>298</sup> Though this season is longer and more stable than the preceding one, it involves a lot of transition as the young man shifts "from the position of child" to the position of "novice adult."<sup>299</sup>

#### **Albert**

Albert came across introspective, but eager to talk to someone who would take the time to listen. He is in his mid-twenties, working a job with a promising future, and going to school pursuant to his budding career. He is single.

Albert grew up in the church, though he had no exceptional experiences to recount - save one. During his high school years, his youth pastor took a personal interest in him - "he treated me like I mattered" - and he misses that kind of attention, now, from older men.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 79.

<sup>299</sup> Levinson et al., 79.

<sup>300</sup> Albert elaborated on his relationship with his youth pastor: "He didn't assume I was doing something wrong [and he had to fix me]... he focused on *me*." Whenever Albert shared something that was bothering him, the youth pastor would initiate prayer together "*right now* - not 'I'll pray for you'."

Albert has continued to attend church since graduating from high school, but confesses "I'm not particularly involved." He doesn't see a lot of other guys his age meaningfully involved, either. "After graduation from high school, young men ask the question: 'What do we do now?' It's a little vague how to get involved in the church."

I have a hunch that Albert, by his demeanor, doesn't invite involvement in his life. He seemed to fall into thinking about, and assessing, others' spirituality, and how it might be lacking - and not so much thinking about his own shortcomings, or how he might engage to serve others. Whatever the case, his relationships outside the church - including non-Christians - seem more meaningful to him than those within the church.

As for the big picture, I don't know if Albert grasps that God is on a huge quest to redeem the world and wants him to be part of it. Albert wishes, I think, that someone would take the time to listen to his substantial introspection and help him integrate it with godly manhood.

I did not get the sense that any older Christian man - since his youth pastor - has leaned into relationship with Albert, nor tried to understand him, help him identify his capacities, or pursue manhood together. I don't think he

sees the small picture, where he might fit into God's big picture.

*Does the church expect too much, or not enough, from twenty-somethings,* I asked? "Probably not enough," Albert replied. If participation is necessary, as Marc Zimmerman argues, *to learn hopefulness,* Albert seems at risk of not becoming more hopeful about church.

"I really don't have a close friend at church."

### **David**

David came across shy and reticent, but steady and not ashamed of himself. He is in his mid-twenties, working full time in a fairly secure job with benefits. He is single, and enjoys good ongoing relationships with his brother and his parents.

David has a lot of history with church. He grew up in a committed church-going family, and is an official church member. He sometimes misses worship services due to his work schedule.

David, for being a bit shy, is quite involved at church. He is on volunteer staff with the youth ministry - "I want to do my part" - and never misses the annual men's retreat (or a church potluck). He also doesn't mind, on a sunny day when he's not working, taking care of a widow's

lawn. People have told him they think he has the spiritual gift of service.

People have also told David that he is a good listener, and that he cares about people. He admits, however, that "there's not really anybody I'm talking to deeply about spiritual things these days." It seems that the kind of interaction others look to David for is not - at least from David's perspective - spiritually weighty.

David has an established habit of reading the Bible, and he prays a lot during the day, on the job. "It's tough - you have to try hard to follow the Bible; there are lots of people around you making bad choices these days."

While David has formed a fairly stable life structure for a man in his mid-twenties, he does not seem very certain about what he is good at nor very clear about what lies ahead: "I'm unsure what the future holds - [I'm] not sure what God wants..." David would benefit, it seems, from someone helping him determine, in Ken Blanchard's words, his "small picture" - his unique part in the big picture.

### **Elrond**

Elrond is shy, but has a ready smile, and gives you eye contact in a way that says, "I'm listening to you." He

is in his mid-twenties and single. He lives with three other guys in a house.

Unfortunately, life seems boring to him right now. He works a lot, doesn't know a lot of people, and seems stuck between youth and adulthood. *What's it like to be a guy in his twenties these days*, I asked? "Hard. Kind of an in-between stage."

Elrond grew up in the church, and is no stranger to others in his current church. Unfortunately, his work schedule prevents him from attending Sunday morning worship - and that's all that's offered for corporate worship. Still, he reads his Bible regularly - "I'm in Numbers now" - and tries to talk about spiritual things with his co-workers, in spite of the fact that "they wave me off when I do." He helps out with youth events at church when he's able.

When I asked if he had any significant successes that he likes to remember, Elrond said that when he was a teenager, he befriended another teen "when everyone else was making fun of him."

Elrond has good relationships with his extended family, including his parents. He has two good friends, but they work a lot too. He did not mention any older men in

the church who were involved in his life, though he seemed open to it.

Elrond seems to have taken responsibility for his own spirituality. He seems to have resisted the *narcissism* that Tim Elmore sees so prevalent in youth culture... and to have embraced the *responsibility* that Rick Warren commends. Still, church does not seem to be meeting Elrond where he is - not finding much common ground with Elrond's young working man's lifestyle. *How long, I wonder, will Elrond continue identifying with church if he cannot participate in corporate worship and does not get any help navigating through the "in-between stage"?*

### **Jeffrey**

Jeffrey came across disinterested, but willing to give me a chance to make the conversation interesting. When I asked him to describe his life, he said, "Life is good. Work is busy, stressful - but good." Jeffrey is in his mid-twenties, single, and likes to work on his car.

He grew up going to church, though he is not too involved now. When I asked what his relationship with God was like, he said, "It's okay. I read my Bible, pray a lot at work to get my job done well and fast." He seems to have a strong work ethic.



I found myself wondering how the transition went for Jeffrey from youth group to adult participation in church, so I asked. He has continued, he told me, to attend his youth group in the role of volunteer staff. "The transition from youth to youth group helper was pretty quick, pretty smooth; I still get to play the games."

Jeffrey likes sports - watching events on television as well as playing team sports with other young men in town.

I wanted to know if Jeffrey had any knowledge of his strengths, and if he was engaging them these days. He didn't know of any particular strengths he had, and couldn't recall anybody telling him he had any. *Is it really possible, I wondered to myself, to make it to your mid-twenties and not have anybody observe your strengths and "speak into your life"?* Perhaps my question to him was not clear.

*What's it like to be a guy in his twenties these days,* I asked?

"Lots of guys are out on their own, out of a job," Jeffrey said. "Tough."

### Age Thirty Transition (28 to 33 years)

The Age Thirty Transition is a span of about five years during which men, according to Levinson's research, "work on the flaws in the life structure" of their twenties.<sup>301</sup> It is, for many, a tough spot: men have serious doubts about society but, paradoxically, are also worried that they won't find their place in it.

I interviewed five men in the midst of this period.

#### **Seth**

Seth seemed confident, self-assured, easygoing but purposeful. He appeared satisfied with his life: married, starting on his family, a good job that he enjoys - and is confident that he is good at.

Seth grew up in church, and is probably considered a stable church member; he attends church regularly with his family. He likes church to be conservative, with no speaking in tongues. He likes preaching to be from the Bible, "verse by verse" - though he enjoyed a recent topical series. "I like it when preaching pushes buttons - but not all the time."

Seth did not make a smooth transition, spiritually, from high school to where he's at now. "I strayed for three

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<sup>301</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 84.

or four years; I was doing both [Christian and non-Christian lifestyles].”

Seth seems to be very engaged vocationally, doing what he likes and believes he’s good at. He did not indicate that he knew his spiritual strengths, or that these strengths were engaged in connection with church. However, when I asked what he would do if he had no fear of failure, he said he would “witness to friends more freely without fear of alienating them.”

Seth, then, probably knows God’s big picture. Does he know his part in it? While he did not indicate he knows his spiritual strengths or that he is engaging them at this point, he *is* taking a good crack at Eldredge’s tasks of manhood: he has rescued the beauty, and is living the adventure. He *may* be fighting the fight, spiritually, at home and on the job. He did not indicate he is doing so in the context of church.

My hunch is that Seth is a leader, but has not figured out how to be one, or been empowered to be one, in the context of church.

I asked him what his top priorities were, and whether he thought he was making progress toward them. He said he wanted to be a godly man and father – priorities that Stu Weber affirms. He also said he wanted to have good

character - and yes, he felt he was making progress. He admitted, though, that he is sometimes selfish, preferring to be a "homebody" rather than support his wife in her involvements outside the home.

Seth likes rural living. He enjoys his outdoor job, hunting, and other outdoor hobbies. When I asked him who he feels most at home with, he said, "male friends, colleagues, most of my family."

What qualities in others does Seth most respect?

"Loyalty," he replied. "Integrity. Honesty."

### **Josh**

Josh came across happy, content, and stable. He is happily married, parenting, and working. "I'd like things to just keep going like it is." Josh and his wife attend church regularly, are church members, and are involved in church ministry. They obviously find church to be, in the words and theory of Thom and Sam Rainer, *essential* to their lives.

Josh grew up in church and around Christians. He did not slip out of the church habit between youth and adulthood. He has had a number of adult male role models - his dad, other male relatives, and a very influential youth pastor who led his youth group throughout his high school

years. Josh is grateful for this array of men of character, and he credits God for putting them in his life.

It seems, then, that Josh has had an unusual number of men engage their capacities to invest in him - including the youth pastor "who did lots of manly, active stuff with the kids," and "exemplified commitment to Christ and the church." This was not lost on Josh: "I want to be like that, too."

Josh is engaging his capacities as well - in his family, in ministry, and in his work. He lamented that "guys my age just aren't that involved [in church]," but observed that, "church is geared more femininely." He says we need "more authenticity, not just smiles at church."

Josh has been thinking about starting a young men's Bible study for working men as the current men's study meets on a weekday. My hunch is that Josh has the God-given capacity and calling to be a leader and mentor - especially of young men. "Male leadership is important," he said. "The way it should be."

Josh obviously has experienced church as a place to grow up and learn what it means to be a man. He also obviously desires to help others have the same experience.

**Ronnie**

Ronnie didn't waste any time: from the moment I sat down with him at the restaurant, his heart came through - his desire for authentic relationship, to encourage others, to see people come to know Jesus in a personal way. "My goal is to see people come to the Lord.."

He most definitely does not just want people to get religious or go to church. "A lot of churches get lost in the religion part of it," Ronnie lamented. "I have a struggle with religion: Baptist, Foursquare, Assembly... My generation, and the generation after, they're burned out on religion... A lot of people are closed off before they're open [and need to be] 'won over'."

The way people get won over, Ronnie is convinced, is authentic relationships with authentic Christians. "I think that ultimately what will draw people to God is when they see that you're genuine."

Ronnie is doing his best to do that. He works in a local health care facility: "I want to be around people and make a difference [in their lives]." He does not have any big plans, vocationally. "I'm just living in the now, getting beyond a real low that really shook me."

Ronnie has not lived a storybook life or been protected from the tragedies of life. On the front end of a

promising future in collegiate sports, he had a career-ending injury. His Christian marriage ended in divorce. In spite of this, Ronnie has not become self-focused or stuck in a victim mentality. Other people tell him he is positive, encouraging, and caring.

Ronnie has felt empowered by his church, he says. "People accept me... especially among the older generations. My church has allowed me to be me..." In spite of Ronnie's counterculture appearance, he is involved in ministry - including public, up front ministry.

Ronnie's church has stuck by him, and he's stuck by his church: he has been involved for twelve years without a significant break in participation. "I... see a lot of people using what they've got for other people." "I have great relationships with people in my church."

*Has anything you've experienced at church diminished empowerment, I asked?* "Modern day Pharisees," answered Ronnie, "people who judge you for not living by their religious rules... [expecting] you to conform to something they think you should be." *Have people from your generation been pushed away [from church], I asked?* "Absolutely."

*Who has most empowered you, I asked?* "My parents... just letting me be me. My pastor. A friend - he's not a

Christian - but he's helped me embrace who I am. He told me, 'You've just got to live it.'"

I think Ronnie understands God's big picture - that God loves the world and wants people to know him. I think Ronnie knows where he fits into God's big picture: engaging people with his capacities to accept, encourage, and share the gospel with others.

I am not so sure the traditional church feels like home to Ronnie, culturally. Still, he has experienced relationships that are important and meaningful to him, he has been entrusted with ministry - and he has been blessed, he insists, by others' treatment of him. It seems that his church treats him in a manner that echoes the way God treated the five biblical heroes portrayed in Chapter 2.<sup>302</sup>

Julian Rappaport observed that empowerment takes place in the context of relationship, of commitment to community.<sup>303</sup> Ronnie has been committed to his church, and his church has been committed to him. Ronnie has done his part - and fellow church members have apparently done theirs - to create an empowering environment in his Myrtlewood Association church.

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<sup>302</sup> See also Appendix A.

<sup>303</sup> Each of the theorists we have surveyed, I surmise, would agree with that statement - that empowerment takes place in the context of relationship. The theme appears, to me, more implicit and central in Dr. Rappaport's theory than in others'.



I asked Ronnie what he wanted his obituary to say when he died. He did not have to think long: "Boy, he loved the Lord! Boy, he loved people!"

### **Vincent**

Vincent and I met in a coffee shop; he looked down and nibbled at his muffin. He seemed reflective, sober, even a bit discouraged. I would come to understand, in our lengthy conversation, that he was also committed to his wife, to being real, and to personal growth.

Vincent is indeed reflective; he rarely had to think long before answering my probing, open-ended questions. Like many other reflective people, he seemed to have an unmet longing to be listened to, to be understood, to be affirmed. *What qualities in others do you most admire or respect*, I asked? "Genuine interest in me..."

Vincent's family of origin was, in his words, "a divided house." *Meaning?* Mom was interested in Vincent's life; Dad wasn't - at least he didn't demonstrate it: "Dad wasn't checked out... but [he] didn't give [me] affirmation."

Vincent, I think, looks to the church for that attention and affirmation that he didn't get at home. "Where are the older men, the older women, coming

alongside?" he lamented. He has his theory: "As a society, we've individualized ourselves..."

I asked what he wished church was like. "More of a body," he answered, "connection in the Spirit... when you connect with someone in the Spirit, you know it."

Vincent's trying to connect with God, himself, and others. He attends the men's Bible study. He prays and reads his Bible. He attends worship regularly, and is "trying to engage my heart with the message."

He knows he's not perfect, that he deserves a share of any blame. "I'd like to see - [in] myself included - more of a response in worship." He's seeing a counselor right now to "deal with my brokenness." He wants to become "a whole person in Christ."

*What would you like to see happen in your life in the next five to ten years,* I asked? Without hesitation he confesses he'd like to "recapture the life of living water - drawing on the Lord, engaged relationally, enjoying creation."

Vincent enjoys all kinds of aerobic outdoor sports, from the beach to the mountains - surfing, biking, hiking, snowboarding.

Vincent has dreams - and they integrate his personal interests and his heart for connecting with others. He'd

love to find a life structure - to use Levinson's phrase - that allows him to use the outdoors as a venue for personal development. He'd love to set the stage for people to connect with God and one another - and themselves - in the midst of active outdoor sports.

Vincent seems to be doing, in light of much of the theory in Chapter 2, a lot right. He is aware of God's big picture, and has a good sense of his place in it. He has taken responsibility for his own spirituality and personal growth. He wants to grow in character, not just capacities. He knows he needs, and longs for, community. He wants church to be a place of authentic relationship.

It seems to me, however, that God is testing Vincent's mettle in this season of life - seeing if he will keep doing the right thing, for the right reason, even when he is not feeling very hopeful. I found myself, as a human being, longing to pour some hope into his soul - to know that I care about his story, not just my paper.

### **Patrick**

Patrick sat down with his coffee and smiled. We had met about five years ago at a session to brainstorm young adult ministry. There had been a lot of water under the bridge since then, but Patrick was happy to reconnect and

happy to talk with me about his Christian journey. He came across eager to help, intelligent, and comfortable.

Patrick's lot in life at this point is that of a busy husband, father of young children, and working man in a demanding - and very fulfilling - job. His job engages his capacities. Other people tell him he's good at critical thinking, solving conflicts, and working with people - and that's what he enjoys doing, and what his job requires.

His beginnings in church involvement were slow. Growing up, he and his family attended church services about once a month. "Involvement in high school youth group," however, "was life-changing." It was then that Patrick "took ownership of Christ as my own." In college, "connecting in with church was a priority for me," continued Patrick; "The key component [of church] I wanted to seek after was Christ."

Patrick got married and moved to Oregon. He got involved in church - very involved. He and his wife were leading the youth ministry and enjoying significant responsibility, funding, and affirmation. They were struggling in their marriage, though, and not getting the help Patrick knew they needed. He felt he had to take responsibility, personally, for staying on track with God, and resigned from his ministry responsibilities.

Patrick and his wife changed churches. At their new church, they are involved, but not in leadership. Patrick goes to various men's functions. A weekly Bible study with older men has been especially helpful. "It's not so exciting," Patrick admits, but "you can see [the older men's] faithfulness." His involvement with this group has been consistent, and has really helped him in "living out discipline."

Patrick, like Ronnie, has substantial praise for his church. We've got "a great kids' program," he observes; "I know [the children are] getting biblical teaching at a young age." In addition, "The church focuses a lot of energy on mothers and children."

I shared my short definition of empowerment, and asked Patrick if it was happening for him in church. He reflected for a moment and then gave a thoughtful answer. "I was having fun working," he said, "but not learning how to be a player, [how] to get established in work, in marriage."

That was disappointing to Patrick. "Work, marriage, kids - [there's] a lack of church resources directing and supporting you." He continued: "Church wasn't there to help me; nobody walked me through it, taking on the serious work to do as husband, father, etc." Patrick gave ample testimony that in the Entering the Adult World season of

*his* life, as he struggled to form a life structure including vocation, life partner, and lifestyle, he didn't get much in the way of *personalized* help from the church.

He got some good advice. But "Getting told by others to 'read your Bible and pray,'" Patrick quipped, "was incredibly frustrating for us." Generic spiritual platitudes did not satisfy Patrick and his wife's desire for biblical, spiritual direction during their tumultuous twenties.

"Word-fueled interaction," on the other hand, said Patrick, "was great" - when they got it. While he confessed it was rare, Patrick and his wife loved it when they got the chance to interact with others about how the Bible spoke to the problems they were facing at home and on the job.

### **Three Questions**

Having introduced these men, I'd like to take a more considered look at their comments in light of the three questions posed earlier: *What do they say is empowering? What do they say diminishes their empowerment? And what contribution are they making to church life?*

### What Do They Say is Empowering?<sup>304</sup>

Several of the men I interviewed described in very favorable terms their relationship with a long-tenured youth pastor. For them, this pastor's attention to them made - with no risk of overstatement - a deep and positive impression on them.

Josh's youth pastor stayed at his church for the duration of his teenage years. He "did lots of manly, active stuff with the kids," Josh said. He taught about their identity in Christ, and "exemplified commitment to Christ and the church." This had a profound effect on Josh: "I want to be like that, too."

Albert had a similar experience. His youth pastor "treated me like I mattered... he focused *on me*." Albert said that on a number of occasions, he shared something that was bothering him with his youth pastor. His pastor did not respond with "I'll pray for you," but "Let's pray *right now*."

Both Josh and Albert - and several others - gave clear testimony of an older man using his capacities to help *them*. This man - often a youth pastor - took a personal

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<sup>304</sup> In telling their stories, most of the men framed this not in terms of a well-considered opinion - "This is my general approach to such and such," for example - but in terms of *what (or who) in their experience has helped them know God, grow, etc.*

interest in their lives, listened to them, and pointed them toward godliness.

What impact did their relationships with their youth pastors have *on them*? Interestingly, five of the seven men who answered this question described *the man they want to be* in terms of relationship. In fact, they seem to describe the man they want to be in terms of *authentic relationship* - relationship in which truthfulness and acceptance are valued - with such words as *real, gets involved in others' lives, etc.* See Table 1 for a summary of their responses to the question, "*What are some words that describe the person you want to be?*"<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> A standard format with standard questions was used to collect most of the interview data. In individual interviews, however, some questions were added and some were dropped in the course of pursuing conversational "threads." Therefore not all men were asked this question (and other questions), and they are not included in the table summarizing responses.



**Table 1. What Kind of Person do you Want to Be?**

	<i>What are some words that describe the person you want to be?</i>
<b>Ernest</b>	honesty, loyalty, integrity
<b>Albert</b>	dependable, life has purpose & direction, "someone who doesn't just set an example but gets involved [in others' lives]"
<b>Seth</b>	loyalty, integrity, honesty <sup>306</sup>
<b>Josh</b> <sup>307</sup>	honesty, integrity, faithfulness, accepting of good friends "no matter what"
<b>Ronnie</b>	compassionate, real, genuine, flaws - "but that's part of life", love for the Lord and people
<b>Vincent</b> <sup>308</sup>	genuine interest in individuals, values others
<b>Patrick</b>	integrity, authentic - "experiencing emotions, consistent in interactions, not hiding or concealing", compassionate, real

The interview data, therefore, are in accord with Thom and Sam Rainers' theory: young Americans want personal connection. When the young men I interviewed connected with a godly youth pastor, it made a lasting impression on them. When they become the man they want to become, they will offer personal connection to others: authentic relationship.

The issue of relationships with older men was a prominent theme in my interviews. In their journey from

<sup>306</sup> Interestingly, Ernest and Seth go to two different churches, live in two different counties, are in two different developmental phases - and gave identical answers.

<sup>307</sup> This is inferred. I found that when I asked *What qualities in other people do you most admire or respect?*, then *What are some words that describe the person you want to be?*, the men's answer was, "the same." The characteristics I show for Josh are those he supplied in response to the first question.

<sup>308</sup> Inferred. Vincent identified these qualities in response to the question *What qualities in other people do you most admire or respect?*

pre-adulthood to adulthood, all of the men had older men as *examples* of manhood. Several, as recently mentioned, praised older, godly men who were personally involved in their lives. Others testified to the presence of men who - while not personally involved in their lives - modeled lives of commitment, marital fidelity, and service to the church. The men I interviewed are making the journey through the Novice Phase in the company of - or at least within sight of - older men who are living examples of Weber's king, warrior, mentor, and friend.

What are the venues in which young men observe and connect with these older men? Several mentioned a men's Bible study or men's breakfast as significant in their lives. Vincent, in spite of his unmet longing for relationship with older men in the years beyond high school, said that he attends the monthly men's breakfast at his church. He said participation in the weekly men's study at his church was important to him, too. And Patrick, though conceding that he has had to work hard to adapt to its older "vibe," credits the men's study at his church with helping him personally "live out discipline."<sup>309</sup> Though

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<sup>309</sup> According to the Google online dictionary, "vibe" is "a person's emotional state or the atmosphere of a place as communicated to and felt by others."

the guys are mostly older, Patrick observes "you can see their faithfulness."<sup>310</sup>

Are the relationships experienced in such contexts what the young men consider *authentic*? While several of the men used the word *authentic* or *genuine* to describe relationships within the church, it was usually employed to describe a hoped for possibility, not a present reality. Perhaps such relationships are happening, and the men either failed to mention it, or perhaps aren't able to perceive it at this juncture. They did not, however, use the phrase *authentic* to describe current relationships at their churches.

Did relationships with older men empower these young men to *engage their budding capacities*? It seems so, yes. A common experience for the young men I interviewed was *ministry involvement*. Several described opportunities they had been given, in the context of church, to help lead ministry. Though Ernest, in his late teens, had never considered his substantial church history in terms of empowerment, he acknowledged that he had been given a lot of opportunity to use and develop his gifts, even as a teenager. More than half of the men I interviewed, in fact,

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<sup>310</sup> Patrick admits it's frustrating, at times, trying to connect with older guys who are pretty set on how they do things.

had served as volunteer staff in ministry with either children or youth. Clearly, *Myrtlewood Association churches are giving young men opportunities - and trust - to engage their capacities in organized church ministry.*

Though relatively unproven, then, young men are being given opportunities to use their capacities *with others and for others* in the context of church. If participation is necessary, as Zimmerman contends, for an individual to gain a sense of competence and learn hopefulness, Earnest and the other men I interviewed have been given an opportunity to do so. They have been empowered.

Most of the men I interviewed gave evidence of being empowered with *the big picture* of the Bible - God's mission to redeem the world. Elrond, although shy and unassuming, is clearly motivated to point others toward God, even talking to coworkers about spiritual things when they consistently "wave me off when I do." And although church is not a vital part of his life right now - "I'm not particularly involved" - Albert believes in God and says his advice for graduating high school seniors is "Make your faith your own, not [just] your parents'... affirm your identity in Christ, get baptized..." Although variously involved, all the young men I talked with believe in God and understand the nobility of helping other people connect

with him. Men in Myrtlewood Association churches are being empowered with *God's big picture*.

Some of the men gave evidence of grasping *the small picture* - their place in God's big picture. Patrick, for example, was able to respond immediately to my question about his particular strengths - "critical thinking, solving conflicts, working with people" - and give me examples of how he has used them in his vocation as well as in church ministry. The other men on the older end of the Novice Phase - in fact, all of the men I interviewed in the Age 30 Transition (28 to 33 years) - seemed to have a sense of their unique strengths and capacities.<sup>311</sup> See Table 2 for the men's answers to the question *What are you good at?*

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<sup>311</sup> Interestingly - though not necessarily fortunately, for the church - these men were more apt to be using their known strengths and capacities on the job, but not at church.

**Table 2. What are You Good At?**

	<i>What are you good at?</i>
<b>Ernest</b>	martial arts, keeping the peace
<b>Albert</b>	(did not ask - though others have told him the arts, cooking, music)
<b>David</b>	cooking, working on cars, computers (others have told him good listener, cares about people)
<b>Elrond</b>	friendship (others have told him hard worker)
<b>Seth</b>	job, hunting
<b>Josh</b>	people person, networking, faithful, humor, easygoing, ability to get along with people
<b>Ronnie</b>	football (before injury), curiosity about people & interest in their stories, compassion
<b>Patrick</b>	(did not ask; others have told him critical thinking, solving conflicts, working with people)

I did not hear in their responses to the question *What are you good at?* much evidence of awareness of their *spiritual gifts*.<sup>312</sup> I did not explore this with the men; it is possible that they are aware of their gifting but perhaps lack the vocabulary to describe it. It is also possible that churches are *not* empowering young men with an awareness of their supernatural capacities - their *spiritual gifts*. We may *not* be helping our young men, as Tim Elmore implores us, "to recognize their passions and strengths and use them to engage the world around them."<sup>313</sup>

Have Myrtlewood Association churches given *resources, trust, and blessing* to these young men? The interview

<sup>312</sup> These would be those supernatural capacities mentioned in Romans 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. In Chapter 4, we will explore how to empower people as regards both their natural and supernatural gifts.

<sup>313</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 157.

format did not pursue answers to these questions directly. That Myrtlewood Association churches granted *trust*, however, is clear: by giving young men opportunities for ministry, as noted earlier, Myrtlewood Association churches entrusted to these young men responsibility for, and authority over, others' lives.<sup>314</sup>

Beckoning back to Cattaneo and Chapman's findings of empowerment as *a process*, do the men I interviewed understand the Christian life, and empowerment, as a process? Several of them *did* give evidence of such an understanding.<sup>315</sup> Ernest - the youngest of the group, and not yet out of high school - expressed this most clearly. The "firm foundation" for which he credits his parents includes not only knowledge of what it means to be a Christian, but also *the opportunity to figure out what it takes to live the Christian life*. In addition, we must credit all of the men I interviewed with being willing to view church as a process - they continue to participate! - giving their pastors, leaders, and fellow parishioners room

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<sup>314</sup> In my view, ministry involves responsibility, authority, and accountability. The interview data are not adequate to assess this.

<sup>315</sup> This is in contrast, for example, to an appeal to a one-time experience that "checks the Christian box" and renders further discipleship optional. We will explore the relationship between empowerment and discipleship further in Chapter 4.

to grow, bearing with *their* shortcomings on *their* journeys to perfection.<sup>316</sup>

Summarizing this section - *What Do They Say is Empowering?* - can be done in a word: relationships. Whatever Myrtlewood Association churches may be doing wrong, they are doing this right: offering to some young men, at some point or period in their lives, *relationships with older men who not only show them and tell them what it means to follow God, but show a personal interest in them.*

The next section points to some of the ways that Myrtlewood Association churches have missed opportunities to empower their young men.

#### What Do They Say Diminishes Empowerment?<sup>317</sup>

All of the men I interviewed spoke civilly, and even gratefully, about their churches. "After [only] one Sunday at [our church]," testified Josh, "we *knew* we were where we needed to be." To be clear, none of the men I interviewed could be accused, based on testimony given during our interviews, of "church bashing" or libel.

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<sup>316</sup> Discipleship is always a process, not an event. Otherwise, why would we need such exhortations as "work out your salvation" and "bear with each other"? See Philippians 2:12 and Colossians 3:13.

<sup>317</sup> Again, in telling their stories, most of the men framed this in terms of *what (or who) has not helped them know God, grow, etc.*



The men were, however, candid. Whether it was due to their values, my assurances of anonymity, or something else, the men shared with candor - and some even with passion - about negative as well as positive experiences in Myrtlewood Association churches.

In this section, I will filter their comments for those quips and confessions that point to missed opportunities to empower them. *What do they say diminishes empowerment?* My first line of inquiry is this: Have Myrtlewood Association church leaders used the means at their disposal, and engaged *their* capacities, to help young men engage *their* capacities?

For some of the young men, church leaders *have not* seemed to put much effort - engaged their capacities - into directing, discipling, or empowering them; they have not identified a clear path of discipleship, nor ensured that the young men know what it means to follow God wholeheartedly at their stage in life.<sup>318</sup> This observation came from the man who seemed most disaffected about church... *and* the man with the highest praise for his church.

"After graduation from high school," commented Albert, "young men ask the question: 'What do we do now?' It's a

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<sup>318</sup> Again, we will explore the relationship between empowerment and discipleship in Chapter 4.

little vague how to get involved in church..." He continued: "It would be a lot more meaningful if the church would direct young men in the direction God wants them to be." Albert, apparently, did not see church leaders putting much effort into pointing him down a clear path.

Patrick's experience was similar. He was given lots of responsibility in ministry in his mid-twenties, but not much support for his family struggles. Church leaders were happy with his ministry, but didn't show much concern for his pressing personal struggles. "Church wasn't there to help me; nobody walked me through it, taking on the serious work [I had] to do as a husband, father, etc." See Table 3 for interviewees' answer to the question, *What do you wish church was like?*

**Table 3. What do You Wish Church was Like?**

	<i>What do you wish church was like?</i> <sup>319</sup>
<b>Albert</b>	clarify opportunities for involvement as young man & assist him in seeking God's will
<b>David</b>	the pastor is doing a good job
<b>Jeffrey</b>	(did not ask, though he seems happy; "I like [helping] with youth group")
<b>Seth</b>	(did not ask, though he seems content and likes pastor's preaching)
<b>Josh</b>	"more geared toward men", more involvement of "guys my age", "more authenticity, not just smiles at church"
<b>Ronnie</b>	less legalistic, more concern for unsaved, more accepting of people as they are
<b>Vincent</b>	"more of a body" with spiritual connecting, more response-oriented worship, more mentoring
<b>Patrick</b>	more "Word-fueled interaction", more energy put into training & mentoring men through challenges of marriage, parenting, work

Their churches may have failed to provide the degree of direction some of the young men desired, but *they didn't fail to give them opportunities to engage their capacities*. Patrick, Ernest, David, Elrond, Jeffrey, Josh, and Ronnie all experienced opportunities - in the course of their church involvement - to be involved in others' lives.<sup>320</sup> Their churches empowered them by setting them up to engage

<sup>319</sup> Answers to this question were extracted from various points in the interviews.

<sup>320</sup> *Youth ministry* has been significant for several of the men as has *hands-on work projects* including service to widows, working on building projects, etc. At least two of the men interviewed have had substantial involvement in *leading worship*.

their capacities in ministry - with children, youth, widows, and the church at large.<sup>321</sup>

Do we expect too much of young men? Do we push them too hard to get involved, and end up pushing them away? To the contrary, according to Albert; when I asked him if the church expects too much or not enough from young men, his answer was "probably not enough." Myrtlewood Association churches are not, it seems, pushing our young men too hard. According to Albert, we can push harder - but it had better be in the context of personal attention, it would seem, if we want men like Albert to respond positively.

There is no shortage in Myrtlewood Association churches, apparently, of role models. Several of the men, as seen in the preceding section, testified to having godly men in their churches demonstrating godly manhood. But does this constitute the *authentic relationship* that is necessary for empowerment?

For the men I interviewed, it may not. A number of the men I interviewed pointed out the difference between a good example and someone who is personally involved in your life - and that their churches seem to provide mostly the former. This preponderance of *examples* over *mentors* is

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<sup>321</sup> Significantly, none of the men complained about being "held down," or pressured to serve in an area in which they did not want to serve.

noticed by some of the young men - and for some, it is a lack they feel keenly. "Where are the older men," asked Vincent, "coming alongside?"

Albert shared a similar sentiment. "I think the men in the church do a great job of setting an example. But not such a great job of passing it on." I'm not sure what Albert meant by "it," but he is looking for older men to be more than examples for him.

Patrick described one of the spiritual implications of this lack of involvement of older men. While he comes across enthusiastic and confident, Patrick distrusts his ability to discern God's will on his own; he believes he needs others' input into personal issues in order to know God's will for his life - including the wisdom of older, wiser saints. He wants to follow Bill Thrall's advice, to "let the other ordinary people around [him] provide input into [his life] and decisions."<sup>322</sup> But he wants more than generic exhortations: "Getting told by others to 'read your Bible and pray,'" Patrick lamented, "[has been] incredibly frustrating for [me]."

*Relationship* with older men, for some, is something that "once was found, but now is lost." Half the men had significant, personal attention paid to them when they were

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<sup>322</sup> Thrall et al., *Ascent*, 154.

in youth group, but - as mentioned - aren't getting much personal attention now. "There's not really anybody I'm talking to deeply about spiritual things these days," confessed David. It's possible - in fact, it may be typical - to be a young man who regularly attends a Myrtlewood Association church yet *not* have deep, authentic relationship with any other men there.

Interestingly, not one of the men I interviewed suggested that church needs to be more welcoming or "friendly." I invited Josh, knowing he was positive and enthusiastic about his church, to think about how church might be improved. He mentioned the importance of male leadership - then observed what's needed is "more authenticity, not just smiles at church."

Empowerment always involves *helping someone understand God's big picture and his place in it*. We have already observed that Myrtlewood Association churches do a decent job of helping people understand God's big picture - his plan to redeem the world. But have we missed opportunities to help young men figure out *the small picture* - their place in God's plan?

For some of the men I talked to, this doesn't seem to be a concern or complaint; the interviewees on both ends of the research sample - the youngest and the oldest - seemed

content with their self-understanding. For the four men in their mid-twenties, however, it is an issue.

Why is this an issue? These men in their mid-twenties are seeing people around them making bad choices, but are not quite sure what constitutes good choices for *them*. "I'm unsure of what the future holds," admits David - and "[I'm] not sure what God wants, [or] what I want." They could use some help, Tim Elmore would say, figuring out the vocation that is locked up inside them.<sup>323</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman's model, as noted in Chapter 2, supplies discrete steps an empowering agent can help others take as well.

Lack of self-understanding is an issue because some men in their mid-twenties feel stuck and bogged down. I asked Elrond what it's like to be a guy in his twenties these days. "Hard. Kind of an in-between stage. Kind of boring." *What strengths have other people told you that you have*, I asked? He shrugged. "I'm a hard worker; I like to tinker, but I'm not sure how good I am." It's hard to be motivated to take risks, I will suggest, if you feel unexceptional.

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<sup>323</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, Elmore suggests five questions that mentors / empowering agents can help young people answer: What are my values? What vision do I want to pursue? What is my virtue? What's the best venue for me? What vehicles will I employ to help me reach my goal? See Elmore, *Generation iY*, 161-168.

Julian Rappaport observed that listening to and giving value to people's stories empowers them - and helps them figure out who they are.<sup>324</sup> Do older men in Myrtlewood Association churches listen to young men tell their stories, thereby helping them grow in self-understanding? None of the men I interviewed reported that older men pursued understanding their stories. It may be that these young men see older men as more interested in telling their own stories than listening to theirs.

Are Myrtlewood Association churches directing resources, trust, and blessing toward young men? As a pastor of a Myrtlewood Association church, I know fellow pastors and I are praying for and pursuing relationship with some Novice Phase men in our churches. These interviews, however, did not yield much evidence to support that.

Sometimes, Myrtlewood Association churches fail to make men's ministry events accessible to young men. Josh noted that the men's study currently underway at his church meets mid-morning on a weekday, which doesn't work for young men - including him - with a day job.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 796.

<sup>325</sup> Josh mentioned that he'd been thinking about starting a Bible study for young men. I struggled to remain in the role of researcher here, though I bit my tongue and did not urge him to implement this idea.



Sometimes, too, religious traditions that are dear to older church members are experienced by young men as barriers to empowerment. Ronnie, who expressed as much enthusiasm for his church as any other interviewee, bemoaned the presence in the church of "people who judge you for not living by their religious rules... people who don't accept people for who they are." *Has this pushed people from your generation away from the church*, I asked? "Absolutely," replied Ronnie.<sup>326</sup>

Summarizing this section - *What Do They Say Diminishes Empowerment?* - can be done in four words: lack of authentic relationships.

What Contribution Are They Making to Church Life?<sup>327</sup>

The previous two sections evaluate the experience of young men from the standpoint of how others have treated them - how others' action (or inaction) has empowered (or failed to empower) them. In this section, we set aside any perceived credit or blame on others' part and evaluate how young men, on *their* part, are making positive contributions to their churches.

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<sup>326</sup> Albert shared the same sentiment. "Religion," he began, "is what makes you think you're okay with God - by what you're doing - when you're not."

<sup>327</sup> This will, again, be from the perspective of the men I interviewed.

I must, at this point, put the spotlight on Patrick. Here is a man with ample opportunity to make excuses for mediocrity, and to place blame on others for unfulfilled potential. His father was and is emotionally distant. He did not grow up in church, and when he did find Christ and get plugged into church, he was prematurely thrust into leadership and not supported, in his opinion, adequately. He was given cliché "encouragement" when he needed mentoring. He *still* wants mentoring, but has to listen to other men's stories instead. Patrick has a lot of reasons to be sour on church and give up on organized religion. "Between early adulthood and middle age," Patrick laments, "there's a lack of training, time and energy that goes into helping young men."

But Patrick *hasn't* given up on church. At various stages, when the church had "let him down," he took responsibility for his own spiritual wellness, prayed, made decisions, and pressed on. Right now, he's struggling to balance work, family, and church involvement. Unable to fulfill a leadership role in ministry due to the cumulative demands on his time and energy, Patrick helps out, when he has time, with the children's ministry his kids are part of - at his church.

Patrick is an example of taking your disappointments to God, not giving up on the church, and finding a spot to contribute, using your God-given capacities, in an imperfect church. He is spiritually open, as Dan Kimball observes is generally true about those in his generation. He is looking, as Thom and Sam Rainer observe, for personal connection in church - to participate in a community, as Julian Rappaport describes, that will allow him to write his own story in accord with shared ideals. And he is being, like biblical hero Abraham, patient, and like biblical hero Moses, gracious toward God's people.

Ronnie is an example, too, of a young man who continues to believe in church; he persists in engaging his capacities and perseveres in seeking authentic relationship there. Profoundly disappointed in "modern day Pharisees," Ronnie is grateful for his church, his pastor, his parents, and his job. He uses his obvious capacities in serving, compassion, and evangelism - at church *and* on the job.<sup>328</sup>

In fact, seven of the ten men I interviewed are actively engaged in hands-on ministry - leading worship, volunteering with youth, and serving in helps and compassion ministries.

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<sup>328</sup> Ronnie and Patrick are both examples of men who have stepped beyond their disappointments in other Christians, taken responsibility to seek and obey God - and are walking out their destinies. They are, I will suggest, living purpose-driven and exemplary lives.

Are they fully engaging their capacities? If they were being more effectively empowered, would their kingdom impact and their rate of maturing increase? Are they functioning at 90%, 50%, or perhaps just 10% of their capacities? Are these ten men fulfilling the words of Jesus in John 14 - "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing"? Or, as Jesus continues, "even greater things than these"?<sup>329</sup>

### **Summary**

*Empowerment, we concluded in Chapter 2, is helping someone (a) understand his place in God's big picture and (b) engage his God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes. It requires authentic relationship - your resources, trust, and blessing. Which of these aspects of empowerment are young men in Myrtlewood Association churches experiencing?*

They are experiencing opportunities to engage their God-given capacities in church-based ministry. Pastors and other church leaders are entrusting to young men both organized ministry (with youth or children, for example) as well as more informal ministry (helping care for widows). Sure, Myrtlewood Association churches could be more

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<sup>329</sup> John 14:12

intentional about helping young men identify their spiritual gifts and deploying them in ministry more strategically - more on that in Chapter 4. Yet there is no mistake: young men are finding that Myrtlewood Association churches provide significant opportunities for ministry.

Myrtlewood Association churches are, in general, providing solid examples of godly manhood. Opportunities do exist - in men's breakfasts, men's Bible studies, and work projects - to spend time around these older men.

At least some Myrtlewood Association churches have significant ministry with youth. When youth ministry staff pays personal attention to youth, it can result in young men who know what it means - and want - to follow God whole-heartedly.

A significant number of young men are continuing, over the course of years, to participate in Myrtlewood Association churches - and, it seems, to grow spiritually. "Since high school," relates David, "I've grown closer [to God]."

How are Myrtlewood Association churches failing to empower? The most glaring lack appears to be the failure of older men to get personally involved in the lives of young men. In the stressful, sometimes chaotic transition from

the teenage world to the adult world, some young men feel that older men are not very concerned about them.

*I understand, I said to Patrick, that empowerment means using the means at your disposal to help someone else fulfill his or her destiny. It includes helping others engage their strengths, right where they're at in life. Do you see that happening in church?*

"No," said Patrick; "it's not happening in the church..."

*Ronnie, do you see empowerment happening in church?*

"Yes and no."

*Ernest, I asked, what people have empowered you?*

"All my pastors. Camp speakers. My parents."

## Chapter 4

### EMPOWERING YOUNG MEN IN MYRTLEWOOD ASSOCIATION CHURCHES: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We heard, in Chapter 1, about my concern for the future of young men in Myrtlewood Association churches.

We arrived, in Chapter 2, at a concise conceptualization of empowerment: *helping someone (a) understand his place in God's big picture and (b) engage his God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes. It requires authentic relationship - your resources, trust, and blessing.*

We listened, in Chapter 3, to how some of the young men in Myrtlewood Association churches are experiencing - and not experiencing - empowerment.

In this, our final chapter, we will try to draw some useful conclusions. We will answer the question *What does this all mean?* - what processes, relationships, and resources exist to foster empowerment of young men in Myrtlewood Association churches? We will also answer the

question *What should we do?* - what opportunities do church leaders have to empower young men?<sup>330</sup>

In this chapter, I will speak as both researcher and pastor. I am writing primarily for fellow pastors and church leaders who are concerned about the overall health of Myrtlewood Association churches as well as the future of our young men. My intention is to be objective, collegial, and sympathetic.

Here is my approach: I will review each aspect of empowerment - revisiting pertinent theory and interview data - and draw *conclusions* for church-based ministry. I will comment on the relationship between empowerment and discipleship, and then make *recommendations* to pastors and leaders. I will conclude by giving credit to some of the people who made this project possible.

### **Conclusions**

For each component of empowerment, I will move from describing and analyzing data to discussing implications.

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<sup>330</sup> We will also reflect, but not linger, on the hindrances to empowerment of young men and the challenges for the leaders who want to empower them. The data, my theology, and my philosophy of ministry all allow for optimism.



Most of the implications will speak to *leading* and - in the best sense of the word - *managing* a church.<sup>331</sup>

#### Empowering with God's Big Picture

"This [praying] is good and pleases God our Savior,  
who wants all men to be saved..."

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:3-4a

We observed, in Chapter 2, that God has a *mission*: redeem the world. We proposed this mission as *God's big picture*: that God - as he promised to Abraham and accomplished through Christ - desires, intends, and is carrying out a plan to bless "all peoples on earth" with salvation.<sup>332</sup> We concluded that a biblical model of empowerment involves *helping someone understand God's big picture*.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> These will comprise the "church based solutions" I propose to the "problem" I posed in Chapter 1.

<sup>332</sup> See Genesis 12:2-3 and Galatians 3:14. Some would argue, passionately, that God's big picture is *his glory*, and that redeeming the world magnifies his glory. I can only say "Amen!" to that notion, articulated so well by the ancient poet: "May those who love your salvation always say, 'Let God be exalted!'" (Psalm 70:4b, italics mine). John Piper, a worshiper of more recent vintage, also bears testimony to this in *Desiring God* and other of his writings. Please see John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters: Multnomah Books, 2003).

<sup>333</sup> Blanchard and his colleagues (Blanchard et al., *Empowerment*) also noted the importance, in empowerment, of giving people all the information they needed - including clarifying the *vision*, or *big picture*, for them.

If you converse with a young adult who is serious about church, you may not hear him talk about "God's big picture," but you will probably hear him use the word "missional" - and use it to describe the way church *ought to be*. The word *missional* may seem strange or awkward to some of us - even an invention of emerging generations.<sup>334</sup> I think it is just a new way to describe the ancient impetus behind God's big picture: His desire to redeem the world and restore relationship with and among humanity. Those calling out for a more missional church are calling us to remember God's mission to redeem - God's big picture.

As noted in Chapter 3, Myrtlewood Association churches are succeeding, to some degree, at equipping young men with knowledge of God's mission. We have, it seems, legitimate reason to celebrate our success at providing these young men with a critical component of empowerment.

We should not, however, celebrate too long or loud. Emerging generations' conception of the gospel is different from their parents' conception; it is, as Dan Kimball noted

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<sup>334</sup> Alan Hirsch, a prominent "young" missiologist, argues that "A proper understanding of *missional* begins with recovering a missionary understanding of God," that "By his very nature God... takes the initiative to redeem his creation" - and "the church is the instrument of God's mission in the world"! See Alan Hirsch, "Defining Missional," *Leadership Journal* 29, no.4 (Fall 2008). See also <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/fall/17.20.html>>.

in Chapter 2, less propositional and more experiential.<sup>335</sup> Postmodernism - which, as Kimball observed, is becoming increasingly influential - recognizes lower and more distant sideboards on truth than does modernism.<sup>336</sup> Young adults in Myrtlewood Association churches may be familiar with and favorable toward God's big picture, but they also may be familiar with and favorable toward alternate spiritualities.<sup>337</sup>

Emerging generations need, I will suggest, patient voices of reason from older generations in order to forge a biblical worldview.<sup>338</sup> If Kimball is right, the prevailing culture in which Myrtlewood Association churches exist will not be free, in the foreseeable future, from postmodern thought - including religious pluralism and a subjective view of truth. God's big picture is still *the* big picture, and pastors, leaders, and teachers interested in empowering young men must clearly, persistently, and graciously persist in sharing it with them.

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<sup>335</sup> By *propositional*, I mean cognitive and organized. By *experiential*, I mean individual and subjective.

<sup>336</sup> Modernism, contends Kimball, is the defining philosophy of immediately preceding generations. See Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 44.

<sup>337</sup> This is called, as noted in Chapter 2 as we explored Dan Kimball's theory, *religious pluralism*.

<sup>338</sup> The increasing willingness, in Evangelical circles, to consider *universal salvation* (universalism) as a legitimate biblical belief is one example of this - and evidence of the need to persistently call fellow Christians back to the truth of Scripture.

## Empowering with the Small Picture

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 2:10

Empowerment requires, we surmised in Chapter 2, not just helping someone understand God's big picture but also *his particular place in it*. God's plan to redeem the world is glorious, but unless a young man sees his part in it, he is at risk of finding it irrelevant. Empowering young men in Myrtlewood Association churches requires that others help them understand their *small pictures*: their unique, individual parts in God's big picture.

As Levinson and his colleagues observed, a young man has to "make a place for [him]self in the adult world," has to find a vocation that is "viable in the world and suitable for the self."<sup>339</sup> Young men need help, Levinson observed - and our data supports - discovering and engaging their unique set of skills.

Tim Elmore advised us how to help men on the younger end of the Novice Phase - those in their teens and early twenties - discover their part in the big picture. He urged us to *help them dream*. This is not urging them to idle

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<sup>339</sup> Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 72.

fantasies, but to actively pursue discovering their passions and strengths: the vocation for which they are suited.<sup>340</sup> By asking them questions, telling them the truth, setting boundaries, teaching them skills, and working together on projects - purposeful activity in the context of relationship - we help them "practice maturity" and figure out "what is inside of them."<sup>341</sup> Those who help young men identify their passions and strengths help them discover their place in God's big picture - they empower them with their small pictures.<sup>342</sup>

While men in their late teens and early twenties need help transitioning into adulthood, men in their mid to late twenties need help choosing from all their options - in vocation, dating, marriage, parenting, and lifestyle. As reported in Chapter 3, these are the challenges for which young men want "Word-based interaction" - a chance to discuss how the Bible speaks to their concerns - and guidance from older men who have been there.

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<sup>340</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 157.

<sup>341</sup> Elmore, 159. Elmore identifies five critical decisions we can help them think through: What are my values? What vision do I want to pursue? What is my virtue? What's the best venue for me? What vehicles will I employ to help me reach my goal? See Elmore, 161-168.

<sup>342</sup> Empowering young men with an understanding of their part in the big picture seems to involve both helping them come to grips with reality and helping them dream - offering both practical coaching ("You're tone deaf; forget about a career in opera") and asking optimistic, speculative "Have you ever thought about...?" kinds of questions. Men need, I conclude, help of both kinds.

It is possible that young men in this season of life - mid to late twenties - may not *want* any advice.

Nevertheless, they, like young King Rehoboam, *need* it.<sup>343</sup>

Those of us committed to empowering them will keep inviting them into our lives, recruiting them to mission, and watching for opportunities to mentor.<sup>344</sup>

Men in their twenties, Levinson observed, encounter considerable difficulty - and expend considerable effort - finding a life structure that works for them. Yet for all the effort in their twenties, few men make it through the Age Thirty Transition without some kind of crisis.<sup>345</sup> Young men in this season of life may welcome assistance clarifying their temperament, gifting, calling, and what it means to be a man - their particular part in God's big picture. For those who want to empower men approaching their thirtieth birthday, this season of life offers substantial opportunity to, in Vincent's words, "come

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<sup>343</sup> This sad story, chronicled in 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12, describes a young king who spurned the advice of older, wiser advisors and followed - to his detriment - the advice of his young, foolish friends.

<sup>344</sup> I do not know if I am typical, but I longed for older men's involvement in my life when I was in my twenties. One of the highlights of that decade was when the man I respected the most in my church - about twenty years my senior - asked me to co-teach the high school Sunday school class with him. We met, prayed, and planned together, and I had dinner with his family those evenings when we met to prepare.

<sup>345</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, over half the men in Levinson's research "experienced their lives as incomplete, oppressive, not going anywhere or heading in the wrong direction" in their late twenties (Levinson et al., *Seasons*, 83).

alongside" - to listen, encourage, and advise regarding these major "hot issues."

Those committed to empowering young men are likely to encounter - at any stage of their development - the "What's in it for me?" attitude. Elmore, in spite of his gracious analysis, observes that many in emerging generations have "an overinflated idea of their own importance... [and] they feel entitled to special treatment."<sup>346</sup> While the interview data for this project do not demonstrate clear evidence of narcissism, those committed to empowering young men in Myrtlewood Association churches should prepare themselves to encounter it - and face it honestly, graciously, and patiently.<sup>347</sup>

Do Myrtlewood Association pastors and church leaders believe that the small pictures of their young men are necessary parts of God's big picture? Do we believe that Ephesians 3:20 is true - that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" - in *these* young men, and that his power is at work *in them*? If so, we will help them - skillfully, prayerfully, and patiently - identify their *small picture* in God's *big picture*. A very

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<sup>346</sup> Elmore, *Generation iY*, 25.

<sup>347</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, Elmore offers practical (and hopeful) advice about how to do this in *Generation iY*.

practical way to do that is to help them identify and engage their God-given capacities.

#### Empowering by Engaging Capacities

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:10

The preceding verse says that each believer has received some "gift" from God and is to use it to pursue God's purposes. The Bible clearly teaches - and Warren, Blanchard, and Thrall agree - that each person has a unique set of capacities with which to engage the world and accomplish God's purposes.<sup>348</sup> If young men are to be empowered in Myrtlewood Association churches, they need to engage their God-given capacities.<sup>349</sup>

To begin, there *appears* to be a need to distinguish between "natural" and "supernatural" capacities. Every person is born with *natural* capacities. Regardless of one's relationship to God, one has a God-given portfolio of

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<sup>348</sup> Blanchard and his colleagues, in *Empowerment*, do not make the point of divine sanction clear.

<sup>349</sup> This is at the center of the definition of empowerment - as well as the empowering agent's efforts.



capacities to think, feel, and do.<sup>350</sup> Scripture also tells us that Christians, by way of God's Spirit, possess one or more additional, *supernatural* capacities, or gifts.<sup>351</sup> Yet while it seems needful to distinguish between the two categories, it can prove to be either distracting or helpful to empowerment.

On one hand, distinguishing between natural and supernatural capacities can be distracting. A church can get lost in a never-ending theological discussion about gifts and gifting - and never get around to helping people identify and engage their gifts.<sup>352</sup>

On the other hand, distinguishing between natural and supernatural capacities can be helpful; it provides two practical categories for evaluation and empowerment. We can expect a young man, not yet a Christian, to possess natural capacities, but not supernatural ones. In seeking, as a church, to empower him, we can help him identify his natural, God-given capacities - and pray and coach him to receive Christ and receive additional, supernatural capacities. We can likewise expect a young Christian man to

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<sup>350</sup> We can, thinking biblically, attribute these capacities to *Imago Dei* - the image of God in the human frame; most of us would describe these God-given, God-like capacities as "natural abilities."

<sup>351</sup> Romans 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 all make this clear.

<sup>352</sup> In that scenario, it is as if the church has been given a truckload of vegetables by a generous benefactor - but they let it all rot while they carry on a prolonged discussion about the biblical way to unload trucks and distribute produce.

possess both natural and supernatural capacities, and help him identify and deploy all of them. Whether by way of natural birth or supernatural rebirth, a young man's capacities are God-designed and God-given and intended to be engaged for God's purposes. Pastors and other church leaders can empower young men by helping them identify and engage all of these capacities.<sup>353</sup>

According to the interview data, some of the young men in Myrtlewood Association churches don't feel like they are getting much help identifying their capacities. It is possible that these young men are being coached, but for some reason do not *realize* that they are.<sup>354</sup> In such cases, pastors and other leaders committed to empowerment must keep the long view and continue making their unacknowledged investment in the emerging generation.

It is also possible that young men are *not* being coached in identifying and engaging their capacities. Since the data indicate that most of the young men are being deployed in ministry, pastors and other leaders may be making some assumptions. One possible assumption is that people are able to engage their capacities regardless of

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<sup>353</sup> Cattaneo and Chapman do not emphasize the uniqueness of individual capacities, but instead assert that "skill deficits" can be rectified by identifying deficits and intentionally learning new skills (Cattaneo and Chapman, "The Process of Empowerment," 653).

<sup>354</sup> It was several decades after my Novice Phase before I realized the extent to which others had invested in me during that period.

the role assigned to them. Another possible assumption is that if people are mis-assigned - given roles that don't match up with their capacities - they will eventually figure it out on their own and take the initiative to re-engage elsewhere, with nothing lost in the process. Both of these assumptions may be true to some degree; they may also be faulty, and may contribute to frustration and dropout among young men in Myrtlewood Association churches.

The interview data suggest, as we saw in Chapter 3, that while Myrtlewood Association churches generally deploy young men in ministry, we may at times do so without much understanding of their unique set of capacities. Some young men in Myrtlewood Association churches would benefit, then, from a more concerted effort to identify their capacities and deploy them more strategically in ministry. Pastors and other leaders in Myrtlewood Association churches can do this for them.<sup>355</sup>

There is one thing that pastors and other leaders cannot give to young men, and that is the spiritual fuel required for their spiritual capacities. It is at this

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<sup>355</sup> A variety of instruments are available to pastors and church leaders who want to help others sharpen their understanding of both natural and supernatural capacities. The MBTI, DISC, and StrengthsFinder instruments, for example, all help identify one's natural capacities. The *Wagner-Modified Houts* questionnaire - the basis for several books by Peter Wagner - helps, on the other hand, identify one's supernatural capacities.

point that a young man's personal relationship with God becomes keenly relevant. "Power and might are in your hand," confessed King Jehoshaphat as he prayed.<sup>356</sup> Estranged from God, a young man is merely talented. Reconciled with God, a young man is both talented and - in the most fundamental sense of the word - empowered by the One who holds power and might in his hand. The single best thing we can do for a young man, I contend, is to ensure that he knows God personally.

The Bible indicates that the Holy Spirit has a unique role in empowering people. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," the LORD Almighty told prophet Zechariah.<sup>357</sup> Though a thorough discussion of the spiritual life is beyond the scope of this discussion, being filled with the Spirit is clearly essential to being full of God's power. I conclude that introducing a young man to the Holy Spirit - as a person, not an abstract point of theology - is an essential aspect of helping him engage his God-given capacities, pursue God's purposes, and fulfill his destiny.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 20:6

<sup>357</sup> Zechariah 4:6

<sup>358</sup> From the Old Testament example of God speaking in a "still, small voice" (1<sup>st</sup> Kings 19:12), to Jesus describing the Holy Spirit as all-sufficient Counselor (John 14:16-17), to the Apostle Paul's exhortation to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25), the Bible makes it

What if Myrtlewood Association churches fail to help young men identify and engage their capacities? A young man may continue to associate with a church, for some period of time, regardless of whether he is engaging his God-given capacities or not. Intuitively, I think he is likely to migrate elsewhere.<sup>359</sup> In the meantime, unrealized potential accumulates with each month of unengaged capacity.

What if Myrtlewood Association churches *do* help their young men identify their capacities, and *do* offer them opportunities to engage their unique strengths and calling - though green and unproven - in ministry roles that fit them?<sup>360</sup> The potential to add strength to our churches by helping young men identify and deploy their God-given capacities appears to be substantial.

#### Empowering through Authentic Relationship

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us."

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:8

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amply clear that the Holy Spirit is a person to whom we should listen and with whom we should cultivate relationship.

<sup>359</sup> He may remain indefinitely, lacking ambition or vision for anything better. If that occurs, it is a problem of another stripe.

<sup>360</sup> This idea was initially suggested in the context of discussing Thom and Sam Rainer's *Essential Church?* in Chapter 2.

*Empowerment*, our definition says, *requires authentic relationship* - relationship in which truthfulness and acceptance are valued. As we noted in Chapter 2, this concept is both consistent with the meaning of the word *authentic* and the character of Jesus.<sup>361</sup>

Older adults may not understand the term *authentic relationship*.<sup>362</sup> Younger adults, however, consider authentic relationship very relevant. They *want* authentic relationship - *and*, significantly, *they want to find it at church*. "This generation," observe Thom and Sam Rainer, "desires an essential connection with others."<sup>363</sup> It is probably *non sequitur* - even absurd - to young people that a church would claim to be relevant to them while not offering authentic relationship.

Myrtlewood Association churches are offering authentic relationship, the interview data suggest. Life on life involvement is occurring between young men and older men in the context of youth activities, outreach ministries, and men's groups. "He treated me like I mattered," testified Albert about his relationship with his youth pastor.

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<sup>361</sup> The word *authentic*, as noted in Chapter 2, includes the idea of being *worthy of acceptance or belief* (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*), and we defined *authentic relationship* as *relationship in which acceptance and truthfulness are valued*. The Bible describes Jesus in very similar terms: "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

<sup>362</sup> If "baby boomers" - those born between 1946 and 1964 - tend to be pragmatic, it stands to reason that they would find a concept concerning quality of relationship irrelevant or even suspect.

<sup>363</sup> Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 46.

Myrtlewood Association churches, the interview data suggest, may not be offering authentic relationship to the degree and to the extent that young men seek it. This may indicate that their expectations are too high - that they are self-absorbed and are expecting too much attention. It may also mean that older men are not engaging young men adequately, relationally - that older men are not engaging young men with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Pursuing authentic relationship with young men is necessary, it seems, to accommodate contemporary youth culture. It is also, I will observe, more than that. If our theology says a local church is the locus of fellowship and community - and that Christians have the God-given desire to experience it - we should not be surprised that young adults *want* and *expect* to find deep relational connections in church.<sup>364</sup> "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."<sup>365</sup> I conclude that offering deep relational connections - authentic relationship - to young men is both culturally appropriate and consistent with normal Christian life as described in the New Testament.

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<sup>364</sup> An in-depth Bible study of the nature and practice of Spirit-mediated *fellowship* would be insightful in this regard - coupled with a rigorous (and potentially both affirming and uncomfortable) round of self-examination.

<sup>365</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:27. See also Ephesians 4:25: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

What opportunities are there for Myrtlewood Association churches to cultivate authentic relationship with young men? If it is best, as Jesus says in Matthew 7, to begin with ourselves, perhaps church leaders should ask ourselves a probing question: Are we offering authentic relationship to people in general, and to young men in particular? Asking this question requires humility and courage, but the pursuit of authentic community and authentic relationship requires it.<sup>366</sup>

Some of the young men I interviewed indicated that older Christian men liked to tell their stories, but didn't seem to value theirs. Again, this may be a matter of perspective, and a case of self-centered young men just wanting more attention. Still, to the degree that it is true - that young men often get relegated to the role of audience - it presents an opportunity for improvement. One way to cultivate authentic relationship with young men is to *listen* to them - to their stories, their ideas, their feelings, and their frustrations.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> It may be possible, in the culture of some churches, to be considered a member in good standing - even a leader - and not be deeply connected with others in the church body. This is a bigger issue, beyond the scope of this project - and worthy, I would suggest, of further research.

<sup>367</sup> This doesn't require that we agree with their thoughts or even understand them. We don't have to dress like them or talk like them. It just means that we are willing to hold our tongues and open our ears and, as the apostle Paul instructs the Romans, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15).



Older men may find this difficult. Listening to young adults can be hard for us who - in all nobleness and mercy - want to spare young people from making the same mistakes we made.<sup>368</sup>

Listening to young adults may be hard for us, similarly, who want upcoming generations to lay hold of the deep truths of the Christian faith. Listening seems frivolous to some of us - less important than meaty, biblical instruction.

Regardless of the motive behind our desire to talk, listening to young men talk remains a readily available means for cultivating empowerment. Even when we don't hold the reins of a conversation, we may, by simply listening, help a young man understand his place in God's big picture. As Julian Rappaport concluded, "narrative theory and methods" - which boil down to really listening to others' stories - "are a powerful means to... foster these [empowering] processes."<sup>369</sup>

I will observe that it is easy, as self-centered human beings, to blame others for any lack of authentic

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<sup>368</sup> Older believers, faced with our own mortality, often want to effect a generational transfer of wisdom. Though eager to pass on the wisdom of our years to those who will outlive us, we would do well to heed Solomon's warning that "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

<sup>369</sup> Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative," 799.

relationship.<sup>370</sup> It is the mature man's responsibility, I will suggest, to not only refrain from pointing the finger at the young man, but to initiate in relationship. Still, both the young man and the older man have the opportunity to cultivate authentic relationship - and empowerment - by engaging heart, soul, mind, and strength in relationship.<sup>371</sup>

Authentic relationship does not preclude confrontation. Stu Weber's roles of manhood - king, warrior, mentor, friend - *require* confrontation.<sup>372</sup> Jesus, the one perfect man, confronted sin and hypocrisy with biting rebuke.<sup>373</sup> With Jesus as our ultimate role model, though, we see manhood at its best as *strength under control* - and ultimately used to help others connect with God.<sup>374</sup>

Authentic relationship does not sound the death knell to one's hobbies, be they hunting, fishing, reading and talking about books, or drinking coffee. In my view,

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<sup>370</sup> The first two human beings didn't take long to manifest this behavior; see Genesis 3:8-13.

<sup>371</sup> This may feel awkward to many of us - especially, I will theorize, those of us that have not experienced it before. What is important, as I will point out in the *recommendations* section, is that we *lean into relationship* with young men - that we intentionally try to enter and understand their world, and welcome them into ours - and not just expect them to conform to the form of church to which we have become accustomed.

<sup>372</sup> A good king, for example, "winnows out the wicked" (Proverbs 20:26).

<sup>373</sup> See Matthew 23, where Jesus calls errant religious leaders *hypocrites, blind guides, and vipers!*

<sup>374</sup> "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:18).

hobbies provide a ready context for connecting with young men who share those hobbies.

Do Myrtlewood Association churches value *authentic relationship*? Do we provide a safe place for young people to fulfill their God-given desire to connect with others? If Myrtlewood Association churches offer young men authentic relationship, empowerment can occur. If we do not, it probably will not.<sup>375</sup>

In authentic relationship, we give people the best we have to give: our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This takes the form of our resources, trust, and blessing.

#### Empowering with Resources

"[God's] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:3

*Empowerment*, according to our definition, always involves sharing your *resources*. God, we saw in Chapter 2, shared divine resources with the five biblical role models we identified. The empowering manager, Blanchard observed,

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<sup>375</sup> If young men do not find authentic relationship in church, I will soberly add, they will probably go look for it elsewhere.

shares information, autonomy, and vision with team members. Communities, observed Rappaport, provide a context of commitment and a shared narrative. The Rainers' model of church implies the allocation of resources to sustain ministry with young adults. We have not attempted, in this project, to sort resources by categories; we have, however, seen that those who empower share what they possess with others that others may be empowered.

What opportunities present themselves to Myrtlewood Association pastors and leaders for empowering young men with resources? We are not talking about handing a young man the world on a silver platter. First and foremost, we are talking about handing him *heaven* on a silver platter - *the resources of heaven*, to be more precise.

The resources of heaven are first of all God himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we do nothing else, we can introduce young men, to the best of our ability, to a heavenly Father who loves them, to his Son who died for them and lives to intercede and fight for them, and to his Spirit who unashamedly stays with them, gives them power and boldness, and comforts them. Might this be the heart - and the closest thing to a "silver bullet" - of

empowerment?<sup>376</sup> If we do nothing else but introduce a young man to his awesome, personal, triune God, we have done a profoundly important and helpful thing - we have empowered him to pursue God's purposes.

None of the young men I interviewed mentioned spiritual warfare.<sup>377</sup> Yet the resources of heaven include spiritual armor, and if the devil is after young men like a roaring lion, young men desperately need spiritual armor to keep from being devoured.<sup>378</sup> The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 6, explains this extended metaphor as comprised of six components: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God).<sup>379</sup> If it is true that young men in Myrtlewood Association churches are not being trained in spiritual warfare, then such training provides another opportunity to further empower young men with the resources of heaven.

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<sup>376</sup> *Silver bullet* is, colloquially, a term for a singularly effective strategy or action.

<sup>377</sup> I did not specifically inquire about spiritual warfare, either. It is possible that Myrtlewood Association churches are training young men in spiritual warfare, but the subject just never came up in my interviews.

<sup>378</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:8. It would likely be very helpful (spiritually fruitful) for us to watch video footage of a lion tearing apart and devouring a living, breathing mammal - and considering that the devil does this to young men without the armor of God.

<sup>379</sup> Ephesians 6:10-18

Patrick's comments indicate that he longs for help putting on one particular piece of this armor: the Word of God. "Word-fueled interaction," Patrick testified, was both very welcome and very helpful in his struggle for godliness. Might this be a second silver bullet for empowering young men in Myrtlewood Association churches: interaction (not mere instruction), fueled by the words and principles of Scripture?

We can also empower young men with more practical resources: information (a la Blanchard), budget dollars, etc. Older, more established churchmen *do* have more access to and more control over resources than young men do. Sharing practical resources with young men is another means of helping him engage his capacities and cultivating authentic relationship.<sup>380</sup>

Empowering people believe the church has powerful resources to share: God himself, God's armor, and God's Word. They want the church to equip others with God's power so they can pursue his purposes and fulfill their destiny. Empowering pastors and leaders in Myrtlewood Association churches introduce young men to the triune God, show and tell them how to put on the armor of God, and interact with

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<sup>380</sup> If we *trust* young men, we will share control over practical resources; we will talk about *empowering with trust* in a moment.

them about Scripture. They also share practical resources with young men.

#### Empowering by Trusting

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:27

Bill Thrall and his colleagues identified *trust* as a crucial aspect of developing - and helping others develop.<sup>381</sup> Blanchard and his colleagues' prescription for an empowering environment - you trust others, they trust you, and they have the freedom to create - affirms the essential nature of *trust* in the empowerment process. These authors identify *trust* as a key ingredient in empowerment, as do we: *empowerment involves trusting*.

What does it mean to *trust* somebody? According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, it means we have "a firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability, justice, etc. of another person or thing; faith; reliance." It means *we think someone is worthy of taking care of something that we want taken care of well*.

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<sup>381</sup> "We will never be able to trust everyone," Thrall and his colleagues note, "but we cannot live a fulfilled life without trusting lots of people" (Thrall et al., *Ascent*, 71).

What do we, as Myrtlewood Association churches, want taken care of well? We care about our facilities, our children, and our Sunday morning worship service. We care about our finances, our widows, our Sunday school, and our Bible studies. How do we entrust these things to young men - and thereby empower them?

We give young men, according to our interview data, responsibility. Myrtlewood Association churches, as noted in Chapter 3, give young men charge over people who are very dear to us: youth and children in age-graded ministries, and the entire congregation in leading worship. We commission them - albeit often informally - to serve widows locally and entire churches in other cities, states, and countries.

We also give young men increasing measures of authority. Several of the young men I interviewed testified to moving, upon leaving high school, from participant to leader in youth ministry.<sup>382</sup>

In addition to entrusting young men with responsibility and authority, Myrtlewood Association churches also give them accountability. While this is not

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<sup>382</sup> We may sometimes err on the side of caution here, entrusting responsibility to young men but not authority. The authority of the pulpit, to many of us in the Conservative Baptist tradition, is a sacred trust. Do we occasionally entrust this precious authority to emerging preachers? If not, we might be failing to develop budding young preachers.



always welcome - Ronnie lamented the "people who judge you for not living by their religious rules" - it is an aspect of trust that Myrtlewood Association churches are providing young men, albeit imperfectly.

In my view, we execute these three components of trust - responsibility, authority, and accountability - decreasingly well, as described. In my view, we are eager to share the ministry load with young men, less eager to share authority, and generally avoid accountability.<sup>383</sup> Since biblical empowerment - reference the five Bible heroes of Chapter 2 - involves all three, we should consider them essential to empowerment as well.<sup>384</sup>

Trust is not blind faith, and it does not preclude common sense. We should not, in my view, put a twenty-five year old with the gift of mercy and no Bible training behind the pulpit. Unproven is okay; unexamined is not. Our job as pastors and leaders would seem to include *vetting* young men - evaluating their suitability for various

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<sup>383</sup> I believe we have good reasons for avoiding accountability: we don't like it (it makes us uncomfortable), we assume others don't want it (and honor their assumed preference), and it violates the strongly held American value of independence. The first two reasons don't hold water, biblically; there are lots of things that are unpleasant that are quite good for us, including rebukes and prostate exams. The third reason is a case in which we must ask ourselves what is biblical - and God held all five Bible heroes accountable to obey him.

<sup>384</sup> This will demonstrate *and* cultivate trust with young men in Myrtlewood Association churches.

ministries - as well as setting them up to engage their God-given power.<sup>385</sup>

Individualism - a belief in the adequacy of the individual - may be an especially high value among rural Oregonians.<sup>386</sup> This has implications for empowerment. It is important, we have seen, to treat young men as individuals - to help them identify their unique part in God's big picture. This does not logically preclude interdependence - relying upon others and their resources - which also appears important in the empowerment process. "We must trust God and find others who can be trusted implicitly," believe Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath.<sup>387</sup> The Bible also teaches the radical interdependence of individual believers.<sup>388</sup> Modeling trust - along with the collaborative aspects of biblical fellowship - empowers young men.

Does the responsibility and authority entrusted by God to Myrtlewood Association leaders imply accountability to God to trust others - including young men? I believe the application of Hebrews 13:17 requires this, and that we

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<sup>385</sup> I have for some time suspected that the personal transformation that results from empowering discipleship is not unlike the actualization described by Abraham Maslow - a kind of *holy self-actualization*, powered by the *Holy Spirit*. That discussion will have to occur elsewhere.

<sup>386</sup> Personal conversation with Dave Cetti, CBNorthwest staff.

<sup>387</sup> Thrall et al., *Ascent*, 81.

<sup>388</sup> If the church is a body, as the apostle Paul teaches in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, we need the other parts of the body of Christ to survive and thrive.

will be called upon to "give an account" for the use of the means God has put at our disposal to empower others.<sup>389</sup>

#### Empowering by Blessing

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Philippians 2:4

The notion of *blessing* is common both in the Bible and in the Christian vocabulary - often used to the point of being passé.<sup>390</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of *blessing* figures prominently in the program of God, as evidenced by God's multiple pronouncements of *blessing* on the man who is the father of the faith.<sup>391</sup> The notion and nobility of *blessing* - according to the Bible - is well established in the heart, plans, and kingdom of God.

*Blessing* can mean verbalizing a wish or prayer for someone - *to invoke divine care for*.<sup>392</sup> It can mean doing good to people - *to confer prosperity or happiness upon* -

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<sup>389</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, Hebrews 13:17 urges Christians to obey their leaders and "submit to their authority." The biblical author then describes leaders as *accountable* to bear their authority well, describing them as "men who must give an account" for their leadership and use of authority.

<sup>390</sup> If you don't know how to close a conversation, you just say, "Well, God bless you." If you don't know what to pray, you just pray, "Bless so and so."

<sup>391</sup> I refer of course to Abraham and God's words to him recorded in Genesis 12:1-3.

<sup>392</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* - and Numbers 6:24-26!

like bringing a friend soup when he is sick, or buying a new set of tires for his car.<sup>393</sup> Both ideas are included in the range of meaning found in the Bible.

Biblically, there is a higher purpose for blessing. In Abraham's case, God's blessing was so that, ultimately, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."<sup>394</sup> God would ensure that Abraham's descendents would multiply and cause him to be famous.<sup>395</sup> God would punish people who behaved ill toward him and his offspring.<sup>396</sup> Yet it is worthy of note that all this blessing eventuates in "all peoples on earth" being *blessed*. Given this grand purpose of blessing, how do we bless others - after God's example, and pursuant to his overarching plan?<sup>397</sup>

Jesus instructed his disciples: "Freely you have received, freely give."<sup>398</sup> However God has blessed Myrtlewood Association churches, he has empowered us to empower others: to pass it on. I conclude that he wants us, and expects us, to let his blessings leak - to bless others

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<sup>393</sup> Again, per *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*; see also Psalm 132:15.

<sup>394</sup> Genesis 12:3

<sup>395</sup> Genesis 12:2

<sup>396</sup> Genesis 12:3

<sup>397</sup> This, of course, is the same as asking how to play our part in God's big picture.

<sup>398</sup> Matthew 10:8

in kind, speaking good to, and doing good for, people inside and outside the church.<sup>399</sup>

How is this part of empowerment? Pastors and church leaders involve young men in these things - doing good to those inside and outside the church - and thereby involve them in *blessing* others. Ernest's parents recruited him to help serve meals in the local Gospel mission, and his church leaders recruited him to help on a building project in a developing nation: they empowered him to pass on God's blessing to others.

God's blessing, notably, does not preclude suffering. All five of our Bible heroes had God's clear favor and blessing. Yet Abraham sojourned, and lived childless. Moses spent forty years away from home and family, then given the job of leading several million complainers through the wilderness. David spent lonely years watching livestock, was mocked by older brothers, chased by a maniacal king, and deprived of the company of his best friend. Jesus endured a life of misunderstanding and then was crucified. Paul got beat up, rejected by church members, and thrown in prison.

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<sup>399</sup> Moses told the Israelites, as recorded in Deuteronomy 9, to defend the cause of the fatherless and widow (who may have been fellow Israelites) and to love the alien (who were not fellow Israelites).

This is a paradox. God wants the very best for people, but he is willing to suffer - and allow his beloved children to suffer - in order bring salvation to all.<sup>400</sup> For the good of the cause - for the sake of God's big picture - we suffer.

As we empower young men, we should give them *our blessing* - bless them with whatever means we have at our disposal. We should also encourage them to seek *God's blessing*. Jesus revealed in Matthew 7:11 that God gives good gifts to his children. When God blesses young men - with a job, with a wife, with a new guitar - we should "rejoice with those who rejoice" and give God credit for his blessing.<sup>401</sup>

Since living out one's part in God's big picture brings suffering, we should also prepare young men to suffer. "The sufferings of Christ," warns Paul, "flow over into our lives."<sup>402</sup> Like Paul, we ought to warn young men to steel themselves for suffering for the sake of the cause.<sup>403</sup> God's overarching mission, the redemption of the world, is worth it.

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<sup>400</sup> I am not here suggesting universal salvation. I am speaking of the just and mysterious means by which God brings the offer of salvation to all people: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

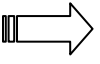

<sup>401</sup> Romans 12:15

<sup>402</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:5

<sup>403</sup> The apostle Peter - and Jesus himself - similarly warned believers. See 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-19 and John 16:33.

Below, in graphic form, and in light of these thoughts, is an overview of empowerment as conceptualized in this project.

**Figure 1. The Rubric of Empowerment**

Increasing engagement of capacities 				
Increasing relationship 				
Big Picture	Small Picture	Resources	Trust	Blessing
ensure they understand God's grand scheme to redeem the world!	help them dream, identify gifts, confirm calling	ensure they have the Spirit's power & God's armor	share responsi- bility, author- ity, account- ability	use power to give them triumph, success

#### The Relationship of Empowerment to Discipleship

Before I share recommendations for Myrtlewood Association pastors and leaders, I would like to answer a question that, for some, may be lingering: "Why emphasize *empowerment*? Why not talk about *discipleship*?" For those committed to discipleship, this is a pressing question.

Let me explain. The second member of the Trinity has always related perfectly to the other two members. While on earth, Jesus the Son of God continued to relate perfectly

to the other two members.<sup>404</sup> Since we know God wants to be loved with heart, soul, mind, and strength, we can assume that Jesus - as a perfect human being - loved, and continues to love, the Father in such a complete way.<sup>405</sup>

Discipleship, as I see it, is the process of becoming more like Jesus. It is learning from Jesus, implementing what you learn, and over time becoming more like him. Discipleship involves every facet of life - who we are and what we do in every circumstance. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."<sup>406</sup>

Discipleship extends to helping other people become more like Jesus, too. Used in this way, discipleship is helping someone else learn from Jesus, implement what he learns, and over time become more like Jesus. We help someone else figure out what "all for Jesus" means - help him break it down into manageable steps, and help him walk it out. That, too, is discipleship.

Empowerment is one aspect of discipleship - the power aspect. It is the process through which the disciple gets the power from God to be a disciple. Empowerment is therefore a component of discipleship, and necessary if

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<sup>404</sup> "The LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4); "I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

<sup>405</sup> Mark 12:30

<sup>406</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:31



discipleship is to occur. Jesus, as noted in Chapter 2, experienced all seven facets of empowerment that we have identified.<sup>407</sup>

*What about character?* one might ask. *Remember that Bill Thrall and his colleagues warned us about climbing the capacity ladder and neglecting character!* Granted, there is a lot of emphasis placed on engaging capacities in empowerment. My response is twofold.

One, I have not said character development is not important. Discipleship, of which empowerment is part, eventuates character. I have focused this project on the process of gaining the power - and giving the power - to be a disciple.<sup>408</sup> Empowerment fuels discipleship, and character development is implicit in discipleship.<sup>409</sup>

Two, character development is God's domain. He designed the spiritual process, or processes, that grow character. Though the Bible identifies some discrete measures of character, they are difficult, even hazardous, to assess.<sup>410</sup> Empowerment, I contend, cultivates the

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<sup>407</sup> Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul did as well.

<sup>408</sup> More accurately, we do not give power to others as much as set them up to receive power - from God, through whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

<sup>409</sup> The Bible describes various spiritual processes that occur in a person who is trying to emulate Jesus and grow in godliness. Peter describes one of these in a linear, sequential fashion in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:5-7; Paul describes another in Romans 5:1-5. All such spiritual processes eventuate godly character.

<sup>410</sup> Galatians 6:1-5

spiritual process or processes that result in godly character. By the grace of God, *empowerment* leads to *discipleship*, *discipleship* leads to *character*, and *character* leads to the magnified *glory of God*.<sup>411</sup>

### **Recommendations**

*Empowerment* is helping someone (a) understand his place in God's big picture and (b) engage his God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes. It requires authentic relationship - your resources, trust, and blessing. Based on my research, I have two primary recommendations for Myrtlewood Association pastors and leaders who want to empower the young men in their churches.

#### Pursue Authentic Relationship with Young Men

My first recommendation is this: *pursue relationship with young men*. Any significant impact we have on the lives of young men - any actual increase in their empowerment, any furthering of their discipleship - is likely to happen only in the context of authentic relationship, older man with younger man.

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<sup>411</sup> Discipleship requires *faith* - which, according to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:7, will result in "praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Relationships with younger men that lead them to weep at your memorial service and say, "He was like a father to me!" do not, I will contend, happen accidentally.

Relationships of profound, positive impact happen when godly men value young men and pursue relationship with them.

"I'm a private person" is one of the comments I hear most frequently from rural Oregon Christians. Can one be a "private person" and live a life devoted, as Paul describes it, to others in brotherly love?<sup>412</sup> If our living situation tends to isolate us from others, or our temperament leads us to withdraw from others, we will probably need to be very intentional about pursuing meaningful relationships with young men. We cannot reason away our responsibility to connect with young men and get involved in their lives.<sup>413</sup>

Pastors and other leaders should never underestimate our fitness for the senior role in empowering relationships with young men. We have a lot to give, and godliness leaks. None of us are perfect, but we older men have got a divine power plant *and* time in service; we have, just as we are, the capacities to infuse young men with wisdom, strength,

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<sup>412</sup> Romans 12:10

<sup>413</sup> If I speak strongly here, I can only say, "Please forgive me for any brashness, but please consider what I am saying." I have sat and listened to too many young men brimming over with potential, zeal, and heartache to speak timidly.

comfort, and love for God, his Word, and his people.<sup>414</sup>

Pastors and other leaders, just as we are, are competent to empower young men to be disciples of Jesus.

We cannot disciple someone who does not want to be disciplined. We can, however, empower anybody. We can speak words that affirm a young man's strengths. We can ask him questions about his life, and listen. We can sit on the edge of our seat, ready to explain God's big picture and explore how he fits into it. By leaning into relationship, we may earn the trust necessary to speak into his life.

We cannot force depth of relationship; it is a gift from God.<sup>415</sup> We can, however, be open to it. When we offer genuine friendship to young men, they discern it. When we offer them stories, advice, and lectures - but not relationship - they discern that, too.

Such relationship is, in some sense, egalitarian, with parity between parties. We set aside our positions and our power - to which we may have become accustomed, more than we know - in order to connect with young men.

This does not require that we abdicate our values and our dignity. In fact, in light of emerging generations' appetite for authenticity, baring our soul to a young man

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<sup>414</sup> See 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:6: "He has made us competent..."

<sup>415</sup> The author of Proverbs, in fact, warns us to be cautious in friendship (12:26).

has every chance of deepening his respect for us, forming a bond of trust through which we can counsel and mentor him - which includes sharing the wisdom of God's Word.<sup>416</sup>

Jesus is our best coach when it comes to authentic relationship. When he told the eleven faithful disciples to "Go and make disciples," he was instructing them to be directly involved in the lives of others.<sup>417</sup> Discipleship and empowerment, according to Jesus, require having a *presence* in others' lives - life on life involvement with others.<sup>418</sup> It is not in our power, as Myrtlewood Association pastors and leaders, to make young men *feel* believed in. We can, however, believe in them - believe what God says about them is true - and treat them accordingly.

*Pursue authentic relationship with young men.* This will set the stage for empowerment to occur - perhaps more than we can understand.

#### Focus on Developing and Deploying Their Capacities

My second main recommendation for empowering young men in Myrtlewood Association churches is to *focus on developing and deploying the capacities of young men.*

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<sup>416</sup> As older disciples of Jesus, we share God's Word verbally; we also share it non-verbally through the living testimony of its reality and power in our own lives.

<sup>417</sup> Matthew 28:16-20

<sup>418</sup> It is difficult, of course, to disciple when you are absent from the lives of your disciples.

Whether we know him well or not, and whether he is a believer or not, we can offer a young man opportunities to identify, develop, and use his God-given strengths to pursue God's purposes.

A man moving through the Novice Phase of life has a growing interest in identifying his strengths and deploying them skillfully.<sup>419</sup> By providing opportunities for him to grow in self-awareness and skill, we meet him and serve him at his point of need. By meeting him and serving him at his point of need, we give him a reason to trust us - and model godliness for him.<sup>420</sup>

A variety of tools and other resources can be useful in helping a young man identify his capacities. Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* provides a conceptual overview of God's Big Picture - and how to find one's place in it. Various tools to identify capacities are available in the marketplace as well. In addition, spiritual gift inventories are available from Christian publishers. One or

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<sup>419</sup> I make this claim somewhat intuitively, based on my observations, experience, and Levinson and colleagues' theory in *Seasons*.

<sup>420</sup> "The best first step" to preparing the upcoming generation for the future, posits Tim Elmore, "is to enable them to discover their vocation - to recognize their passions and strengths and use them to engage the world around them" (Elmore, *Generation iY*, 157).

more of these tools may prove quite helpful in helping a young man identify his capacities.<sup>421</sup>

It is important to help a young man make the connection between the capacities identified by any of these tools and ministry - to deploy him in such a way that he engages these capacities. Such engagement will confirm the results of the tool - in the young man's mind as well as in the minds of others. It will contribute to the edification of the church as well.<sup>422</sup>

Ministry requires commitment, and pastors and other leaders should *ask* for commitment as well as *model* it. We are sometimes guilty of asking for little and receiving little from young men. Yet Jesus called his disciples to forsake all to follow him.<sup>423</sup> Julian Rappaport observed, as noted in Chapter 2, that empowerment takes place in the context of commitment, and Tim Elmore prescribes - for a generation he describes as over-served - calling them out to be part of something bigger than they are.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> We do not have to exercise ourselves greatly, in my view, over whether a capacity is inherent in our God-given frame (a natural ability) or comes by way of a spiritual gift (a supernatural ability); both have their source in God, are designed by God, and intended to be engaged for his glory: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

<sup>422</sup> "Each one," exhorts Peter, "should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:10).

<sup>423</sup> Mark 8:34-38

<sup>424</sup> "They love to throw themselves into something - but they must believe in it" (Elmore, *Generation iY*, 160). He observes that "students today

My two main recommendations, then, for empowering young men in Myrtlewood Association churches are (1) *pursue authentic relationship with young men* and (2) *focus on developing and deploying their capacities*. If we give attention to these recommendations, we will *help young men (a) understand their place in God's big picture and (b) engage their God-given capacities to pursue God's purposes*. We will give them *authentic relationship - our resources, trust, and blessing*. We will help young men appropriate God's power to live for him.

Next I will share ten suggestions that, in my view, will help accomplish - and give additional "handles" - to these recommendations.<sup>425</sup>

### Be Yourself

We know, from Paul's message at Mars Hill, that God put each of us in the exact place in time he wants us. Age is a gift, and we bring stability and wisdom to those around us. We don't have to try and be hip; we can just be old. Patrick, you may recall from Chapter 3, continued attending the Bible study comprised largely of older men of

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are both high-performance and high maintenance" - and that leaders need to "walk the delicate balance between nurture and challenge" (Elmore, *Generation iY*, 186).

<sup>425</sup> I will, in this next section, unfetter my imagination and speak more freely, intuitively, and collegially than in other sections of the dissertation.



faith because he realized it empowered him to live out his own faith. *It is a gift to younger generations, just showing that you are comfortable inside your own skin, a happy victim of God's sovereignty.*<sup>426</sup>

#### Don't Feel Compelled to Launch a New Program

Empowerment isn't a program, so you do not need to design, find, or borrow a curriculum on empowerment in order to empower young men in your church. You can empower people as you do what you already do. Empowerment involves being yourself in the place God has placed you with the people that God has placed you with.

When a young man discovers that you, a more seasoned man, actually care to know what he's going through, and want to see him doing what he's good at, you will have already begun to establish a bond of trust and credibility. Unless you are a dreadful bore, he will probably want to spend more time with you.<sup>427</sup> Jesus, wisdom, and inspiration will leak out of you into his life.

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<sup>426</sup> Some of us suffer from feelings of inferiority and shame and feel incompetent to empower and disciple others. The devil loves to leverage this weakness and keep us on the bench. Yet Paul assures us that God's indwelling Spirit "has made us competent as ministers" - we have the right stuff to minister in power (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:6). We have what it takes to empower young men to walk with Christ and strengthen the church!

<sup>427</sup> If you are like me, you will be afraid that you are a dreadful bore, and imagine young people rolling their eyes and looking for the door whenever you talk to them. Granted, younger people have, it seems,

Empowerment is very organic; it defies programming. You won't get credit for starting some exciting new ministry, but you will help others engage their gifts and add strength to the church.

Pastors and leaders should not feel responsible to map out each young man's course and destiny; that is God's responsibility. We *can* coach, mentor, and guide young men in God-ward living - *without* starting a new program.

#### Don't Expect the Pastor to Do it All

This, of course, is obvious to all of us who take Romans 12, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 seriously, but it bears stating plainly. Empowerment, as a necessary part of discipleship, is the job of the church, not just the pastor.

Unless your church is quite small, the pastor cannot personally counsel, coach, or mentor everybody in the church. Even if he *could*, I do not think he *should*.<sup>428</sup>

It is unlikely that there will be a natural "chemistry" between the pastor and every young man in the

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perfected the art of appearing so bored they are close to death. As I tell myself, it's not all about me; get over it and keep leaning into the relationship, boring or not.

<sup>428</sup> This, of course, is completely consistent with Paul's teaching on the body of Christ and with Baptist doctrine regarding the priesthood of every believer.

congregation, and the pastor will likely be grateful when he sees other mature saints come alongside younger saints.

*Help the pastor empower and disciple the young men in the church.*

#### Consider How to Help Men Bridge into Adult Participation

When young men graduate from high school, they often find that in spite of being too old to attend youth group, they are still too young to identify with adult church life. Myrtlewood Association churches should consciously think through how they will help high school graduates find their niche as adults.

We can do two things for young men at this stage. One, we can help them identify their strengths - their natural and supernatural capacities. Elaborate surveys and other assessments may be overwhelming for men at this age; simply watching to see what they are good at and telling them what you see may be sufficient.

Two, ministry leaders can evaluate the ministries they lead for receptivity to new volunteers. What are the entry-level roles in this ministry? What kinds of gifts are well-suited to this ministry? What training and coaching can we provide to someone who wants to explore involvement?

A particularly effective strategy is to invite a young man to assist you in ministry: "I've been asked to lead an 8-week Bible study in September; why don't you pray about co-leading with me?"

Young men are big-block engines, on engine stands and ready to be installed in a chassis that needs them.

*Consider how to help young men bridge into adult participation in church life.*

#### Invite Young Men into Your Home

Something supernatural happens when people put their feet under your table. We know from Acts 2 that eating together in one another's homes was on the short list of church priorities. *Invite young men into your home* - for a meal, to watch a ball game together, to share a hobby. Pray together at some point. This may be an especially good way to connect with single men.

#### Pray for Young Men

*Pray regularly for the young men* in your congregation. Use your influence with God to bless them. Do spiritual battle for them. They may not appreciate it at present, but you may spare them from becoming part of the grim

statistics about moral failure and church dropout. They will thank you someday.

#### Make Men's Ministries Accessible to Working Men

A young man setting chokers in the hills outside Fairview cannot make it to town during the week for a mid-morning Bible study or a lunch meeting at the pizza place. Consider early morning or evening for a men's weekday event, or Saturday morning for a weekend event. *Make men's ministries accessible to working men.*

#### Cultivate Conversation

Nothing communicates "I care about your life" like taking the time to listen. When you are with young men, consciously do less than your share of the talking.<sup>429</sup>

Ask a young man about his interests, hobbies, car, books he's reading, prayer life, or new power tool. If he's married, ask about his home life, children, house, or yard. I think we are often more concerned about being invasive than we need to be. Emerging generations, more than older generations, are accustomed to saying what they think - including "I'd rather not talk about that."

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<sup>429</sup> I find that when I have spent time in prayer - when I am "prayed up" - I have more genuine interest in others' affairs. I also find that after I have spent quality time with a friend who listens well to me, I have a greater capacity to listen to others.

Listening as young men talk about their lives and try to make sense of pressing issues fosters the empowerment process and fuels discipleship. The connection may seem fuzzy, but it's real. *Cultivate conversation, with an emphasis on listening.*

#### Lecture Less, Dialogue More about Spiritual Things

Young men are not drawn to a spiritual tradition where somebody in authority, often with a microphone or behind a podium, asks his questions, and they are supposed to supply the right answers. Young men in Myrtlewood Association churches need instruction in the Word of God; they want to receive this instruction from people who will listen to *their* thoughts and field *their* questions, too. When you teach, ask questions, especially open-ended questions that don't have "yes" or "no" answers.<sup>430</sup>

If you want to empower young men and keep them interested in church, *reduce monologue and increase dialogue about spiritual things.*

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<sup>430</sup> Carl Shafer's small book on teaching changed my life. His *Excellence in Teaching with the Seven Laws* - a contemporary rendering of Milton Gregory's seven laws of teaching - taught me to see myself not as a teacher of others, but as one who served others by helping them learn. See Carl Shafer, *Excellence in Teaching with the Seven Laws* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985).

### Take the Long View

Pastors and church leaders can feel responsible to effect change in others' lives, and can feel like failures when others - including young men - seem slow to change or slow to grow up. But since learning to love God and others with heart, soul, mind, and strength is a lifelong endeavor, we need to grant others a lifetime to do so. We should *take the long view*; empowerment and discipleship are lifelong endeavors.

Furthermore, spiritual growth is God's domain, and we need to content ourselves with God's sovereignty over others' lives. Since "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion," pastors and other leaders should simply do their best to put their capacities to work making disciples, entrust the overall endeavor to the Good Shepherd, and "lie down and sleep in peace."<sup>431</sup>

### Closing

I pray that this project will help Myrtlewood Association churches empower the young men in our midst - to use everything we've got to set young men up to engage their God-given capacities, pursue their God-given purpose, and fulfill their God-given destinies. If this modest

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<sup>431</sup> See Philippians 1:6 and Psalms 4:8.

project keeps one young man from giving up on church, it will have been worth it.

I am grateful to my advisory team - Dr. Glen Johnson, Rev. Don McKay, and Mr. Darin Nicholson - for their contributions to this effort, though I take responsibility for all its shortcomings. I'm also grateful to Pastor Jim Settle, unofficial member of the advisory team, whose frequent queries about this project both sharpened and encouraged me.

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I am grateful to the Honorable and Mrs. Chuck and Barbara Reeves for providing a remote and tranquil place in which to undertake the rigors of writing. I am grateful to Bill, Francie, and Amanda Jonsson, and Bruce Kupersmith, for praying for me.

I am grateful to all the Myrtlewood Association pastors who have prayed for me, trusted me, and cooperated with me. I am grateful to the young men who, to the man, opened up their lives to me and trusted me with their stories.

I am grateful to my wife, Jill Ann Grage Elefritz, who has never known life with me apart from the demands of



graduate studies, and with whom I am eager to pursue the possibilities of dissertation-free living.

Finally, I am grateful to my parents, Jack and Gerry Elefritz - Dad, who is teaching me more than I ever imagined, and perhaps more than he even realizes, about being a man; and Mom, who is a living example of what it means to live a noble, good, and unselfish life.

I am an empowered, and happy, man.

"The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me..."

Psalm 138:8a

*Soli Deo Gloria*

## Appendix A

### A LOOK AT BIBLICAL EMPOWERMENT

I investigate five biblical characters, looking to see if empowerment is part of their lives - both as a gift given *to them by God*, & as a gift they subsequently *give to others*. I ask five questions to assess empowerment.

#### *How Did God Empower Five Biblical Heroes?*

	Did God let him in on <b>The Big Picture</b> ? <sup>432</sup>	...& on <b>the part he played</b> in The Big Picture?	Did God give him <b>His resources</b> ?	... <b>His trust</b> including responsibility & authority?	...& <b>His blessing</b> ?
Abraham (all scriptures from Genesis)	Yes! In the form of the Abrahamic Covenant (AC), Gen 12:1-3	Yes! In AC, God told him he would be a pioneer & a missionary who would bless the whole world	Yes. God told him "next steps" - for ex, 12:1; God gave abundant provision, 13:2	Yes! In initial voicing of AC & later reaffirmed, 15:1, etc - though God tested him (22:1f)!	God worked through A's good & bad decisions to accomplish His will - though He made him wait (21:2); he lived long (24:1)
Moses (all scriptures from Exodus)	Yes (Ex 3:1-10) though universality (as in AC) not clear	Yes (3:10; reassured 3:12)	Yes (3:13-22, 4:1-31); glimpse of God's glory (33)	Yes, entrusted leadership of the exodus to him, incl resp + auth + respect	Yes, in spite of his doubts, limitations & failures

<sup>432</sup> The Big Picture = God's mission & game plan to redeem the world

	Did God let him in on <b>The Big Picture</b> ? <sup>433</sup>	...& on <b>the part he played</b> in The Big Picture?	Did God give him <b>His resources</b> ?	... <b>His trust</b> including responsibility & authority?	...& <b>His blessing</b> ?
David	Yes, after seated as king, by prophetic word (2 Sa 7:1-16)	Yes, early on by Samuel's anointing (1 Sa 16) + later by subjective experience (2 Sa 5:12). <sup>434</sup> Note God told him role not to play (2 Sa 7:5-7) + role to play (7:12-16).	Yes - the Spirit of God! (1 Sa 16:13)	Yes - and David knew (2 Sa 5:12) that it was "for the sake of His people Israel"	He slew Goliath against all earthly odds (1 Sa 17); he succeeded at any endeavor under Saul's authority (1 Sa 18:5,14); cf 2 Sa 5:10
Jesus	Yes - Mk 1:15	Yes - Lk 4:18-21. He knew He came to preach (Mk 1:38), call sinners (2:17), & die for the sins of humanity (Mk 10:45) <sup>435</sup>	Yes - power, glory, Spirit (Mk 1:7-8); authority over <i>everything</i> (cf Mark); favor (Mk 1:11); endorsement (Mk 9:7)	Yes	Yes (see column 3)
Paul	Yes (Co 1:15-20)	Yes (Co 1:24 - 2:5)	Yes (faith - Ph 4:12-13 - but not always the world's plenty!); Paul also demonstrated extraordinary human capacities: intelligence, perseverance, etc	Yes (Co 1:24 - 2:5)	Yes

<sup>433</sup> The Big Picture = God's mission & game plan to redeem the world

<sup>434</sup> Of weighty significance is that David was neither eager to unseat his predecessor (1 Sa 24, 2 Sa 2:1-4), nor willing to discredit him (2 Sa 2:5-7).

<sup>435</sup> Jesus knew His final destiny in heaven as well (Mk 14:61-62).

The biblical evidence indicates that the characters received, from God, the information, support & encouragement they needed to fulfill their role in God's mission.

The evidence seems to support a model of empowerment in which we let others know the big picture, their individual places in it - & provide them resources, trust (in the form of responsibility & authority), & favor.

Did these men pass on, *in kind*, the empowerment they received? On this count, the results are more mixed.

#### *How Did These Men Empower Others?*

	Did he pass on <b>The Big Picture</b> to others?	Did he tell others <b>the part they played</b> in The Big Picture?	Did he give others the <b>resources</b> they needed to do their part?	Did he <b>entrust</b> others with responsibility & authority to do their part?	Did he use his wherewithal to <b>bless</b> others?
Abraham (all scriptures from Genesis)	Probably. He likely explained to others altars & offerings (12:8, etc), circumcision (17), procuring a wife for Isaac from his own tribe (24), etc in light of TBP & his faith in God. Also, the LORD confirmed His covenant directly with Isaac (26:2-4).	See column 1. Also, Isaac likely overheard the LORD confirming His blessing on A's descendents (22:15-18)	Yes. His actions spoke of his faith in his descendents. He gave physical resources to all his children (25) - & the land to Isaac.	Again, A "set Isaac up" (24), & left all to him (25:5), <i>de facto</i> evidence of faith in God and Isaac.	Yes, per column 4



	Did he <i>pass</i> on <b>The Big Picture</b> to others?	Did he tell others <b>the part they played</b> in The Big Picture?	Did he give others the <b>resources</b> they needed to do their part?	Did he <b>entrust</b> others with <b>responsibility &amp; authority</b> to do their part?	Did he use his <b>wherewithal</b> to <b>bless</b> others?
Moses (all scriptures from Exodus)	Yes - Aaron (4:7-8), all Israel (4:29-31, 19:1-7)	Yes, per 4:29-31; Moses always passed on what God told him (12:43-51, etc)	Yes - he asked the LORD to supply the practical needs of people (15:25); he passed on God's promises, instructions, etc (34, etc)	Yes; he followed Jethro's advice (18) & delegated resp + auth; also Bezalel & Oholiab (35:30f), explorers (Nu 13), etc; in the end, passed the scepter to Joshua	Moses often interceded for God to bless (32:31-32); he passed on God's blessing so priests could bless people (Nu 6:24-26); in the end, passed on to Joshua (Nu 27)
David (all scriptures 2 Sa unless noted)	David strongly modeled (& wrote poems about!) faith in God's timing & sovereignty (see David's psalms + last words in 2 Sa 23)	He affirmed & blessed those who buried Saul (2:4-7)	David inspired courage in others (1 Sa 17:52); he required followers to follow God's Law (1 Sa 21:5); he sought the LORD before attacking (1 Sa 23:1-6)	He honored people: Saul, Abner (2 Sa 3:38), etc; his practical wisdom in setting descendents up for success is less clear	He wept in front of Jonathan at the prospect of separation (1 Sa 20:41); he [finally] passed scepter to son Solomon (1 Ki 1)
Jesus	Yes (Mk 1:14-15)	Yes; individuals (Mk 1:17, 5:19, etc) + disciples (Mk 16:15, etc)	Absolutely! (Mk 11:22-26)	Yes! (Mt 28:18-20)	He gave His life to set up all humanity for abundant, eternal life

	Did he pass on <b>The Big Picture</b> to others?	Did he tell others <b>the part they played</b> in The Big Picture?	Did he give others the <b>resources</b> they needed to do their part?	Did he <b>entrust</b> others with <b>responsibility &amp; authority</b> to do their part?	Did he use his <b>wherewithal</b> to <b>bless</b> others?
Paul	Yes; Paul gloried - often verbally, in his letters! - in the grand scheme of redemption wrought by Christ + the unfathomably rich future with Him in heaven (Eph 1, etc)	Yes; he made clear that we all have a part to play, including allowing for others to play their [different] parts (1 Co 12, etc)	Paul prayed for others, taught them, wrote them letters, urged them to be filled with the Spirit...	Paul delegated auth to lead local churches to others; he told leaders to entrust others with resp + auth, too	Yes - by praying for God to bless people, by affirming others freely, by facilitating financial assistance, etc

## Appendix B

### SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF EMPOWERMENT WITH SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR PASTORS AND LEADERS

The following table is a schematic overview of the empowerment process and several suggested resources for empowering discipleship.

Increasing engagement of capacities 				
Increasing relationship 				
Big Picture	Small Picture	Resources	Trust	Blessing
ensure they understand God's grand scheme to redeem the world!	help them dream, identify gifts, confirm calling	ensure they have the Spirit's power & God's armor	share responsibility, authority, accountability	use power to give them triumph, success
<i>The Call;</i> Bible survey	<i>The Purpose Driven Life;</i> spiritual gifts inventory; Strengths-Finder 2.0	Bible study of Ephesians	partner together in ministry effort	entrust ministry responsibility & authority to them

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