



# Teaching Manhood to Men

by Dr. Robert Lewis

Men's Fraternity revolutionized our church from top to bottom, and moved us toward greater influence in our community. Never-in nearly thirty years of pastoral ministry-have I experienced a more fruitful, productive, life-changing ministry with men in the local church! We now have many men who believe they have what it takes and are equipped to accomplish significant ministry in their work, in their community, and even around the world.

What is most gratifying to me, though, is the impact of Men's Fraternity on individuals. I have also seen men come alive as they involve themselves in the lives of other men. Like a guy named Harry.

Harry is an older gentleman in our church who had severe health problems. Once I went to see him in the hospital, and from his bed he told me that his health had declined after he had retired. "You know I just don't have anything to live for," Harry said.

I thought, Wow, Harry is in our church and he thinks he has nothing to live for? What's wrong with this picture? Harry was an outstanding businessman and his marriage is strong.

"Harry, that's just not true, we can use you at church," I told him.

"Well, what can I do? I can't teach."

"Sure you can teach, Harry. You are a walking reservoir of unbelievable experiences that men would die to pick your brain on."

"I have failed a lot."

"That's the point! You have failed in some things and from those experiences you can tell young men what not to do, as well as what to do. What rich experiences you have to offer and stories to tell!"

Shortly after his hospital stay, Harry took me up on my offer. He first became involved as a participant in Men's Fraternity. He was there the day when I challenged older men to reclaim the second half of their life by investing down in younger men as mentors. I paused in that message and said, "All of you young men who would like a personal mentor, please stand up." About one hundred and fifty guys got up. They didn't care who the mentor would be. They just wanted an older man to talk to.

So I turned to the older guys and urged them to take a risk and open themselves up to these younger men. Harry was one of those who decided to make himself available.

About four years later I was at the Athletic Club working out at 6:00 a.m. and Harry climbed on the treadmill next to

mine. He looked healthy as a horse. "How's the mentoring going?" I asked him.

"Well, you know I have seven guys I am mentoring right now and I have five on a waiting list. Is that not incredible?" Harry said. "Robert, it is the greatest thing I have ever done. I am reclaiming a whole season of my life as I pour myself into these guys. I still don't know anything, but these guys just want to talk. And being retired, I have plenty of time to talk. It has given me a whole new ministry, and those young men are just loving it."

That's just one story illustrating why I love the impact of Men's Fraternity. While I am eager to explain how the program works, let me first offer some background on the needs of men and why I think a ministry like Men's Fraternity is so important.

## The Needs of Men

After many years of listening to men talk and working toward an understanding of my own masculinity, I have listed what I believe are the common needs of most men.

*First*, men need a safe place where they know someone understands them and they are not alone. If men feel welcomed and understood, they will let their hair down and interact with other men over issues that may have been stuffed in their soul for years.

*Second*, men need a compelling vision of biblical masculinity that they can grasp. Men want to know what God intends for them. This vision will inspire and lift them during moments of challenge in the workplace and community, or when they are facing discouragement in their own heart. The vision will recharge them, but it must be "user friendly"—i.e., the content must make sense in the context of their own life.

*Third*, men need time to effectively process their manhood. That is why a men's ministry should be more than a periodic rally. Seminars and rallies are excellent for motivating men but do not provide enough time for processing their masculinity. Men are often cautious and do not move quickly toward a deeper perspective of who they are. Effective ministry to men must allow the opportunity for men to involve themselves with other men through interaction and rubbing shoulders with one another.

*Fourth*, men need practical how-to's they can use and taste success with. The information on personal design, marriage, family, career and so on of men must connect with their day-to-day experience. Can they go out imme-

diately and implement ideas at least at a rudimentary level? If the teaching does not work in real life, men will start ignoring what you tell them.

*Fifth*, men need male cheerleaders. These can be special peers or older mentors who come alongside to listen and offer encouragement. “You can do it!” said by an older man has a profound impact on a younger man.

*Sixth*, men need a sacred moment where they know they have become not just a man but a biblical man. Men need a reference point where they know they have crossed over into the promised land of responsible manhood and will stay there and grow. This need can be met through special ceremonies included in men’s ministry.

*Finally*, men need the church. If the church and its pastors don’t lead men to reclaim a biblical manhood, most men will not pursue it with consistency, camaraderie, celebration, and courage.

## The Men’s Fraternity Design

I believe Men’s Fraternity significantly meets all of these needs of Christian men. What I will share about the Men’s Fraternity design is how it looks now at Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock. Believe me, this is not what we had at the start. We fumbled around and made many errors in many trials! But by God’s grace we have made much progress.

Men’s Fraternity runs twenty to twenty-four weeks during the “school year.” We begin in early September and meet weekly until we break for the holidays - from early December to early January. We start again in mid January and continue until April or May when we have a “special graduation ceremony” completing the year and marking the accomplishments the men have made.

The preparation process begins early in August when we have a Men’s Fraternity get together for our leaders. We meet to plan and pray throughout the month, even going to the church auditorium where Men’s Fraternity will meet and praying over every seat. This pattern of weekly prayer by the leadership team continues throughout the year.

Men’s Fraternity is an outreach opportunity. We run large ads in the newspaper about four weeks before Men’s Fraternity begins. The ad lists topics and has photos of our host and myself. We invite men from throughout the community. For example, one year all the salesmen from the local Merrill Lynch office came. One of the men belonged to our church, but the others were interested enough in subjects like “Becoming a Man,” “A Man and His Life Journey,” and “Twenty-five Ways to Love Your Wife” to come along. We encourage men to join Men’s Fraternity in groups, because the more guys can get together with their friends, the quicker they will bond, open up, and share their lives with one another.

We are careful not to use Men’s Fraternity as a recruiting device for Fellowship Bible Church. When our Men’s Fraternity host welcomes men to the early sessions, he always says, “Guys, I just want to remind you that this Men’s Fraternity is a community event not a Fellowship Bible Church event. We are not here to recruit members

for Fellowship Bible Church. If you are here from another church and something helps you, take what has helped you back to your pastor and encourage him to do something similar for the men of your church.” This has happened—Men’s Fraternity groups have started in a Methodist Church and a Baptist Church in our city.

But we definitely welcome men from all churches and backgrounds. At one Men’s Fraternity, we had sixteen different churches represented. Once we asked the guys who didn’t go to Fellowship Bible to stand and 350 of the 700 men present stood up.

Men’s Fraternity meets every Wednesday morning. Here’s the schedule:

<b>6-6:15 a.m.</b>	<b>Coffee and fellowship</b>
<b>6:15-6:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Host greets the men, gives announcements, prepares the way for the day’s message</b>
<b>6:30-7:00 a.m.</b>	<b>Message by pastor or the day’s presenter</b>
<b>7:00 -7:30 a.m.</b>	<b>Small group interaction</b>

Because Men’s Fraternity is an outreach ministry the first meetings have a more seeker, “non-churchy” feel. We want unchurched or marginally connected guys to feel welcome and safe. There will be many powerful “spiritual moments” in the weeks to come, but at the beginning we don’t want to scare them away. Slowly the emphasis on prayer, Scripture, and Christian music increases. By about midyear when we really hit Scripture hard, the men are comfortable and ready.

We end the year with each guy assessing all he has learned and putting together a “Manhood Plan” that lists goals for growth in his manhood in specific areas concerning his past, his present and his future. The plan is first shared with his small group and then turned in to me. The first week in May we have a sacred ceremony of graduation for every man who has completed his plan.

In the summer months many guys continue to meet and interact in their small groups, usually around a breakfast. By that time, a number of them have formed some pretty intense friendships that will go on for life. Recently, I spoke to a physician whose group is still meeting 5 years after going through Men’s Fraternity.

## The Men’s Fraternity Curriculum

We have three years worth of Men’s Fraternity curriculum, which, when we finish the cycle, we start over again. The first year is devoted to processing manhood. It also establishes a solid biblical definition of manhood men can build their lives on. The second year deals with the two most important responsibilities in a man’s life—his work and his home. The final year speaks to a man and his dealing in the world, emphasizing personal gifting, his ministry in the world and life as a great adventure.

Here is a more detailed explanation of the content of Men’s Fraternity.

## Year One

The first year, *The Quest for Authentic Manhood*, is a primer divided into three sections. The first part deals with a “man and his baggage.” Here we talk about the different wounds in a man’s life and his misperceptions, misplaced expectations, hurts, and so on. This portion concludes with an explanation of depravity and the sinful nature that haunts us all. At our last meeting before the Christmas break, I share the Gospel explicitly and urge unbelieving men to respond. These guys now trust me enough to listen carefully, and a good number do stand up to indicate their desire to receive Jesus Christ.

After the holiday break, we get into the Scripture more heavily and begin to build a theology of Christian manhood. The first year ends with the creation of a specific definition of “what is a man?”

## Year Two

During the second year, the first semester covers a “Man and His Work” and the second semester a “Man and His Home.” In our church, we have some outstanding men like Doug Sherman, Dan Jarrell and Dennis Rainey with great expertise in these areas, so they present most of the weekly talks.

Doug explores how a man deals with success, ambition, and serving Christ in the workplace. Dan and Dennis tackled the home and instruct men how to promote, protect and honor their wives while investing wisely in their families.

## Year Three

The final year of our curriculum is *The Great Adventure*. The first semester covers “A Man and His Great Adventure!” Here we teach the guys what it means to walk with the Spirit of God while strategically considering how to live a life of real purpose and become a difference maker in the world.

The second semester revolves around “A Man and His Design” which helps men understand their gift mix and what really motivates them. We help guys discern not only their gifts but how to employ them as a ministry in the world.

At the conclusion of this last year in Men’s Fraternity, we challenge a man to determine what ministry he can now have with his gifts, how he can walk with God in a consistent way in the world, and how he intends to live life with direction and purpose.

We finish by asking the men to come back and bring other men the next fall and become group leaders as the cycle begins again with *The Quest for Authentic Manhood*.

## A First Morning at Men’s Fraternity

Now that I’ve explained the design and content of Men’s Fraternity, allow me to give you a brief tour that reveals what a guy coming for the first time actually experiences and feels on the opening day of Men’s Fraternity.

The doors open at 5:45 a.m. If you drove up at this early hour, you would see that all the lights are on and music is playing when you enter the building. The mood is warm, bright, and cheerful.

At the doors you are greeted by big smiles from men on the Men’s Fraternity staff. Hot coffee is available at each of several “entry stations.”

The greeters at the doors and stations assume that on your first visit you are scared to death. You may not normally attend this church or any church for that matter. So the greeter’s job is to make you feel comfortable and safe. More than likely you will return to the same station each week and the greeter there will get to know your name and welcome you more personally, laughing with you, patting you on the back.

Viewer Guide?As you enter, you will receive a sheet of paper that has the outline for the day’s lesson and questions for your small group later on. If you came early, you will have until 6:15 a.m. to drink coffee and stand around and visit with other guys. The buzz grows through that early part of the morning.

Since outreach to seekers is a definite purpose of Men’s Fraternity, the first 10-12 sessions are as non-religious as possible. So the music you hear playing in the background is popular secular music. The leadership team has selected songs from the sixties to the present that fit the theme of today’s message.

At 6:15, the entire group finds seats in the auditorium, and the host does the welcome and opening remarks for about ten minutes. At 6:15, he introduces me and I deliver the morning’s talk.

At 7:00, we break up into small groups. Since you are new and have no group, at our host’s invitation, you will meet in a group he will lead this morning. By the following week, though, you will be assigned to an existing group and stay there the rest of the year.

You will grow to like your group. As time goes on and you recognize that this is a safe place, you will open up and begin sharing at a deepening level. (If as the speaker you have identified with the men and demonstrated transparency before them in processing your own manhood, by the third or fourth session the interactions in the groups are surprisingly deep. I have had several counselors come to Men’s Fraternity and observe that the level of transparency the group reached in two or three weeks is beyond what private counselors may reach in two to three months. Guys want to talk to guys. (They just need someone to create the right environment and spark the conversation.)

At 7:30, you will hear the music begin to play, which is a signal that Men’s Fraternity is over for the day. If you must, you are free to get up right then and leave for work. Some men will hang around or go out to breakfast together.

For a few of us, Men’s Fraternity is not quite done. Each week my host and I invite two of the small groups (fifteen to twenty guys) to join us for a simple breakfast. We only

ask each group to do this one time during the whole year, and these times are scheduled far in advance. If a man can't do it, he just can't. But most guys are excited about meeting with us.

Once breakfast is served, I say, "In the thirty minutes I have with you I want you to tell me what is working and what is not. What about Men's Fraternity is making a difference in your life? What is really helping you? What would you change about Men's Fraternity if you could?"

This means on a weekly basis for the entire year I have a "focus group" telling me where I am succeeding and where I am not. It lets me know if I have overlooked some question. For example someone might say, "You talk so much about your son. How would you do that with your daughter?"

When I hear that from enough guys, the next week I will incorporate the answer some way in my talk. I might even start by saying, "Between sessions some guys asked me about this and I want to take just a moment and answer that question."

So, this practice of debriefing the men keeps us from having blind spots in what we are teaching and in the general operation and effectiveness of Men's Fraternity.

## Starting a Men's Fraternity of Your Own

Is Men's Fraternity a transferable program to other churches? Most certainly yes, although I do urge some modification in most cases.

We are not trying to start Men's Fraternity "franchises" throughout America, but hundreds of pastors and college ministries are now using this model. My passion is to impact men - so I will gladly share the Men's Fraternity concept with anyone who thinks it might work in his church. (We have the printed curriculum for all three years as well as tapes of the messages. If you are interested in obtaining information or materials, go to the following website, [www.mensfraternity.com](http://www.mensfraternity.com).)

If you are a pastor and asked me, "How can I use this?" - here's my answer.

My recommendation is that you not get a group of guys and play the tapes. If your group or the church is very small and you have only a few men, that can work. Some have done it successfully that way. But in most situations, I strongly suggest you take the time and listen to the whole series (year one) from start to finish. There will be things you really like and others where you say, "I can do better than that." That's great!

When you finish listening, then go back lesson-by-lesson and create your own personalized version. Take out my illustrations and things you don't like. Put your personality and illustrations in. Call your men's ministry something different than Men's Fraternity if you like.

When you are done, you will have your whole first year curriculum finished. Find your host. After finishing your preparation, announce your men's ministry starting date and get ready to roll.

If you are a layman or a staff member who does not

have pastoral involvement or support, you can get a small group (probably not more than ten) of guys together, listen to a CD or watch a DVD, hand out study sheets, and have your discussion. Men's Fraternity is adaptable to such an environment.

Here are two more tips to help make your Men's Fraternity a winner:

- Find the right host. I believe the host is absolutely critical to the success of Men's Fraternity. He is not just a welcomer. He is a host. Let me give you some characteristics I think are essential for this guy:
- He has to be well known in the community.
- He has to be well respected as a businessman in the community.
- He has to be a good warm communicator.
- He has to be creative and well organized.

God gave me that kind of man in Little Rock—Bill Smith. He answers all of these qualifications. Bill stands in front of the men and welcomes them, helps them get settled, and interacts with them. Since he knows the subject of my talk ahead of time, he will do different things to get men ready for my presentation. For instance, if the topic of the day is a man and his wife, Bill may have arranged to have a man come up and interact about his marriage.

One time during the first session in the fall of Men's Fraternity, Bill was talking to the guys and pumping them up on what they would learn when the house lights went dark. On our screens we saw a three-minute clip from the Apollo 13 liftoff. The message was clear: "We're lifting off today."

- Use technology. If you have the ability to use some technical aids in your talks, I encourage you to do so. Microsoft's Power Point is a good example. Men seem to respond well to different communication techniques that use computers, movie clips, and so on. Use these creatively, especially during the early sessions of Men's Fraternity.

Technical bells and whistles that are familiar to men can reduce the resistance of those not comfortable in church. In the early sessions I don't even open a Bible. I will say, "Just like the Scriptures say," and the Bible verse will come up on Power Point behind me.

Using media tools can really sink home a point. When I talk about roles in marriage, many men get uptight. I talk to them about marriage being a partnership between people, but if it is a true partnership, that is going to bring problems because most business partnerships fail. I explain that you have to have someone to lead. This is how marriage works.

When I finish that particular talk I step off the stage, and as the lights go down, a video by the country music group "Alabama" begins playing. This video is called "It Works," which is the name of one of the group's songs. It takes the theology of marriage, what we are talking about that morning, and in a very emotional way, drives it home to the guys.

The song tells the story of a young couple going to visit the husband's mom and dad. All through the time with his folks the young man compares his "modern marriage" to the one he sees his mom and dad enjoying. The video shows so powerfully that some aspects of marriage and roles are never outdated. They are timeless and yes . . . biblical.

As the young couple drives off, the husband looks in his rear-view mirror and sees his dad and mom hugging and loving on one another. And the last line of the son is, "It works."

That is a powerful moment and it really gets the men thinking.

## The Ongoing Ministry of Men's Fraternity

Some people are surprised to learn that we repeat the Men's Fraternity program every three years. I was a bit shocked myself with what happened at our church during the first repeat. When we came back to teach Men's Fraternity I again, I expected a whole new crop of guys. Instead many of the men who had gone through Men's Fraternity the first time were back. But what they had done was recruit groups of their friends, and they automatically became group leaders.

At the end of the year I brought all those guys together and said, "Why did you go through this a second time?"

They told me, "The first time we went through it we were kind of reacting emotionally and got excited about it. But the second time the material sank in at a much deeper level, and we also got to share the experience with our friends."

We now have done Men's Fraternity I four times, and I still have several hundred men who faithfully hear it again with their friends. Their joy is in seeing what it does with other men. My joy, however, has been in seeing the incredible life change I have witnessed in their lives.

Nothing I have done in thirty years of pastoral ministry has impacted our church more than what has taken place in our men's ministry. Nothing. Today hundreds of men serve as mentors with our children, students, and young adults. Hundreds more serve faithfully and willingly as small group leaders pasturing our large congregation up close. Others gather in weekly accountability groups because they have learned the value of cheering for one another as men. Still others have courageously stepped forward in ministry ventures our church would never have

dreamed of doing without their creative leadership. The spiritual life and tenor of our whole church is deeper and higher today because we stumbled across the power that's unleashed when men discover their true masculine identities.

Most importantly of all is what I have observed in our men regarding their marriages and families. Hardly a week goes by that a wife in our church doesn't grab me and comment about the impact of Men's Fraternity has made on her husband.

Just recently, I was walking through a local mall in Little Rock when a young woman pulled me aside and said excitedly, "What did you do to my husband?" She then went on to tell me how her husband had been displaying spiritual initiative and direction he had never shown before. He was also involving himself in her life and the life of their nine year old son with a passion that amazed her. "It's like he's a whole new man!"

As I walked away, I kept hearing those words, "He's a whole new man! . . . He's a whole new man!" And all because I, a pastor, had discovered a critically needed new ministry . . . teaching manhood to men!

[www.mensfraternity.com](http://www.mensfraternity.com)

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