The *Samson Society* and the Rhetoric of Authentic Christian Brotherhood

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James Ralph Verhoye

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To Anna, my amazing wife, and Alex, Robert, and Olivia, my incredible children.

Abstract

This study employs a multi-tool critical method to explain the rhetorical strategies used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. A specific case analysis is provided of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the ministry he founded, the *Samson Society*. The rhetorical tools used to analyze this rhetoric are: audience *addressed* and audience *invoked*; constitutive rhetoric; the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption; identification; invitational rhetoric; and, the rhetorical tropes of metaphor, metonymy, and irony.

Data for the study were selected from the following rhetorical artifacts: 1) Nate Larkin's (2005) unpublished book proposal; 2) Nate Larkin's (2006) memoir, *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*; 3) the *Samson Society's* Statement of Faith, Ministry Teaching Curriculum, and Group Meeting Format; 4) Nate Larkin's (2012) recorded speech from an evangelical Protestant men's conference; and, 5) the web site and podcast of the *Samson Society*.

This study found that Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* address a particular demographic of evangelical Protestant men. In addition, in his rhetoric Larkin is invoking an audience through casting them in the roles of "friend," "Samson," "traveling companion," "voyeur," and "Christian brother." Larkin's rhetoric and the rhetoric of the *Samson Society* proffer four narratives, which act constitutively to situate the ministry within the larger, transhistorical "body of Christ." These narratives are Larkin's life-story, the masculine ideology of the *Samson Society*, the formation of the *Samson Society*, and the religious ideology of the *Samson Society*. Collectively, these narratives offer evangelical Protestant men a forum for "recovery" from the destructive effects of

sin through engagement with Larkin's modified 12-Step principled ministry. As a case study in the rhetoric of "authentic Christian brotherhood," the *Samson Society* offers valuable insight into the discursive practices of contemporary evangelical Protestants, as well as parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries in a post *Promise Keepers* era.

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But I will hold on hope, and I won't let you choke on the noose around your neck. And I'll find strength in pain and I will change my ways. I'll know my name as it's called again.[1]

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Orientation to the Study

An estimated one in ten adult Americans over the age of eighteen is currently in some kind of recovery from substance abuse or addiction (New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, 2012). This represents over twenty-three million people (*Census*, 2014). The story of addiction and recovery has become a familiar one to many, and it began in the early 2000s for former evangelical Protestant pastor Nate Larkin. During his adult years Larkin had spent roughly "$300,000 on porn and hookers" (Larkin, 2012). He had been trying to hide it all from his wife, Allie, but was ultimately discovered. So, as is the case with some who struggle with sex addiction, he turned to the 12-Step recovery group Sex Addicts Anonymous (S.A.A.) for help.

While the S.A.A. 12-Step group he attended weekly was central to Larkin's recovery, it did not totally satisfy him. Born out of his own personal need to commune with other evangelical Protestant men, and finding this lacking in his 12-Step group, Larkin and twelve friends formed a parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry in early 2004 (Larkin, 2006). This ministry would come to be known as the *Samson Society,* and its identity is informed by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries and principles from 12-Step recovery groups such as the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2001; see Appendix A, and Appendix B).

[1] Mumford and Sons, "The Cave." *Sigh No More*. Glassnote Entertainment Group. 2010.

Justification for the Study

Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, such as the *Samson Society*, are a very popular and influential phenomenon in the United States and in several other countries and they merit academic investigation. Compiling an exact number of men engaged in these ministries is problematic, given the diffuse and ever-changing nature of these organizations. As such, the total number of men involved is unknown; however, at the height of its popularity in the late 1990s the parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry *Promise Keepers* self-reported more than a million men attending events annually (*Promise Keepers*, 2014). Patrick Morley's men's ministry, *Man in the Mirror*, claims that more than ten million men have read its materials or participated in the ministry in some way over the last twenty-five years (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014). The *Samson Society* estimates at least ten thousand men have been involved in its ministry over the last ten years and it continues to grow its membership (Larkin, 2014).

The subject of this dissertation is the rhetoric of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries; however, rather than conducting a study of all of these ministries, which could produce superficial conclusions, I will instead undertake a rich, detailed study of one typical ministry with the goal of producing specific conclusions about how these ministries function. Specifically, I will conduct a rhetorical criticism of the *Samson Society* and the rhetoric of its founder, Nate Larkin, in an attempt to generalize about how these religious ministries persuade men to join them and what strategies are used to sustain men's involvement over time. This investigation will also provide insight into the masculine and religious ideologies of these ministries, which have been highly influential

within the context of the larger evangelical Protestant community (Bartkowski, 2004; Claussen, 2000; 1999; Willmer and Schmidt, 1998). The impact of these ministries has been manifested in terms of the enormous amount of resources allocated, as well as the credibility and stature given to their leaders as preeminent teachers and pastors.

Definitions

Having introduced and justified the investigation of these religious ministries, I will now offer the seminal definitions of the study. Specifically, in order to put the *Samson Society* in context as a typical parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry it is important that I do the following: 1) distinguish between *local* and *parachurch* ministries; 2) define *evangelical Protestant*; and, 3) define parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, and review their histories and rhetoric.

Local vs. Parachurch

There are two types of evangelical Protestant men's ministries—*local* and *parachurch* (Reid, 1990; Turner, 2008; Willmer and Schmidt, 1998). *Local* ministries typically function as "men's clubs" at a given church, just as many churches have localized women's clubs and youth groups. Local men's ministries are generally under denominational control or the control of the localized congregation. A pastor or lay congregant normally coordinates them, and these groups exist primarily to support a variety of ministry and service work of the men within a given localized church congregation (e.g., community service projects, pancake breakfasts, and mission trips).

Parachurch Christian ministries exist outside the normal boundaries of a local church congregation, and they are not under denominational control. They generally

consist of men from a variety of Christian churches, as well as those who are not affiliated with a church congregation but identify as "Christian." According to Turner (2008), "The word 'parachurch' is not in most dictionaries—it refers to organizations that exist alongside (from the Greek para) the institutional church (i.e., denominations and congregations)" (3). The most notorious parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry of the last thirty years has been *Promise Keepers*. Examples of current popular ministries of this type in the United States are: *Authentic Manhood*, *Christian Men's Network*, *Man in the Mirror*, *No Regrets Men's Ministries*, and the *Samson Society*.

Evangelical Protestant

Scholars who have defined what it means to be an *evangelical Protestant* find it difficult to come to consensus; however, in reviewing the literature I found that there tends to be general agreement that it often involves holding some or all of the following five beliefs: 1) conversionism; 2) activism; 3) Biblicism; 4) crucicentrism; and, 5) trans-denominationalism (Alsdurf, 2010; Bebbington, 1994; Noll, 2011a; 2011b; Stackhouse, 2007). All five of these core beliefs are typically present in contemporary parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries.

Conversionism is the belief that lives must be changed through participation in religious experiences. Conversionistic phrases such as "Born Again" and "Saved" are common vernacular within the evangelical Protestant community. *Activism* is a call to live out the Gospel and "share the Good News" (Bebbington, 1994). This often takes the form of "mission work," in which the "good news of Jesus" is evangelized. *Biblicism* is the evangelical tenet of having a particularly high regard for the Bible and viewing it as

the infallible, authentic, inspired word of God. Seeing the Bible referred to in evangelical circles simply as "The Word" or "The Word of God" with a capital "W" is commonplace. In addition, the fundamental Protestant belief in "Sola Scriptura"—that the Bible contains everything that is necessary for one's salvation—works in concert with the evangelical tenet of Biblicism. *Crucicentrism* stresses the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This core belief concerns Christ's atoning death as providing redemption from the power of Original Sin, forgiveness for human guilt, and reconciliation to God. *Transdenominationalism* is concerned with the ways in which evangelicals partner with other Christians, regardless of denomination, to support a larger cause. This tenet is often seen outside of a church congregation's work. As Coulter (2013) noted, "Evangelicals seem at home in parachurch ministries and organizations that transcend any particular denominational structure" (1).

Parachurch Evangelical Protestant Men's Ministries

Now that I have distinguished between *local* ministries and *parachurch* ministries and described *evangelical Protestant*, I will turn my attention to providing a definition of *parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries*. Defining these religious ministries first requires an acknowledgement and review of their history.

History

The practice of men gathering together to create spiritual fellowship is as old as the accounts of Christ and his disciples in the New Testament of the Bible (e.g., Matthew 10: 1-42, *NIV Bible, 2015*).[2] Groups of men gathering in the name of Christ to establish a

[2]All references to the Bible will be made using the NIV Bible. For a justification for using this Bible in my study of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, see Riley, 2008; and, Toalston, 1997).

particular goal-based ministry have been traced as far back as 1274, when the *Society of the Holy Name* was founded at the Council of Lyons (Gelfer, 2011; Thuente, 1910).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century one issue Christian men formed organizations around was "temperance." For example, taking its name from the celebrated Irish temperance leader and Catholic priest, Father Theobald Mathew, the *Knights of Father Mathew* was organized in 1881 in St. Louis, Missouri (Blocker, Fahey, and Tyrell, 2003, 350).

Also toward the end of the nineteenth century groups of men began holding organized meetings out of concern over two perceived problems within the Protestant church—the fear of feminization of the church environment, and, the low number of men who attended church relative to the number of women (Boyd, Longwood and Muesse, 1996; Culbertson, 2007; Gelfer, 2008; Podles, 1999).

Protestant men's ministries have historically solved these problems and achieved "masculinizing" goals in part through enlisting "Muscular Christianity," the 1850s Victorian England era idea that participating in sports could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and "manly" character (MacAloon, 2006; Mazer, 1994; Putney, 2001). Historically, Muscular Christianity was a major influence on the founding of several Protestant parachurch boy's/men's organizations in the late 1800s and early 1900s, including *The Young Men's Christian Association* (YMCA) and the *Boy Scouts* (Garnham, 2001; Lerner et. al., 2009; MacAloon, 2006; Spurr, 2002). Current parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, including the *Samson Society*,

continue to be influenced by Muscular Christianity, as will be described later in my review of the literature.

The goal of getting men more engaged in the life of the Church was addressed in the United States by the "Men and Religion Forward Movement" of 1910-1911, whose purpose was "to 'vitalize' the churches by bringing in more male church members" (Bederman, 1989, 432). Notable historical figures played prominent roles in this effort, including businessmen like John D. Rockefeller and J. Pierpont Morgan; social activists like Charles Stelzle and Raymond Robins; theologians like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch; and politicians like William Jennings Bryan and Governor W. J. Northen of Georgia (Allen, 2002; Bederman, 1989).

A second wave of Muscular Christianity occurred after World War II and it made special reference to Christian sporting activities (Ladd and Mathisen, 1999). The most notorious parachurch organization that was founded during this era was the *Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, which was started by Don McClanen in 1954 in Norman, Oklahoma and was initially supported by such famous professional sporting figures as Branch Rickey and Otto Graham (Claussen, 2000; Prebish, 1984). The goal of this ministry was "To present to coaches and athletes, and all whom they influence, the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church" (*Fellowship of Christian Athletes*, 2014).

Contemporary parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries began in the late 1970s (Gelfer, 2009). These groups got their start with Edwin Cole's *Christian Men's Network*, founded in 1977. Referred to by some scholars as "The Father of the

Christian Men's Movement," Cole's organization is an evangelical Protestant men's ministry that describes its primary goal as, "training men toward their roles as servant-leaders in their families, church and culture" (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014).

Culbertson (2007) described the diversity of thought found within the total range of contemporary Christian men's ministries, both Catholic and Protestant:

> Some are anti-feminist, others are profeminist. Some, working out of sex role theory, assume masculinity to be either essentialist or deeply archetypal. Others, working out of social construction and postmodernism, argue that masculinity is performative, unstable and cued by culture, family and experience. They have no common approach to theology and spirituality, and no agreed-upon goal (46).

Given such a myriad of beliefs and goals represented it is not surprising that Gelfer (2010) described the spectrum of Christian men's ministries as coming in a variety of forms: "Men's ministries may be denominational or ecumenical; they may address a spectrum of issues which pertain to men, or they may have a tighter focus such as the fatherhood ministries" (37). Examples of the issues that men gather in Christian fellowship to attend to are Marriage, Fatherhood, Christian Faith, Leadership, Recovery from Addictions, Bible Study, and Authentic Male Christian Identity.

Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries gained national and international notoriety with the advent of Bill McCartney's *Promise Keepers* in 1990 (McCartney and Diles, 1995). McCartney was the coach of the University of Colorado football team and an evangelical Protestant. Along with James Dobson and other prominent evangelical Protestant leaders of the time, McCartney founded this parachurch

religious ministry that was particularly influential throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The goal of *Promise Keepers* was to fill arenas and stadiums with men so that they could "become everything that God has created them to be, and then return to their families, churches, and communities with a commitment to hear and obey God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit," as they start new ministry groups (*Promise Keepers*, 2014).

Promise Keepers was not a typical parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry in three ways—the mainstream media attention it received, its size, and its primary goal of serving as a catalyst for starting other men's ministries. In describing *Promise Keepers*, Claussen (1999) noted that no other ministry that existed from the 1970s up through the 1990s were of its size, and none received the kind of media attention that it did (20). In 1996 Kimmel wrote, "Promise Keepers is arguably the largest 'men's movement' in the nation" (111). In 1996 Longwood stated, "Few efforts to advance the religiosity of U.S. men in the twentieth century have attracted the attention given to Promise Keepers, which grew exponentially during the early part of the 1990s" (Boyd, Longwood, and Muesse, 1996, 3). At the height of its popularity in 1997 the *Promise Keepers*' annual operating budget was $117,000,000 and it had a permanent ministry staff of over four hundred (Rivera, 2001). In addition, that year a national march on Washington, D. C. took place with an estimated six hundred thousand men in attendance. A primary goal of this gathering was to serve as a catalyst for other men's ministries to be created. Thus, it was not surprising that while other ministries have sprung up since *Promise Keepers* was founded; the ministry itself has not maintained viability in the U. S.

From a high of approximately one million conference attendees in 1996 to less than ten thousand in 2013, *Promise Keepers* has seen its enormous influence dwindle substantially. As Larkin (2014) noted, "*Promise Keepers* in the U. S. is moribund, almost to the point of being defunct. The one exception is the ministry in Canada, which began in 1995, and has grown significantly over the last several years."

In what I would describe as the "Post-*Promise Keepers* era" of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries in the United States, no particular group has taken its place in relevance or prominence. Instead, an organization has been formed—the *National Coalition of Ministries to Men*—in an effort to provide both local and parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries with resources and support (*N.C.M.M.*, 2014). Currently the landscape of these men's religious ministries consists of long-standing, modest sized organizations, as well as newly established groups.

Definition

Having reviewed the history of these ministries, and informed by the work done to define *parachurch ministries* by Reid (1990), Turner, (2008), and Willmer and Schmidt (1998), I now offer the following definition:

> *Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries* are religious organizations that are voluntary, not-for-profit associations of evangelical Protestant men, functioning outside of Protestant denominational control and alongside church congregations, that assist men with achieving particular personal, interpersonal, and organizational goals. They share a universal and expressed belief in the fundamental basic tenets of evangelical Protestantism and they have historically

been influenced by the religious ideology of "Muscular Christianity."

This definition is intended to describe contemporary parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries that have developed since the late 1970s. To understand these ministries better I will now turn my attention to providing a history and description of the subject of this case study—the *Samson Society*.

Samson Society

The following is a brief history of Nate Larkin's life and how he reports starting the *Samson Society*. The information used to compile this history comes from two sources: Larkin's (2006) book *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*; and, a forty-five minute videotaped talk (Larkin, 2012) he gave at a conference at Orangewood Church in Maitland, Florida, on January 21, 2012. While no autobiography should be taken as a full and true account of a life, since I am concerned with Larkin as a persuader and not with the truth of his account, Larkin's self-description is valuable even if not objectively true.

History

According to Nate Larkin he grew up in an evangelical Protestant family. His father was a preacher while his mother did not work outside the home. He is the oldest of eight children. When he was a teenager his mother, who had suffered for several years with depression, committed suicide in the family's basement. Church was a huge part of his life growing up. At a fairly early age he knew that he was being "called" to be a Protestant pastor. After finishing college he married his wife, Allie, and attended Princeton Theological Seminary. He first saw hardcore pornography while on a

seminary-sponsored outing to New York City. Shortly after that trip he developed a pornography addiction, eventually leading to an addiction to prostitutes. After a short career as an evangelical Protestant pastor, he quit the ministry, convinced that he could no longer fulfill his duties as a religious clergy while continuing to satisfy his sex addiction. In his early forties he began his recovery and attended Sex Addicts Anonymous 12-Step meetings. A few years later he and twelve evangelical Protestant men began meeting on a regular basis in an effort to support one another through a variety of personal issues (Larkin, 2006).

On February 16, 2004, the very first official meeting of the *Samson Society* convened. Thirteen men, led by Nate Larkin, gathered in the Women's Parlor of Christ Community Church in Franklin, Tennessee. (Larkin [2006] wrote that the irony of meeting in the "Women's Parlor" was not lost on him and some of his group members). Influenced by Larkin's own recovery and involvement with 12-Step groups an hour of deep sharing took place during that first gathering (Larkin, 2006). As Larkin (2006) noted, "Somehow, despite the absence of a sermon or a formal Bible study, we had all been instructed, exhorted, encouraged, reproved, corrected, and strengthened in our faith. We had experienced real fellowship, and I could already sense a fresh spiritual bond between us" (130).

Description

The *Samson Society* can be described as a parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry consisting of localized groups that typically meet once a week. These groups are described as "a fellowship of Christian men who are serious about

authenticity, community, humility, & recovery—serious, not grave" (*Samson Society*, 2015). Meeting groups have formed organically over the last ten years across the United States and in several other countries. The primary goal of these groups is to promote personal behavior changes in whatever area of life a man struggles with, such as pornography addiction, drug abuse, marital infidelity, divorce, parenting issues or job loss. As stated in the ministry's Meeting Materials, "Our purpose is to assist one another in our common journey. We do so by sharing honestly, out of our own personal experience, the challenges and encouragements of daily Christian living in a fallen world" (Larkin, 2006, 115).

The organizational structure of the *Samson Society* is very similar to the original 12-Step organization, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (A. A.), and the more recent *Sex Addicts Anonymous* (S.A.A.), in that: (1) local groups hold weekly meetings; (2) these meetings follow a standard format; and, (3) members typically have a "Silas," a man who is analogous to an A. A. or S. A. A. Sponsor. Central to these group meetings is the reading aloud of the ministry's Charter, just as A. A. meetings typically involve the reading of the 12 Steps aloud. The Charter (Larkin, 2006) contains a statement of evangelical Protestant faith (*The Fact*, see Appendix C), a prescriptive statement of seven steps of generic recovery, modeled after the 12 Steps of A. A. (*The Path*, see Appendix D), and a statement of seven organizational principles, modeled after the 12 Traditions of A. A. (*The Pact*, see Appendix E). The majority of time during these meetings is spent with members broken out into small groups to discuss the topic of the week; this is where "assisting one another in our common journey" primarily takes place. In addition, prayer

and the reading of one or two preselected Bible verses aloud are typical practices during meetings. A primary goal of these gatherings is to produce what Larkin (2006) refers to as "authentic Christian brotherhood."

Membership

Over the last ten years the *Samson Society* has grown in membership. It is impossible to determine the exact number of members, as not every man has a registered profile on the ministry's web site; however, as of March, 2015 there were 416 registered local meeting groups, and 7,959 men with registered profiles (*Samson Society,* 2015). In 2012, Rob Brown, a friend of Nate Larkin's, conducted an online survey of 2,500 *Samson Society* members (Brown, 2012). In his survey Brown (2012) gathered demographic information as well as other information related to the *Samson Society*, such as how men first heard about the ministry. Some of what Brown (2012) found was: 1) the ministry had members in 46 countries; 2) the top three issues men reported struggling with in their lives were pornography, sex addiction, and depression; 3) members ranged in age from 15-80; 4) 72% of the members were married, 18 % were single, and the remaining 10% were "in a relationship"; 5) the top two ways men found out about the *Samson Society* were through a friend (42%) and through Nate Larkin's (2006) book, *Samson and the Pirate Monks* (32%); and, 6) 78% of those surveyed said they had read part or all of Larkin's (2006) book, and 15% said they had given the book to another man.

Rhetoric: Written Materials, Public Speeches and Digital Materials

Having provided the history and definition of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, including the *Samson Society*, I will now turn my attention to reviewing

the rhetoric used by these religious organizations to achieve their goals. Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries typically utilize three forms of rhetoric: 1) written materials; 2) public speeches; and, 3) digital materials. The following is a review of these three forms of rhetoric from the most significant and popular contemporary parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. Included in each sub-section at the end is a summary of the *Samson Society's* corresponding rhetorical artifact.

Written Materials

There are four genres of written materials that play fundamental roles in establishing and maintaining these religious groups—*Books*, a *Statement of Faith*, *Ministry Teaching Curriculum*, and a *Group Meeting Format*. First, ministry founders typically write a *Book*, which in some cases are autobiographies or at least autobiographical in nature, that list the sins that plague the modern man, and, a list of prescriptive principles to live by. Second, these organizations are generally founded on a collection of evangelical Protestant beliefs that is often referred to as a *Statement of Faith*. These proclamations are sometimes part of a larger organizational "Mission Statement," and they are used by these ministries to identify and define themselves. Third, these ministries offer *Ministry Teaching Curriculum* to their members, representing the collection of persuasive messages that are the seminal rhetoric being promoted in order to achieve organizational goals. These "lesson plans" often include a ministry's version of the Bible. Fourth, these organizations typically have created a *Group Meeting Format* that prescribes how to conduct a large and/or small group local meeting or teaching session. These materials are designed out of a strong belief in the

effectiveness of the small and large group format for creating "Christian fellowship" and reaching a ministry's goals.

Books

The formula of a charismatic ministry founder producing an engaging read, which encapsulates a particular version of the struggle and redemption of the modern man, has become a common rhetorical genre for these religious organizations. These books typically have three things in common. First, they lay out the primary sins that men commit and provide reasons for why men behave in these particularly sinful ways. Second, they offer a set of prescriptive life principles that illustrate a path for evangelical Protestant men to take in overcoming their sins and finding redemption. Third, they offer supporting evidence in the form of personal narratives, "biblical teachings," and "Christian principles," and they do so without citing sources or having any kind of an academic bibliography. The following are several examples.

Edwin Cole's (1982) book, *Maximized Manhood*, was used to jumpstart his ministry, and it set the stage for future parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry founders. The book is typical of the genre. First, it does not contain a bibliography or source citations. Cole relies on his position as the founder and visionary of the *Christian Men's Network* as his primary source of authority and credibility, as well as his credentials as an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God church. Thus, he does not cite any academic studies to support his claims; rather, Cole makes his arguments through the use of personal narrative and the force of biblical authority, a common practice among contemporary evangelical authors (Noll, 1994). Second, as is commonplace with

this genre, Cole's book contains a list of what causes men's life problems (i.e., their "sins"), and third, he follows up with his recommended solutions. In the foreword Ben Kinchlow, who was co-host of Pat Robertson's evangelical Protestant television program "The 700 Club," describes Cole's approach:

> Into the "middle of the muddle," like a stinging slap in the midst of hysteria, a gauntlet slammed down in challenge, or the shock of icy cold water, strides the ringing declaration of "Maximized Manhood." A book that contains not a mere rhetorical discussion, but a head-on confrontation with the issues (Cole, 1982, 4).

The issues Kinchlow refers to are what Cole (1982) labels "The 5 basic sins: Lust, Idolatry, Fornication, Tempting Christ, and Murmuring" (7). These issues are laid out in the first chapter, with the remainder of the book discussing how a "maximized man" overcomes these sins and reaches the goal of "Maximized Manhood"—Cole's desired outcome for the men in his ministry.

In 1992 the first major *Promise Keepers* book was published. It was coedited by Bill McCartney and entitled, *What Makes a Man? 12 Promises That Will Change Your Life* (McCartney and Smalley, 1992). Joined by more than thirty contributors, McCartney laid out what it means to be a *Promise Keeper* and why then, more than ever, men needed to "recapture the spiritual climate in our own homes and cultivate a heart for other men"—two important goals of this ministry (11).

The book consists of thirteen chapters, each containing essays on the different promises mentioned as life-changing—promises made to God, self, spouse, family, parents, friends, worship and fellowship, work, neighbors and community, the needy, and

the future. The writing style is typical of this genre of Christian self-help books, with a mix of personal anecdotes from the various contributors, Bible verses, exhortations, and famous quotes. It has no bibliography and there are no source citations. The book was made available at *Promise Keepers* events for several years and in Christian bookstores, and it was viewed as *Promise Keepers*' initial national publishing effort.

Two years after this first book came out *Promise Keepers* produced a follow-up that was a reworking of the first book. It was entitled, *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Janssen and Weeden, 1994). It is viewed as the seminal *Promise Keepers* rhetoric, in part because it was published when the ministry was just becoming a national and international presence (Bartkowski, 2004; Brickner, 1999). It has been labeled by *Promise Keepers* and others as its "manifesto," and it was first published by James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* publishing arm (*Promise Keepers*, 2014). The book is a collection of essays written by eighteen different contributors elaborating on the *Promise Keepers*' "Seven Promises"—promises to God, mentors, one's integrity, family, church, friends, and the world (See Appendix F). Just as with Cole's book, there is no bibliography and there are no source citations, and, there is a list of what ails the modern Christian man, along with a set of solutions to these ailments.

Other seminal books that have helped launch parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries include: 1) Patrick Morley's (1989) *The Man in the Mirror: Solving the 24 Problems Men Face*, which helped his *Man in the Mirror* ministry get started (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014); and, 2) Robert Noland's (2010) *The Knight's Code: Live Pure, Speak True, Right Wrong, Follow the King*, which Noland wrote in support of *The*

Knight's Code ministry and spells out "the heart of what this ministry is all about" (*The Knight's Cod*e, 2014).

Nate Larkin's (2006) book, entitled *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*, is typical of this genre. The book serves as the seminal literary work of the *Samson Society*, and like the previous books mentioned it describes the sins that are common to men, and it provides a "path" for recovery from these sins. New members are routinely encouraged by existing members to read the book, and copies are often distributed at weekly meetings. Along with conveying the autobiographical details of Larkin's life from birth through his late forties, the book relays the history of the formation of his religious ministry and provides a roadmap for forming local fellowship groups. As with Edwin Cole's *Maximized Manhood* (1982), the *Promise Keepers*' *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (1994), and the other books mentioned previously, Nate Larkin's book does not have an academic bibliography.

The subtitle, *Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*, is the underlying message of Larkin's book. In telling his story he lays out a case for the need for Christian men to gather together, with the primary goal of creating and maintaining "authentic Christian brotherhood" in an effort to support personal redemption from the common "brokenness" that men suffer from. This group dynamic of "authentic Christian brotherhood" is what Larkin explains was missing in the 12-Step groups he had been attending prior to starting the *Samson Society* (Larkin, 2006).

Statement of Faith

A second genre of written materials used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries is an organizational Statement of Faith. These statements are created by ministry founders and their leadership to identify and demarcate the seminal evangelical Protestant beliefs and values of their particular organization.

The *Christian Men's Network* lists its core evangelical Protestant beliefs and ministry mission in two parts: 1) "The foundational truth of this international movement is that 'Manhood and Christlikeness are *Synonymous*'"; and, 2) "The goal is to Build Men, Build Churches, Transform Culture" (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014). The *Promise Keepers* has a Seven-point Statement of Faith (See Appendix G). In it, the ministry offers its core evangelical Protestant beliefs, including beliefs in: the Christian Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Bible as the inspired and inerrant authority on God's moral law; and, the redemptive power of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Patrick Morley's *Man in the Mirror* ministry introduces its Statement of Faith with this declaration:

> Every individual who works for Man in the Mirror has signed a copy of the following Statement of Faith as part of their employment. We believe by making this available to the users on our website, you may see that we take both our commitment to Christ, and to you, very seriously (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014).

The ten-point Statement of Faith referred to includes a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, the infallibility of the Bible, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. (See Appendix H)

The *Samson Society* is typical of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries with its Statement of Faith. According to Larkin (2014) the first part of the ministry's Charter, known as "The Fact," is its Statement of Faith (see Appendix C). Larkin (2014) noted that unlike *Alcoholics Anonymous* he wanted there to be no mistake that the *Samson Society* is not about calling on a "higher power" or part of a vague spiritual movement; rather, this is a men's ministry consisting of a common core of evangelical Protestant rhetoric. These beliefs are laid out in "The Fact" in a way that "any Trinitarian Christian could accept" (Larkin, 2014). Included in the ministry's Statement of Faith are the beliefs that: humans were all created to live in harmony with God and one another; human sin is common to everyone; and, faith in Jesus leads to personal redemption and restoration.

Ministry Teaching Curriculum

Ministry Teaching Curriculum represents the third genre of written materials used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. This form of rhetoric serves as a foundational mechanism for these ministries to attempt to achieve their persuasive goals. The *Christian Men's Network* explains the development of its materials as follows:

> In 1997, after Ed Cole and CMN had helped launch Promise Keepers in the USA, Honorbound and many other ministries to men around the world the MAJORING IN MEN® curriculum was launched, and the first men were commissioned. Today that curriculum has been the most successful material of its kind, endorsed by leaders around the world and used by over 8,000,000 men. This curriculum

uses ten of the books Dr. Cole authored and each book has a corresponding workbook for a dynamic and powerful tool (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014).

At the height of its popularity, *Promise Keepers* produced an array of Ministry Teaching Curriculum. Most of this material was constructed in the generic form of "study guides" for *Promise Keepers*' seminal books. Examples of *Promise Keepers*' Ministry Teaching Curriculum include: Griffith and Deckard's (1993) *What Makes a Man? Study Guide*; Trent's (1997) *The Making of a Godly Man Workbook: A Guide to Help Men Live Out the Seven Promises*; and, Peel's (1993) *What God Does When Men Pray: a Small Group Discussion Guide*. The ministry also published in 1997, *The Promise Keepers' Men's Study Bible* (1997), which featured the New International Version (NIV) Bible, along with accompanying study guides that were written by a variety of *Promise Keepers* literary contributors. It also contained a "Promisefinder Index," in which the reader could look up which passages of the Bible are labeled as relevant to one or more of the "Seven Promises of a *Promise Keeper*," which serve as the foundational rhetorical message of the *Promise Keepers* ministry.

The *Man in the Mirror* ministry has an extensive Ministry Teaching Curriculum. Topics covered in these materials include marriage and the family, improving as a pastor, and Bible study (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014). The *Authentic Manhood* ministry was founded on Ministry Teaching Curriculum. The original series, entitled *Men's Fraternity Classic*, was created by Dr. Robert Lewis "to provide timeless truths and practical insights to help men become the men God intended them to be" (*Men's Fraternity*, 2014). The current Ministry Teaching Curriculum of *Authentic Manhood* is entitled, "33 The

Series." It is described as "a multi-volume, gospel-centered video series that presents the timeless truths of Authentic Manhood in a powerfully new and engaging way" (*Authentic Manhood*, 2014).

Typical of parachurch evangelical men's ministries, the *Samson Society* has a Ministry Teaching Curriculum. These resources center on "The Path," which is the organization's formula for recovery from personal sin. There are worksheets and guides for men to explore and gather a greater understanding of The Path (For an example, See Appendix I). In addition, the *Samson Society* offers a weekend retreat called "48 Hours of Frankness," during which men work their way through the Seven Steps of The Path in a detailed manner. The retreat's advertised goals are listed on a companion web site of the *Samson Society* as follows:

> Find fellowship with safe, broken men who long for something greater than themselves; Be challenged in being honest with yourself and God; Spend time alone with Him discovering your own story; Learn the blessing of sharing your story and gift of listening to another man's; Discover the places where evil has bound you with lies and deceit; Experience honor, acceptance and freedom (*Gen225*, 2014).

Group Meeting Format

The fourth genre of written rhetorical materials used by parachurch evangelical men's ministries is a Group Meeting Format. A key feature of these organizations is the importance placed on men gathering together in large and/or small groups to support one another, provide a teaching forum, and create a sense of "ongoing fellowship"

(Bartkowski, 2000; *Promise Keepers*, 2014; Singleton, 2004; 2003). In order to go through one of the Ministry Teaching Curricula previously mentioned, which is the "what" of these ministries, ministry founders and leaders typically put together a "how to" Group Meeting Format of some kind. This creates a systematic and uniform method of conducting local meetings and achieving ministry goals.

Instilling a sense of community and fellowship in small groups of ministry participants in over one hundred countries has been crucial to the *Christian Men's Network*. These groups are individually led by the more than two thousand "Commissioned Men," who have "completed the *Majoring in Men* curriculum designed by Ed Cole, achieved the standards of a faithful man, and been approved by their family and pastor to receive this highest honor" (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014). These group leaders follow a Group Meeting Format to train men in Cole's curriculum during small group meetings, where they attempt to achieve a primary goal: "To bring men to a place of identification with Christ and impress them with the reality that 'manhood and Christlikeness are synonymous'" (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014).

Promise Keepers' leadership was well aware of the potential for the enthusiasm generated by stadium events to wear off and for attendees to struggle to keep their promises and achieve their goals. As such, as Bartkowski (2000) and Singleton (2004; 2003) both noted the ministry created "Accountability Groups." The Group Meeting Format for these groups continues to be available to members, and it lays out in detail how to start and lead a group and be a participant in a group (*Promise Keepers*, 2014).

Numerous other parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries provide a Group Meeting Format for their organizations. One current example is Patrick Morley's *Man in the Mirror*, which provides detailed instructions on how to facilitate a small group meeting and how to be an effective meeting participant (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014).

As is typical of these ministries, every week in communities across the United States and several other countries, groups of men gather in the name of the *Samson Society* for the purpose of Christian fellowship. The format of these meetings was laid out by Nate Larkin and the early members of his ministry. The "Samson Society Meeting Materials" consists of a two-page document outlining the structure of a one-hour meeting, a list of potential topics for discussion, and a copy of the Twenty-third Psalm from a version of the Bible (See Appendix J). Copies of the Charter are typically distributed to members as they gather for the formal opening of the meeting.

Meetings typically begin with the Host (i.e., moderator), who rotates from week to week, saying his name and asking to open with a prayer, followed by a reading of the twenty-third Psalm or the "Armor of God" passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament. The Host then reads from the Group Meeting Materials format, explaining what the *Samson Society* is and what the purpose of the meeting is. This is followed by a reading of the Fact—the first of three sections of the ministry's Charter. Once the Fact has been read aloud meeting attendees go around and introduce themselves and provide a brief statement regarding their reason for attending the meeting. Once introductions are over, the Host introduces the Path—the second section of the Charter. The Path is read aloud, followed by an introduction of the sharing portion of the meeting.

Guidelines for how to share are read by the Host, who then introduces the suggested topic for the meeting. Depending on the size of the group attendees break off into smaller groups of four to six men for discussion of the weekly topic, or, for discussion of a pressing issue that an attendee feels compelled to talk about. With approximately five minutes remaining, the small-group discussion ends and the group reconvenes as a large group for announcements and closing. The meeting closes with a reading aloud of the Pact—the third section of the Charter. At this point the mentoring aspect of the ministry is mentioned, as members who are willing to be a "Silas" to other members make their availability known.[3] A Silas is somewhat analogous to an A. A. "Sponsor"; someone who, "If he agrees, you make an open-ended arrangement to walk together for this stretch of the road, however long it lasts" (Larkin, 2006, 137). The meeting concludes with attendees praying aloud in unison the Lord's Prayer or a spontaneous prayer by one or more group members.

Public Speeches

Moving from the written word to the spoken word I will now discuss the importance of "public speeches" for parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. Public address, often in the genre of sermons, has been a primary rhetorical strategy used in the advancement of Protestant religious movements for centuries. From the prodigious 19th century preaching career of Dwight L. Moody, to early 20th century professional

[3] Larkin explains the biblical significance of choosing "Silas" as the name for a sponsor-type relationship in the *Samson Society*. At one point in his ministry, the apostle Paul needed a new traveling companion, so he "picked out a guy, a humble and wise and trustworthy guy named Silas, and he asked that guy to travel with him. Silas agreed, and within days they were on their way. In the Samson Society, we say that everybody needs a Silas and everybody should eventually *become* a Silas" (Larkin, 2006, Original emphasis, 136-137).

baseball player-turned preacher Billy Sunday, to the iconic Billy Graham, the list of prominent and successful Protestant evangelists in 19th, 20th and 21st century America is lengthy. Within the arena of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries this strategy is also heavily implemented to develop ministry membership and achieve ministry goals. Organizational leaders, such as Edwin Cole and Bill McCartney, have traveled the country speaking at evangelical Protestant church services and men's conferences.

The primary vehicle *Promise Keepers* used to evangelize its message and grow its ministry was the stadium conference. These events consisted of a Friday night rally, followed by a morning session and an afternoon session on Saturday. Brickner (1999) characterized these events this way: "The stadium conferences are the catalyst used by the Promise Keepers to raise men's biblical consciousness . . . The conferences are structured in order to make men think about their promises" (11). A key feature of the conferences is the "altar call." Typically during the Friday night event men are asked to come down from their seats, up onto the stage, and proclaim their acceptance or rededication to Jesus Christ (Brickner, 1999). The majority of time during *Promise Keepers*' stadium events is spent with event attendees listening to evangelists give public speeches, exhorting the men in attendance to "make and keep their promises."

In an effort to revitalize the deteriorating ministry, in 2015 *Promise Keepers* will again look to public speeches. The ministry has scheduled seven stadium/arena events across the United States. These events will consist of several evangelical Protestant speakers, including long-time *Promise Keepers* leader Raleigh Washington, as well as the

ministry's founder Bill McCartney. In addition, a "celebrity" speaker is scheduled to speak—former major league baseball player Darryl Strawberry is slotted to provide his "personal testimony of faith" (*Promise Keepers*, 2014).

Other parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry leaders and staff currently spend considerable time traveling the United States, in order to give public speeches in support of their ministries. Paul Cole, the current head of the *Christian Men's Network*, travels extensively all over the world giving public speeches to support his cause (*Christian Men's Network*, 2014). Patrick Morley and the staff at the *Man in the Mirror* ministry also speak at events across the United States regularly (*Man in the Mirror*, 2014).

Typical of these ministries, the *Samson Society* also utilizes the rhetorical form of public address, primarily through the speeches of its founder Nate Larkin. Larkin has traveled throughout the United States and Canada over the last ten years, speaking at a variety of evangelical Protestant venues in support of his ministry.

There is also a recording of one of Larkin's speeches available to be viewed on line. On the left side of the ministry's web site is the title, "I Samson." This title overlooks a video that is put forth to serve as an overview of the ministry and Larkin's story. "If you want to know how it all began, watch and listen as Nate Larkin delivers the foundational message of the Samson Society." This forty-five minute talk was recorded at the *Orlando 2012 Grace & Men Conference* at Orangewood Church in Maitland, Florida, on January 21, 2012. In it, Larkin spends the majority of time comparing and contrasting the lives of Samson and David from the Old Testament of the Bible. He

describes Samson as "a loner, a rover, a man of reflex, and a man who made the big plays." He encourages his audience to be more like David—Samson's archetypal opposite. He also spends time describing his sex addiction and how 12-Step Recovery helped restore his life. He concludes by encouraging his audience to consider joining the *Samson Society*. In sum, the majority of the speech is a reiteration of the primary rhetorical message of Larkin's (2006) book. (See Appendix K for a full transcript of the speech.)

Digital Media

Having provided an overview of the rhetorical forms of written materials and public speeches used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, I will now turn my attention to a more recent type of rhetoric—digital media. There are two genres of digital media used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries—web sites and podcasts.

Web Sites

The Internet has become ubiquitous and using a web site to promote a social or religious cause has been shown to be commonplace and effective (Della Ratta and Valeriani, 2014; Stein, 2009). Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries are no exception to this. Every current ministry has a web site, which greatly facilitates access to written materials and recorded public speeches. From the *Christian Men's Network* to the *Promise Keepers*, to every other similar ministry mentioned in this dissertation, having a web site has become routine.

Typical of every one of these ministries, the *Samson Society* has a web site (*Samson Society*, 2015). Serving as the on-line portal into the organization for prospective and current members, the web site has evolved over the last ten years. What began as a small site that allowed meeting attendees to affiliate with the ministry, and groups to register their meeting details, is now a more advanced site that operates on the Ning platform (Larkin, 2014; *Ning*, 2014).

As described on the web site, the *Samson Society's* focus is on "the Christian journey." Under a heading entitled, "Traveling Companions," members are described as:

> traveling-companions on a great spiritual adventure, not grim pilgrims on a death march to personal holiness. We challenge each other daily to believe the incredible news that God actually knows us, loves us, and has restored us to himself. As we follow Christ together, we find our lives progressively interrupted by righteousness, peace and joy (*Samson Society*, 2015).

Underneath this paragraph is a list of basic tenets that the ministry puts forth. The first is, "We are not a church." Clearly influenced by the 12-Step philosophy of "inclusion," the *Samson Society* makes it clear that it is "simply one extension of the church universal."

In a shift out of 12-Step anonymity the organization encourages members to meet outside of designated meeting times to socialize and create friendships, but not in the way that *Promise Keepers* does. "We are not an 'accountability group.' Instead of living our lives separately and reporting (or lying) about our progress, we try to live our lives together." In addition, the ministry does not like to think of itself as a "men's group," assuming that many prospective members view traditional evangelical Protestant men's

groups pejoratively. "Most of us have had it up to *here* with men's groups." The site has several other features, including a map of local meetings, a list of other recovery resources, and a "chat" feature. There is also a listing of prior podcasts that have been recorded, which are entitled, "Pirate Monk Radio." (See Appendix L for screen shots of the *Samson Society* web site.)

Podcasts

Podcasts, the digitally recorded versions of "blogs," have grown substantially over the last ten years. In 2013 Apple, Inc. reported its one-billionth podcast subscription, spread across two hundred fifty thousand unique podcasts in more than one hundred languages (Friedman, 2013). Parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries have their share of podcasts, which are available by searching Apple Inc.'s "iTunes store." Some examples of ministries that have produced podcasts are: *Promise Keepers*, with episodes entitled, "Men of Integrity"; *Man in the Mirror*, with episodes entitled, "Man in the Mirror Weekly Bible Study"; *No Regrets Men's Ministries*, with episodes entitled, "No Regrets Men's Ministry—Audio."

The *Samson Society*, in keeping with typical parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, has a podcast. At the initiative of ministry member David Mullen the first recorded podcasts were produced at the recording studio of contemporary Christian recording artist Tobymac. The episodes are entitled "Pirate Monk Radio," referencing Larkin's initial *Samson Society* group. The goal was to produce a weekly show consisting of discussions of relevant topics and timely interviews, which would serve as a resource for prospective and current ministry members. In practice there have tended to

be one or two podcasts per month. The current production is recorded in a studio in Franklin, Tennessee and the daily download is listed at 2,000 (Larkin, 2014).

The show is usually divided into four sections. First, Larkin and his co-hosts provide the listener with a roundtable review of what has been occurring in their personal lives. Second, there is usually what is referred to as a "mini-meeting" of the *Samson Society*. During this section Larkin and his co-hosts examine a topic and provide their individual insights, and this occurs in the spirit of the typical weekly meeting format. Third, there is generally a period of time for an interview of an invited guest or guests, sometimes in studio and other times over the phone. The fourth and final section is a closing and summarizing of the podcast, and Larkin and his cohosts will often provide a timeframe for when the next episode will be produced. The total production is usually around an hour in length and it is available in Apple's iTunes as a podcast subscription. (See Appendix M for a screen shot of the Podcast).

Literature Review

Having introduced my subject, defined the key terms of this dissertation, provided a history of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, including the *Samson Society*, and described the three rhetorical forms used by these ministries, I will now turn my attention to the academic literature. The purpose of this literature review is to analyze pertinent research that explores the rhetoric used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries to achieve their goals.

Currently, the academic literature on these religious ministries is quite limited; it consists almost exclusively of analysis of the *Promise Keepers* organization and its

rhetoric from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. In my review of the literature I found only a small number of studies on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries other than *Promise Keepers*. The following is what I discovered.

Research on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries other than *Promise Keepers* can be divided into two categories. First, there is a small body of work that looks at how evangelical masculinity is constructed by these ministries. Second, comparisons have been made between how evangelical Protestant men's ministries construct masculinity and how Catholic men's ministries construct masculinity.

Constructing Masculinity Within Evangelical Protestant Men's Ministries

Defining what it means to be a "man" within evangelical Protestant men's ministries is arguably a product of rhetoric within and outside of these ministries. Several authors have written extensively on the topic of evangelical Protestant masculinity in general, and their work sheds light on this broad topic (e.g., Bartkowski, 2001; DeRogatis, 2014; 2009; 2005; Griffith, 1997; Hoover and Coats, 2011). For my purposes I will be focusing on the academic literature that has examined the masculine ideology propagated by evangelical Protestant men's ministries.

Toward the end of the *Promise Keepers*' run as the preeminent parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry a book was published by John Eldredge (2001) entitled, *Wild at Heart*. It would become a national best seller, and its success helped launch Eldredge's parachurch ministry *Ransomed Heart Ministries* (*Ransomed Heart Ministries*, 2014). The book was also extremely popular among other evangelical Protestant men's ministries (Staub, 2003). This book was analyzed by Gallagher and

Wood (2005) as promoting a possible shift within evangelical Protestant men's ministries, away from the particular "soft-patriarch" masculine ideology being propagated by *Promise Keepers*. What these researchers determined was that the "slightly dangerous" masculinity Eldredge argued for was actually a reformulation of the nineteenth century myth of the "self-made man." According to these authors this supposedly new masculinity was in fact a somewhat shameless reformulation of "Muscular Christianity" and 1980s Mythopoetics, and it was an attempt by Eldredge to move away from the "feminized" expectations of servant leadership and involved fatherhood put forth by *Promise Keepers*. Gallagher and Wood (2005) conclude their assessment of Eldredge's book by noting the following:

> Overall, then, Eldredge's *Wild at heart* is a quintessentially evangelical text. It places non-negotiable, dimorphous gender identity at the center of the story. It appeals to the most salient sources of religious authority, the bible (sic) and personal experience, as the basis for believing these are true. And it links these truths to well-known myths, movies and media, as though there were a kind of gender essentialist "common grace" through which the characteristics of masculinity and femininity can be clearly known (157).

Singleton (2003) studied an Australian parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry and found that the program enabled participants to transcend traditional masculine modes of relating and form intimate relationships with other men. These new relationships served to embolden men to "open up" to one another and share their feelings in a way that previously felt uncomfortable. In another study Singleton (2004)

looked at nine Christian men's self-help books. He found that "Readers are encouraged to take up and embody identities that are organized around men's collective experiences of oppression, resulting from either their sexual addiction, father-wound, problems at home or lack of 'true' friends" (Singleton, 2004, 158).

In his study Gelfer (2011) compared parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries in the United States to those in Australia and New Zealand and determined there were very few differences in how the groups constructed masculinity. Another study by Gelfer (2013) found that a U.S.-based parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry that provided hunting activities to men framed "hunting and meat consumption as signifiers for masculinity, which results in a way of engaging the non-masculine world in a violent and sexualized manner" (78).

In sum, what all five of the aforementioned studies argued in some fashion was that the construction of evangelical Protestant masculinity within parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries continues to evolve. This evolution of masculinity often involves an ongoing effort by ministry leaders to blend traditional patriarchy and Muscular Christianity with a more contemporary, emotive ideal.

Evangelical vs. Catholic Men's Ministries

A more recent development in the research on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries has been Joseph Gelfer's (2010; 2008) efforts at comparing these ministries to their Catholic counterparts. Gelfer (2008) first made the case that while the academic literature focused exclusively on Protestant men's ministries, an entire other area of "Christian" men's ministries—those that are Catholic—was being neglected. In

this study Gelfer (2008) made the argument that parachurch Catholic men's ministries merited investigation, and he cited the recent growth in the number of these ministries. He attributed this growth in large part to the recent emphasis Catholic leaders placed on creating these ministries, primarily in response to the success of *Promise Keepers*.

In his second study in this area, Gelfer (2010) compared the masculine ideology present in an evangelical Protestant men's ministry with the masculinity of a comparable parachurch Catholic men's ministry. He found that the evangelical Protestant masculinity rhetoric was more traditional and patriarchal, while the Catholic masculinity rhetoric was "softer" and more emotive. He also continued to make the case that Catholic men's ministries warranted further investigation.

Promise Keeper*s*

As the preeminent parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry of the 20th century that engaged several million men *Promise Keepers* attracted a substantial amount of academic attention. The literature analyzing this religious ministry can be put into three categories: 1) *Promise Keepers*' masculine ideology, and, the ministry's attempts to emphasize racial reconciliation in its rhetoric; 2) *Promise Keepers*' rise; and, 3) *Promise Keepers*' fall.

Masculine Ideology and Racial Reconciliation

Promise Keepers' seminal rhetorical message was encapsulated in *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Janssen and Weeden, 1994). Academic investigations of this rhetoric uncovered two fundamental aspects of the ministry's messages—the

rhetorical construction of an evangelical Protestant masculinity, and, an emphasis on racial reconciliation.

First, the way this ministry defined masculinity received considerable attention. Bartkowski (2004) analyzed the views of gender promoted by the *Promise Keepers* in its speeches and books. In his research he identified four separate models of evangelical Christian masculinity that taken together created a "strategic ambiguity of soft patriarchy" for the ministry: the Rational Patriarch, the Expressive Egalitarian, the Tender Warrior, and the Multicultural Man. Together these models embraced distinct sets of gender ideals rather than a simple formula for traditional patriarchy, and they formed the basis for why Wilcox (2004) and others labeled followers of the ministry "soft patriarchs." In her study Heath (2003) echoed this characterization of *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric, referring to it as "soft boiled masculinity." She argued that *Promise Keepers* "provides a forum for Christian men to grapple with contradictory gender meanings so that these men can make positive changes in their lives around issues of masculinity without challenging their position of authority" (Heath, 2003, 439). Thus, as Heath (2003), Bartkowski (2004), and Wilcox (2004) all noted, blending "Muscular Christianity" and traditional patriarchy with a "soft" emotional element was a primary aspect of the masculine ideology promoted by *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric.

A second aspect to *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric that received academic scrutiny was a belief that the Bible calls for racial reconciliation in the form of "Biblical unity." Influenced heavily by his personal experiences as a grandfather of mixed race children, Bill McCartney, *Promise Keepers*' founder, made a point to emphasize the importance of

Christians being reconciled to one another racially in both his speaking and his writing (McCartney and Diles, 1995). Allen (2000) analyzed this aspect of *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric noting that the ministry specifically set out to address the issue of racism in Promise #6, which says, "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity" (*Promise Keepers*, 2014). What Allen (2000) discovered was that this emphasis on racial reconciliation was rhetorically constructed by *Promise Keepers* as a spiritual problem among individuals that is best overcome when men form close relationships with other men from different racial groups. The challenge for *Promise Keepers*, as Allen (2000) described it, was that while the ministry's leaders subscribed to this aspect of its rhetoric many members (who were white, middle class evangelical Protestants) did not hold this view, or would not adopt it.

The Rise of Promise Keepers

Scholars who studied the early success of the *Promise Keepers* collectively identified the following six reasons why the ministry appealed to millions of men: 1) Many new recruits had been preconditioned as evangelical Protestants to accept the familiar beliefs, values, and terminology that were presented by *Promise Keepers* in new and engaging ways; 2) The "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper" was a simple, straightforward formula to follow in order to "win with Christ"; 3) The "soft-patriarchal masculinity" so prominent throughout *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric was very appealing to a considerable number of members, and it was rhetorically constructed in a way that felt simultaneously progressive and Biblically grounded; 4) Stadium events were initially free, as the ministry had plenty of financial resources to host large stadium venues;

5) The fellowship that occurred at the stadium events with like-minded "brothers," followed by continued fellowship in small accountability groups, was very persuasive; and, 6) The spiritual "high" men received from the stadium "revivals" was well-advertised and powerfully emotive (Bartkowski, 2004; Brickner, 1999; Claussen, 2000; 1999; and, Williams, 2001; 2000).

Another approach toward *Promise Keepers*' success concerned the question of why its opponents failed in their efforts to discredit the ministry. Early *Promise Keepers* detractors tended to be feminists who often went to the media with press releases and held press conferences in an attempt to reframe what was developing, as the majority of initial media attention directed toward the ministry was overwhelmingly positive (Bartkowski, 2004; Claussen, 2000; 1999). Patricia Ireland, the president of the *National Organization for Women* was a frequently quoted critic, and other feminist groups were also very suspicious of *Promise Keepers*. A press release put out by the *Feminist Majority Foundation* (September, 1997) was highly critical:

> In Boulder, where he was once a $350,000-a-year football coach and publicly defended two of his players who had been charged with rape, some refer to him as "McCartney and his Penis Keepers." While McCartney fervently preaches against "sexual sin," which includes sex outside of marriage and the use of birth control, his unmarried daughter had two children by two of his players.

At the height of *Promise Keepers* popularity, and several months prior to the Stand in the Gap event in Washington, D.C. in October, 1997, representatives from the following organizations held a press conference—*National Organization for Women*

(NOW), *Feminist Majority Foundation*, *Center for Democracy Studies* (CDS), *National Network to End Domestic Violence*, *Church Women United*, *National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum*, *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*, and *Equal Partners in Faith*. At this event Alice Cohan, *Feminist Majority Foundation* Director of National Programs stated:

> Some reactionary male want-to-be-patriarchs—the so-called Promise Keepers—are preaching to football stadiums of men that men must resume their rightful place at the head of their household . . . The submission of women is at the core of all these attacks on women's rights and is a backlash to the changed role of women in every facet of our society (Feminist Majority Foundation, June, 1997).

Abbott (2007), Bartkowski (2004), and Claussen (2000; 1999) each studied the rhetoric of the *Promise Keepers*' detractors and investigated why it tended to be ineffective. Their conclusions were consistent. Those who attacked the ministry in the media tended to focus on a political rather than religious frame, primarily because *Promise Keepers* repeatedly referred to itself as a Christian men's ministry that was apolitical. Its detractors challenged this characterization and labeled it a smokescreen, but as a result they lost the public relations battle. As Abbott explained:

> Promise Keepers adopted the "religious" label, describing itself as interested solely in private, spiritual matters rather than public, political issues. Feminists, on the other hand, argued for the "political" label, claiming that Promise Keepers only used religious rhetoric to obscure its "true" political nature. In doing so, the feminists unwittingly endorsed Promise Keepers' sharp division between

> politics and religion. Rather than interrogate the terms "politics" and "religion," perhaps by exploring how and where they may overlap, the feminists merely disagreed with Promise Keepers as to which of the two terms more fittingly characterized the organization . . . Indeed, because the feminists played on the Promise Keepers' symbolic "turf," the men's organization enjoyed the upper hand in proving its motive (22-23).

The Fall of Promise Keepers

Having reviewed the academic literature on the masculine ideology, emphasis on racial reconciliation, and rise of *Promise Keepers*, I will now turn my attention to the ministry's declining influence. One of the primary themes of more recent scholarly analysis of the *Promise Keepers* has been its rapid descent as a thriving parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry in the United States. Reasons that have been offered for the group's diminished relevance include the following seven possibilities: 1) *Promise Keepers* grew too big, too fast; 2) It experienced a financial crisis brought on by the enormous costs of the Stand In The Gap rally in 1997, and, the organization's decision to stop charging admission to its conferences and instead to rely on free-will offerings; 3) As stadium event attendance shrank so too did media coverage; 4) *Promise Keepers*' ideological flexibility and diffuseness, while helpful in the beginning, proved partly responsible for its declining influence; 5) Conference attendees were put off by the "racial reconciliation" theme of the 1996 stadium events; 6) After a decade, *Promise Keepers*' rhetoric became stale to conference attendees; and, 7) The ministry's revivalist nature meant that by definition it would face the fate of every other previous revival and

not maintain sustained, wide-scale influence (Bartkowski, 2004; Claussen, 2000; 1999). As a result of these factors *Promise Keepers* is no longer receiving academic scrutiny, which makes sense given the ministry's extremely diminished presence in the United States.

Summary of the Literature Review

Very little research has been conducted on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries other than the *Promise Keepers*. During the height of its popularity in the late 1990s *Promise Keepers* was seen as successful in its efforts to construct an evangelical Protestant masculine ideology that was described as a multi-faceted "soft-patriarchy." This was a significant aspect of the ministry's appeal to members and it attracted considerable academic scrutiny as well. On the other hand, the *Promise Keepers*' attempts to imbue racial reconciliation into its religious ideology were not successful with members, despite founder Bill McCartney's commitment to emphasizing its importance to the ministry. This emphasis is also not typical of these ministries.

The initial rise of the *Promise Keepers* was a result of multiple factors, chief among which was the use of a familiar lexicon of evangelical Protestant symbolic language, along with the appeal of large stadium events; however, holding stadium events with fifty thousand or more participants is not typical of these ministries. The declining influence of *Promise Keepers* was caused by multiple factors; however, its very nature as a religiously "revivalist" organization meant that its relevance, unlike typical parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, would naturally recede over time.

Although *Promise Keepers* has received the majority of scholarly analysis concerning parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, it is not typical. As such, we cannot draw generalizations about the more typical ministries based on analyses of this unrepresentative one. The *Samson Society*, in its size, structure, ambition, and, especially, the genres that constitute the rhetorical means it employs to promulgate and sustain itself, is typical.

Purpose of the Study

Evident throughout the previous literature review is that parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries are an important part of the American religious landscape. Equally evident is that other than the *Promise Keepers*, which is not a typical example of these ministries in many ways, little is known about the rhetorical strategies used by these religious ministries to achieve their goals. This dissertation seeks to add to the body of research on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries through a rhetorical analysis of the case of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*. The significance of Larkin's rhetoric, along with the formation and growth of his ministry, will be examined in depth. In particular, Nate Larkin's "calling men to authentic brotherhood" as an example of the need for men to recover from the self-destructive effects of "sin" through a modified 12-Step recovery model will be investigated as the *Raison d'être* of the *Samson Society*.

Research Question

As a rhetorical critic I am interested in how rhetoric is used by groups to create their identity, recruit members, and achieve their goals. My rhetorical criticism will focus on the rhetorical processes used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's

ministries, an area of religious rhetoric that lacks substantive academic analysis and understanding. Specifically, I will investigate the seven rhetorical artifacts through which the *Samson Society* is rhetorically constituted as it seeks to achieve its goals. To advance my purpose I offer the following research question:

> What are the rhetorical strategies used by parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries to achieve their goals?

In answering this question I intend to examine the nature of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. I will primarily utilize the work of Maurice Charland and Kenneth Burke to examine the rhetorical strategies that these ministries have used, with a specific focus on the *Samson Society*.

Method

The rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* consists of religious messages; however, as a rhetorical critic my intention is not to analyze this persuasion from a theological perspective. Instead, rather than being concerned with the merit of Larkin's doctrine and that of his ministry, I will focus my rhetorical criticism on why the rhetoric being studied effectively persuades listeners. Thus, I am not interested in debating the soundness or orthodoxy of the religious ideology under investigation; rather, I am concerned with developing an understanding of this ideology, as well as the rhetorical strategies that Larkin and his ministry utilizes to be successful in attracting followers and perpetuating their cause.

Choosing a critical method to analyze the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and his parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry, the *Samson Society*, involves

identifying appropriate and robust tools. The following is a discussion of the components of my critical method.

To begin my analysis I will examine who Larkin believes is the "audience" for his rhetoric. To do this I will be utilizing Ede and Lunsford's (1984) concepts of *audience addressed* and *audience invoked*. For my theoretical framework I have chosen Maurice Charland's (1987) theory of "constitutive rhetoric," making the case for its application to the religious rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*. Within this framework of constitutive rhetoric I will draw on the work of Kenneth Burke, and the work of Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin, to describe the particular pattern of the constitutive narratives that Larkin creates. Specifically I will utilize the following: 1) Burke's (1954) cycle of guilt-purification-redemption; 2) the rhetorical strategy of *identification*; 3) Foss and Griffin's (1995) definition of Invitational Rhetoric; and, 4) Burke's (1969a) "Four Master Tropes" essay.

Audience

To begin my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society,* I will investigate what Ede and Lunsford (1984) distinguish as the *audience addressed* and the *audience invoked*. An *audience addressed* approach views the audience as a "concrete reality" whose attitudes and expectations need to be taken into consideration by the rhetor during the creative process (156). In this case this would include the actual readers of Larkin's book, *Samson and the Pirate Monks*, as well as those who consume his other forms of rhetoric related to the *Samson Society*. An *audience invoked* approach views the audience as a fictionalized construct that is created by the rhetor through "semantic and

syntactic . . . cues which help to define the role or roles" the rhetor wishes the audience to adopt in responding to the rhetoric (Ede and Lunsford, 1984, 160). For this I will look to the various forms of rhetoric under consideration for cues as to how Larkin "imagines his audience."

Constitutive Rhetoric

In his investigation of the pro-sovereignty movement in Quebec, Canada Charland (1987) developed a theory of constitutive rhetoric. He built on Burke's notion in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969b) to consider "identification" rather than "persuasion" as the fundamental term of the rhetorical process in which "audiences are constituted as subjects through a process of identification with a textual position" (Charland, 1987, 147).

Central to his analysis of the constitutive rhetoric of Quebec sovereignty was Charland's (1987) use of "Althusser's category of the subject" (134). As Charland (1987) explains:

> Examining what Michael McGee would term Quebec's rhetoric of a "people," I will show how claims for Quebec sovereignty base themselves upon the asserted existence of a particular type of subject, the "Québécois." That subject and the collectivized "peuple Québécois" are, in Althusser's language, "interpellated" as political subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that "always already" presume the constitution of subjects. From this perspective, a subject is not "persuaded" to support sovereignty. Support for sovereignty is inherent to the subject position addressed by souverainiste (pro-sovereignty)

> rhetoric because of what we will see to be a series of narrative ideological effects. (134)

For the purposes of my analysis I will show how the rhetoric Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* proffer is similarly based on the asserted existence of a particular subject, "Christian." In this case that subject, and the rhetorically collectivized "body of Christ," are interpellated as religious subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that make presumptions regarding their constitution. Thus, recruits into the *Samson Society* are not "persuaded" in the typical sense to support "authentic Christian brotherhood;" rather, support is inherent to the position addressed via Larkin's rhetoric through a series of narrative ideological effects. Thus, prospective members are presumed to already be "affiliated with" the ministry as members of the larger "body of Christ."

Charland (1987) identified three ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric. The first ideological effect is "to constitute a collective subject," which enables an "'ultimate' identification permitting an overcoming or going beyond of divisive individual or class interests and concerns" (Charland, 1987, 139). He summarized this effect when he wrote, "The community . . . is the master agent of the narratized history" (140).

The second ideological effect extends the first. Here he posited a "transhistorical subject" where, "Time is collapsed as narrative identification occurs" (Charland, 1987, 140). He described this second effect as:

> perfectly tautological, for it is a making sense that depends upon the a priori acceptance of that which it attempts to prove the existence of, a collective agent . .

> . that transcends the limitations of individuality at any historical moment and transcends the death of individuals across history. (140)

This second effect, then, suggests that in narratives ancestry is utilized as a link between one group and another that constitute the collective audience.

These first two effects will be demonstrated throughout my analysis. I will show how the "authentic Christian brotherhood" of the *Samson Society* is subsumed in Larkin's rhetoric as a constitutive element of the larger transhistorical "body of Christ."

The third ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric is what Charland (1987) referred to as the "illusion of freedom" (141). Here he argued:

> Because the narrative is a structure of understanding that produces totalizing interpretations, the subject is constrained to follow through, to act so as to maintain the narrative's consistency . . . (subjects) must be true to the motives through which the narrative constitutes them, and thus which presents characters as freely acting towards a predetermined and fixed ending. (141)

In other words a collective audience can only act in ways that are consistent with the narrative and within the narrative's boundaries, since it is the narrative that has rhetorically constituted the collective subject; however, the belief within the audience is that they have the ability to act freely and are active agents, choosing to act on their own accord; hence, the illusion of freedom. As with the first two ideological effects, I will demonstrate in my analysis how Larkin's rhetoric produces this third effect.

While Charland's (1987) conception of constitutive rhetoric was developed to shed light on the workings of political discourse (e.g., Lin and Lee, 2013), it has been

used in other contexts. Examples include Stein's (2002) analysis of advertising, Stokes' (2005) investigation of public relations, and Hayden's (2011) look into "online communities." In this dissertation I will utilize Charland's (1987) theoretical framework to understand how parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, such as the *Samson Society*, are rhetorically constituted through religious discourse.

Guilt-Purification-Redemption

According to Rueckert (1982), Samra (1998), and Bobbitt (2004), one of the more central concepts of the work of Kenneth Burke is the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption. In addition, as Rueckert (1982) opined, "Nothing is ever merely simple in Burke" (137). That being said, I will attempt to summarize Burke's "theory of guilt."

In *Permanence and Change*, Burke (1954) argued that the fundamental human drama, as rhetorically constructed in the Bible and elsewhere culturally, is this cycle, which he described in the following passage:

> In brief, given "original sin," (tribal, or "inherited" guilt), it follows, by the ultimate logic of symbols, that the compensatory sacrifice of a ritually perfect victim would be the corresponding "norm." Hence, insofar as the religious pattern (of "original sin" and sacrificial redeemer) is adequate to the "cathartic" needs of a human hierarchy (with the modes of mystery appropriate to such a hierarchy) it would follow that the promoting of social cohesion through victimage is "normal" and "natural." (284)

Burke (1954) argued that this cycle is predicated on "two great moments": "original sin" and "redemption" (283). In sum the cycle takes place when: a human sins; emotions

such as guilt and shame are felt; purification transpires through victimage (finding a scapegoat to blame) and/or, mortification (an admission of guilt); redemption, the last part of the cycle, is finally achieved when individuals' purification acts are recognized and accepted by others.

As Bobbitt (2004) described it the cycle is "a secular version of the Christian view of the soul's journey from hell to purgatory to heaven. For Burke, guilt-purification-redemption is a constantly repeating symbolic ritual that responds to an archetypal need in humans as symbol-using animals" (29). Rueckert (1982) noted that in Burke's theory of symbolic action:

> The three main archetypal clusters are pollution (hell), purification (purgatory), and redemption (heaven). The movement from the first to the last through purification constitutes the pattern of the rhetoric of rebirth and is the prime function of symbolic action. . . . no symbolic act is complete unless it contains images of all three clusters in the pattern (104).

That a Christian men's ministry might include a narrative of the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption and employ a rhetoric of rebirth is not surprising. I will argue in my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* that this cycle is one of the primary narratives being proffered. I will demonstrate where this rhetoric is situated and how it functions constitutively, persuading prospective and current members to advance the cause of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*.

Identification

Much has been written in rhetoric studies about the concept of "identification," particularly by Burke (1969b) and by those attempting to clarify Burke's ideas (e.g., Ballif, 2014; Cheney, 1983; Crusius, 1986; Day, 1960; Kirk, Day, Smith and Bormann, 1961; and, Rosenfeld, 1969). For the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen to enlist Rosenfeld's (1969) definition of "rhetorical identification," and Cheney's (1983) application of the concept of identification to organizational rhetoric.

Rosenfeld (1969) offers the following definition: "Identification is finding a shared element between the speaker's point of view and the audience's, or finding the audience's point of view and the speaker's convincing them that they share a common element" (1969, p. 183). In his seminal piece on identification in organizations, Cheney (1983) enumerated three identification strategies. First, the "common ground technique" is where the rhetor establishes a link between himself or herself and the audience, echoing Burke's (1969b) first type of identification—using identification as a means to an end. Second, "identification through antithesis" is the uniting of an audience through establishing a common enemy, which reflects Burke's (1969b) second type of identification. Third, there is "identification through the assumed or transcendent 'we'" (Cheney, 1983, 148). This meets Burke's (1969b) notion of "identification," deriving as it does from situations of the unknown or subconscious.

That a Christian men's ministry might enlist a strategy of "identification" in an effort to enlist new recruits is not surprising. I will argue in my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* that Larkin uses "identification" in the imparting of

his masculinity to prospective and current members. Through attempting to convince his audience that they "share a common element" with him, Larkin utilizes the first strategy discussed by Cheney (1983), as he communicates the masculine ideology of the *Samson Society*.

Invitational Rhetoric

Invitational rhetoric "is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does" (Foss and Griffin, 1995, 5). The impetus for the creation of an "invitational rhetoric" was concern by the authors over what was perceived as a "monolithic definition of rhetoric as persuasion" within the discipline of rhetoric studies (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, 2008). In a follow-up article to Foss and Griffin's (1995) original piece Bone, Griffin, and Scholz (2008) noted that invitational rhetoric "can be viewed as a communication exchange in which participants create an environment where growth and change can occur but where changing others is neither the ultimate goal nor the criterion for success in the interaction" (436).

Three external conditions—safety, value and freedom—created by a rhetor in and during a communication exchange are present during invitational rhetoric (Foss and Griffin, 1995). First, *safety* "is manifest when the audience recognizes that their 'ideas and feelings' will not be denigrated or trivialized by the rhetor . . . rhetors create an atmosphere in which audiences recognize that their own views will be 'received with respect and care'" (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, 2008, 436). Second, when *value* is

present, "rhetors recognize that the views of the other person or people, although different from one's own, have inherent value . . . Value is created through '''the principle of universal moral respect'—'the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants' in the conversation'" (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, 2008, 437). Third, when *freedom* is present, "participants 'can bring any and all matters to the interaction,'. . . Freedom involves 'the principle of egalitarian reciprocity' which allows rhetors the 'same symmetrical rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics, to ask for reflection about the presuppositions of the conversation;" (Bone, Griffin, and Scholz, 2008, 437).

In my analysis of the formation narrative of the *Samson Society,* I will investigate how Larkin uses an invitational rhetoric to "call men to authentic brotherhood." In particular I will examine the ways in which Larkin conveys the ideals of safety, value and freedom in his rhetoric.

Burke's Four Master Tropes

Tropes, or figures of speech as they are commonly referred to, have long been the subject of rhetorical theorists. According to Lundberg (2009) there are at least four options for framing tropes in the rhetorical tradition of American communication studies. First, tropes have been viewed as "ornaments, or as a particularly artful way of saying something that could otherwise be said in direct, denotative language" (389). Second, there is the view that "understands tropes as a range of associations that cohere around a signifier, usually indicated by the formulation 'the trope of X' (where X represents a specific set of discourses, for example, the trope of "war")" (389). Third, there is the

option Lundberg (2009) utilized—of viewing tropes as "generative," which conceives of trope as "an economy of exchange and articulation generative of all signs and their meanings" (389). Lastly, "following Kenneth Burke's codicil on the 'four master tropes' in the appendix to *A grammar of motives*, one might frame the trope as an epistemological category (Lundberg, 2009, 389). Tell (2004) elaborated on this notion when he wrote, "At the very least, then, language for Burke is epistemic; it creates meaning. To explain how it does so is the task of Burke's four tropes" (37).

Scholars have applied Burkean notions of the "four tropes" to a variety of rhetorical contexts. Examples include: Presidential Rhetoric, (Desilet and Appel, 2011); Political Cartoons (Moss, 2007; Bostdorff, 1987); Environmental Communication (Kinsella, 2005); Technical Communication (Todd, 2000); and, Scientific Discourse (Tietge, 1998). For my purposes I will be utilizing Burke's notions of "trope" as organizing principles to help the reader grasp the concept of specific persuasive arguments within the rhetorical artifacts I am reviewing of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*.

Burke (1969a) argued for the centrality of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. He began his (1969a) essay with the following oft-quoted passage:

> I refer to metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. And my primary concern with them here will be not with their purely figurative usage, but with their role in the discovery and description of "the truth" . . . The "literal" or "realistic" applications of the four tropes usually go by a different set of names. Thus: For *metaphor* we could substitute *perspective*; For *metonymy* we could substitute

reduction; For *synecdoche* we could substitute *representation*; For *irony* we could substitute *dialectic*. (503)

Burke (1969a) also discussed how the four tropes "shade into one another," and the dividing line between the four "shifts" (503).

The explanations and examples Burke offers in his essay help to illuminate his view that metaphor has a heuristic and epistemic role. In explaining "metaphor" Burke (1969a) wrote, "Metaphor is a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this" (503). As Bobbitt (2004) noted in describing Burke's approach to metaphor, "In functioning as a 'perspective by incongruity' it brings together terms from different categories of association and thereby allows us to see heretofore unrevealed relationships" (65). Thus, an example would be when a person exhibits compulsive sexual habits that behavior is framed *metaphorically* as "sex addiction." The new term, then, describes what was considered a matter of "sin" as a new "disease," applying the involuntary, compulsive nature of addiction [the thisness] to what was traditionally thought of as a bad but free choice.

When it came to "metonymy" Burke (1969a) did provide an example: "The basic 'strategy' in metonymy is this: to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible. E.g., to speak of 'the heart' rather than 'the emotions'" (506). In describing metonymy as "reduction" Burke defined the term as a particular type of reductive generalization in which the name for a thing is reduced down to one of its primary attributes. Other examples would include using "the pen" instead of "the written word," or, using "the sword" instead of "military aggression or force."

Synecdoche is arguably where Burke (1969a) was the most conventional, as the following passage demonstrates:

> For this purpose we consider synecdoche in the usual range of dictionary sense, with such meanings as: part for whole, whole for part, container for the contained, sign for the thing signified, material for the thing made (which brings us nearer to metonymy), cause for effect, effect for cause, genus for species, species for genus, etc. All such conversions imply an integral relationship, a relationship of convertibility, between the two terms. (507-508)

Examples would include using "boots on the ground" to represent the presence of military soldiers in a particular region, or, "stolen wheels" to represent the theft of a car.

The fourth trope is irony, and it is paired with "dialectic" in a very specific way. Burke's (1969a) example that he elaborated on for irony is the "disease-cure" dialectic: "… we should 'ironically' note the function of the disease in 'perfective' the cure, or the function of the cure in 'perpetuating' the influences of the disease" (512). There is a sense of inevitability and surrender in Burke's (1969a) characterization of irony, and he elaborated on it further in his essay:

> Dialectic irony (or humility) here, we might even say, provides us with a kind of "technical equivalent for the doctrine of original sin.' Folly and villainy are integral motives, necessary to wisdom or virtue. (515)

In my analysis I will explain how these tropes factor into the rhetorical strategies of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*. In particular, I will show how Larkin uses metaphor, metonymy, and irony in constructing the religious ideology of his ministry.

Data

The rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* provide a rich and completely untapped resource for rhetorical criticism. While not at the level of notoriety of the *Promise Keepers* in its heyday, this organization is nevertheless typical of contemporary parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, and it has a founder who continues to travel the United States offering men the opportunity to join his cause.

In examining Larkin's rhetoric and the rhetoric of the *Samson Society* there are seven potential artifacts for analysis—Larkin's autobiography, the Charter, the Ministry Teaching Curriculum, the Group Meeting Format, Larkin's foundational speech, the web site, and the podcasts. For the purposes of this dissertation I have chosen to include all seven of these items.

Each of the seven rhetorical artifacts I will be looking at is a valuable source of rhetoric, full of key terms worthy of a rhetorical criticism. First, the book provides the historical background of Larkin's life and the formation of the *Samson Society* and as such, is an excellent starting point for an academic investigation of this religious ministry. Second, the Charter is the seminal written material that contains the organization's *Statement of Faith*, its purpose, and its core values. It is the "Magna Carta" of the *Samson Society* and as a type of "constitution," will undoubtedly contain constitutive rhetoric. Third, the Ministry Teaching Curriculum provides an in depth look into the way Larkin and his ministry frame "The Path." The Path is presented as a prescription for authentic recovery from personal sin and as such, it is rhetorically framed as the seminal way to achieve the ministry's goals. It should be full of foundational

symbolic language and constitutive rhetoric. Fourth, the meeting materials consist of a "how to" manual for leading local one-hour meetings. These meetings are the primary vehicle through which the ministry develops and maintains itself. Thus, the Meeting Materials should be fertile ground for analysis. Fifth, Larkin's speech is representative of public speeches he continues to give, as he travels around the United States evangelizing his audience. Thus, it is worth investigating as a primary act of organizational recruitment and constitutive rhetoric. In addition, as an example of public address it is a quintessential rhetorical act, the kind that critics have commonly analyzed for hundreds of years. Sixth, the web site is an excellent access point into the rhetoric of this ministry. It serves to recruit new members, as well as keep current members informed. It too should provide significant material for a rhetorical criticism. Finally, the seventh rhetorical artifact—the podcast—offers a unique window into the *Samson Society's* religious ideology and should prove valuable.

Significance of the Study

As a case study of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*, this dissertation provides the first academic review of this parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry. In doing this research I am making the claim that the *Samson Society* is typical of these religious ministries in many ways. Thus, explaining the success of this ministry has implications for our understanding of the rhetoric of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. The rise in popularity of these particular ministries in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as their current viability, speaks to the pervasive nature of these groups, and enhancing their understanding is a worthwhile academic endeavor. In

addition, by expanding the use of Charland's (1987) theory of constitutive rhetoric this study advances our understanding of rhetorical theory in general, and constitutive rhetoric in particular.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation will be organized around what I have identified in my analysis as the four fundamental narratives found within the seven rhetorical artifacts produced by Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*—Larkin's life-story narrative; the narrative of the *Samson Society's* masculine ideology; the narrative of the formation of the *Samson Society*; and, the narrative of the *Samson Society's* religious ideology. I will focus my analysis primarily on how Burke's ideas help to explain the rhetorical effectiveness of Larkin's persuasion. In addition, throughout my analysis of these narratives, and also in the summary of each narrative, I will demonstrate how Larkin's rhetoric functions constitutively.

In Chapter Two I will begin my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*. This will consist of an investigation of what Larkin believes constitutes his *audience addressed* and his *audience invoked*. I will then proceed to examine the narratives of the rhetoric being studied. Typical of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries, the life-story narrative of the founder of the organization is prominently featured in the ministry's rhetoric. The *Samson Society* is no exception and as such, Chapter Three will consist of an investigation of Larkin's life-story narrative. Also typical of these ministries is the rhetorical creation of a masculine ideology, as discussed previously in my review of the academic literature. Thus, Chapter Four will consist of an

analysis of the narrative of the *Samson Society's* masculine ideology. In Chapter Five I will examine the formation narrative of the *Samson Society*. Chapter Six will consist of an analysis of the narrative of the *Samson Society's* religious ideology—also a typical element of the rhetoric of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. I will conclude with Chapter Seven, which will consist of the summary and concluding remarks of my study.

CHAPTER 2

Audience

Throughout my analysis I will offer arguments for why Larkin's (2012; 2006) rhetoric is appealing to prospective and current members of the *Samson Society*. I believe that taken collectively, as my analysis will demonstrate and time has shown, the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* is rhetorically effective in encouraging evangelical Protestant men to join the ministry and become ongoing, active members who engage in the creation of what Larkin labels "authentic Christian brotherhood."

To begin my analysis of Larkin's rhetoric, I will be looking at the composition and conceptualization of his audience, in an effort to expand the understanding of the persuasive appeal of his messages. To do this I will be relying on the work of Ong (1975), Ede and Lunsford (1984), and Ives and Crandall (2014). I will also be utilizing Larkin's (2005) book proposal that he submitted to his publisher in support of his book, in which he identifies his target audience. Lastly, I will be using the demographic data collected by Brown (2012) in an online survey he conducted of *Samson Society* members.

The History of "Audience"

The study of "audience" can be traced back at least to the Ancient Greeks, who understood the importance of speaking appropriately to an audience as crucial to a rhetor's success (Kennedy, 2007). This consideration means speculating about the audience's "expectations, knowledge, and dispositions with regard to the subject" (Ives and Crandall, 2014). Ives and Crandall (2014) go on to note that along with *speaker*, *message*, and *audience*, "Two other important elements make up the rhetorical

situation—the context in which writing or speaking occurs and the writer/speaker's purpose, or aim" (46-47).

Over the last few decades, as Ives and Crandall (2014) cite, "Many scholars of composition theory have worked to understand and explain the relationship between writers and their audiences and the strategies writers use to accommodate actual and/or imagined readers' expectations, knowledge, and dispositions toward their subject matter" (47). Out of this scholarship have come two distinct rubrics of conceptualizing *audience*, according to Ede and Lunsford (1984)— *audience addressed* and *audience invoked*.

In explaining *audience addresse*d, Ede and Lunsford (1984) write, "Those who envision audience as addressed emphasize the concrete reality of the writer's audience; they also share the assumption that knowledge of this audience's attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential" (156). Ede and Lunsford (1984) go on to note that many who see audience as addressed have been influenced by the strong tradition of "audience analysis" that comes out of the discipline of Speech-Communication (now Communication Studies). Thus, viewing audience as addressed is familiar to the Communication Studies student, who was likely taught the importance of demographic and psychological audience analysis, as well as the importance of the rhetorical situation. [4]

In contrast to *audience addressed* is the notion of the *audience invoked*. In his essay entitled "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," Ong (1975) argued that

[4]It is commonplace for public speaking textbooks to contain a chapter on Audience Analysis, which examines demographic, psychological, and situational elements of an audience. For example, see Chapter 5, "Audience Analysis" in Grice and Skinner, 2013.

whether or not a writer was composing a text for an "addressed audience" or not, "the writer's audience is always a fiction":

> What do we mean by saying the audience is a fiction? Two things at least. First, that the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role . . . Second, we mean that the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. (12)

Ong (1975) refers to the fictionalized audience as "the audience that fires the writer's imagination" (10), and he explains that when writers fictionalize an audience they "give body to the audience for whom [they] write" (10). Ede and Lunsford (1984) crystalize this idea when they note, "the writer uses the semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help to define the role or roles the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text" (160). In so doing a rhetor is envisioning an "audience invoked" (Ede and Lunsford, 1984).

In summarizing their stance toward "audience," Ede and Lunsford (1984) argue that both *audience addressed* and *audience invoked* are essential to an informed comprehension of "audience." They agree with Park's (1982) observation that the meanings of audience, though varied and complicated:

> tend to diverge in two general directions: one toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate; the other toward the text itself and the audience implied there: a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners. (249)

Ede and Lunsford (1984) ultimately conclude that neither *audience addressed* nor *audience invoked* is sufficient in and of itself to explain the complexity of audiences in specific rhetorical situations: "The most complete understanding of audience thus involves a synthesis of the perspectives we have termed audience addressed, with its focus on the reader, and audience invoked, with its focus on the writer" (p. 167).

For my purposes I will look at both conceptualizations of "audience," beginning with the *audience addressed* and then moving to the *audience invoked*. For my analysis of Larkin's *audience addressed*, I will utilize four primary sources—the book proposal Larkin (2005) wrote that was submitted to his publisher; Larkin's (2006) book; Larkin's (2012) speech; and, an online survey Brown (2012) conducted of 2,500 *Samson Society* members.

Audience Addressed

To discover the audience Larkin believes he is addressing in his rhetoric, I begin by examining the book proposal he constructed for the purpose of persuading his publisher to accept his book for publication. Dated August 9, 2005, this document is entitled "A Book Proposal: Brother Samson and the Pirate Monks—a true adventure."[5] In this document, Larkin (2005) begins by laying out his "premise":

> Most men in modern society spend their lives essentially alone, striving to become self-sufficient. Married Christian men typically focus any hopes for deep companionship on one person—their wife—and try to overcome privately whatever difficulties she might not understand. The purpose of this book is to

[5]Larkin's (2006) book title, *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*, ended up being very similar to this proposed title.

> describe, with humility and humor, an exciting biblical alternative, an emerging culture of teamwork and authentic male friendship that is reinvigorating men and reviving their relationships. (1)

In the preceding passage Larkin (2005) provides a first window into the audience he believes he is addressing—they are men who are "alone, striving to become self-sufficient." They also consist of men who need other men to help them overcome "whatever difficulties" their wives "might not understand." Thus, in the "premise" of his book proposal Larkin (2005) envisions addressing an audience with unfulfilled needs—the need to be understood, and, the need for male friends.

Following the laying out of his "premise" Larkin (2005) provides an overview of: 1) what he hopes to accomplish with his book, including the provision of "core materials created by my group of friends, the Samson Society"; and, 2) an overview of the manuscript.

In the introduction to his overview of the manuscript Larkin (2005) describes his writing style:

> I approach the reader conversationally, obliquely, writing in the first person, employing sensory imagery and making incongruous connections, changing tempo and moving from scene to scene in a manner designed to appeal to an audience conditioned by MTV. (2)

In this section of his book proposal Larkin (2005) offers a demographic clue to his *audience addressed*—"an audience conditioned by MTV." According to Pauling (2008) the primary audience that has been conditioned by the television station "Music

Television" (MTV) is "Generation X," the segment of the population born between 1961 and 1981. This would put Larkin's (2005) comment in the context of an audience ranging in age from twenty-five to forty-five at the time of the proposed publication of his book (i.e., 2006). This is in line with the following passage from "The Market" section of Larkin's (2005) book proposal:

> Judging from the current demographics of the Samson Society, the primary audience for this book will be highly functional Christian men 25-50 with at least a high school education. Many will be church dropouts. Married or single, most will be Internet users. (3)

In the preceding passage Larkin (2005) provides several specific demographic references to his *audience addressed*: as he sees them they are Christian, men, between the ages of twenty-five to fifty, at least high school educated, many of whom have "dropped out" of church, and many of whom use the Internet.

Larkin (2005) continues describing his *audience addressed* in the section of his book proposal sub-titled "Motivations":

> Most men who buy this book and recommend it to others will consider themselves Christians despite their troubled relationship with the church. Many will have battled (perhaps secretly) a destructive compulsive tendency such as workaholism, sexual obsession, drug addiction, anxiety, or rage. The book's direct appeal is its description of a strong male Christian fellowship where human weakness is not considered a handicap. It offers authenticity and hope to men who feel themselves falling toward cynicism because of repeated failures in their

private lives. Most women who buy the book as a gift will be among the millions who attend church each week without their husband, son or boyfriend.

Following this paragraph of "motivations" for his *audience addressed* is a listing of "Affinity Groups" that Larkin (2005) believes comprise the demographics of future readers of his publication:

1. Men who attended Promise Keepers -- once.
2. People who liked "Blue Like Jazz."
3. Members and alumni of Young Life.
4. Subscribers to Relevant magazine.
5. Christian fans of U2 and Switchfoot.
6. Subscribers to the website xxxchurch.com.
7. Subscribers to the website emergentvillage.com.
8. Members of recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous.
9. Fans of Anne Lamott.
10. Members of Christian motorcycle clubs.
11. Fans of John Eldredge.
12. People who liked David Murrow's "Why Men Hate Going to Church."
13. Men who didn't finish reading "The Purpose-Driven Life".
14. Pastors still looking for an effective way to reach men.
15. Women who listen to "Focus on the Family" but whose husbands, sons, brothers or bosses don't.

It is not common in doing academic research to have access to such specific information regarding a rhetor's sense of the audience he or she is addressing. Typically a researcher would be subject to making educated assumptions, trying to find ways of gathering demographic and psychological information that was used as part of a rhetor's audience analysis, or relying on third party data that may have been collected regarding "readership." In this case, through the procurement of Larkin's (2005) book proposal and Brown's (2012) online survey, I am able to precisely enumerate the specific elements of the audience Larkin is seeking to address with his rhetoric.

To summarize the demographic and psychological information that Larkin (2005) discusses and Brown (2012) notes in his summary of the online survey of two thousand five hundred *Samson Society* members, Larkin's *audience addressed* includes men who: 1) are predominantly white, middle class, evangelical Protestant, and between the ages of twenty-five to fifty; 2) are engaged with evangelical Protestant web sites; 3) "consider themselves Christians" but do not have satisfying relationships with "church"; 4) are in some kind of "recovery" from addiction, or, who have at least struggled with the types of issues that men seek "recovery" from; 5) listen to "Christian rock music"; 6) grew up involved in an evangelical Protestant youth group, either at their family's church or through a parachurch youth ministry; and, 7) if they are evangelical Protestant pastors, are seeking strategies for engaging their male congregants in the life of their church.

Audience Invoked

While discovering and articulating the specifics of an *audience addressed* is helpful in understanding a rhetor's persuasive strategies, to complete my analysis I will

now turn to Larkin's *audience invoked*. In doing so I will answer the following questions articulated by Ives and Crandall (2014), and rephrased for my purposes: What kind of audiences "fire the imagination" of Larkin? What language does he use to embody his audience in his rhetoric? What are the linguistic "cues" Larkin gives to his audience regarding how he conceptualizes them? What roles does Larkin signal for the audience of his rhetoric?

In the opening lines of the Introduction to his book, Larkin (2006) provides the first glimpse into his *audience invoked*:

> My name is Nate, but you can call me Samson. That's the code name my friends have given me, and for reasons you'll eventually understand, I've given the same symbolic name to each of them. We are the Samson Society. (xi)

By starting his book off this way Larkin (2006) invokes the role of "friend" for his audience. Letting the audience know what they can call him (i.e., Samson), which turns out to be what his friends call him, puts readers in a similar position. Thus, Larkin (2006) is invoking a "friend" role as his first audience conceptualization. In addition, he is inferring to his audience that they too are deserving of the same symbolic name—*Samson*—which they will come to identify with in time. These roles as "friend" and "Samson" are also made explicit on the *Samson Society* web site (2015). In the upper left-hand corner, underneath the title "Samson Society," is the subtitle "Friendship and Discipleship for Men" (See Appendix K).

Following these initial cues of how Larkin (2006) imagines his audience he provides another cue—one that describes a fundamental role for his *audience invoked*:

> This is the story of how it (the formation of the *Samson Society*) happened, presented with random commentary about subjects as diverse as Linux, the Bible, baseball, and the killing of Julius Caesar. I can promise you one thing: the story isn't boring. (xii)

Right from the start, by describing his story as not "boring," Larkin is setting up his audience for an eventful "adventure," during which he will serve as the "tour guide." In doing so Larkin (2006) is invoking a role for his audience—traveling companion. This is a role that is indirectly and directly alluded to throughout Larkin's (2006) narratives, as well as on the *Samson Society* web site and Podcast (*Samson Society,* 2015). Larkin (2006) refers to the men he met at his first Sex Addicts Anonymous 12-Step meetings as "companions" (49). His first "distinction" in the masculine ideology narrative, which I will be analyzing in Chapter Four of this dissertation, is "Isolation vs. Companionship" (66). The *Samson Society* web site (2015), in describing members as "Traveling Companions" notes, "Samson guys are traveling-companions on a great spiritual adventure" (See Appendix K). In the Charter of the *Samson Society*, the "Silas relationship" is described in Stage Two of "The Path": "I start attending meetings of the Society, and from its members I select a *Silas*, a trustworthy traveling companion for this stretch of the road" (Original emphasis, Larkin, 2006, 132). In the "Samson Society Meeting Format" (See Appendix J), read at the beginning of a typical local meeting of the ministry, and found in Larkin's (2006) book, it states, "Our purpose is to assist one another in our common journey" (205-206). At the end of a typical local meeting, a member reads from the same materials:

> Just as our Lord's first disciples were sent into the world two-by-two, we too should look for at least one Christian companion, a fellow traveler and advisor with whom to share this stretch of the road. We call that person a Silas"(Larkin, 2006, 207).

In addition, during every episode of the "Pirate Monk Radio" podcast that Larkin and his friends produce they read the same invocation from the meeting format materials. In sum, throughout his rhetoric and the rhetoric of the *Samson Society* the role of "traveling companion" is commonly invoked by Larkin.

In further examining Larkin's (2006) rhetoric it becomes clear how he creates his readers, that is, how he communicates to them the "knowledge, interests, attitudes, and values" he expects his audience to take up (Ives and Crandall, 2014). For example, the audience Larkin's (2006) book embodies is one that, to some degree, has knowledge of or curiosity about growing up as the son of a pastor in a particular time and place. Larkin (2006) demonstrates this in his book by interspersing numerous episodes from his childhood, describing his father's disciplining of his children as "lightning-quick and stinging" (17). He talks about being "one of those Christians who grew up in church," noting, "In fact, as far as I can tell, I was *conceived* in a church" (Original emphasis, Larkin, 2006, 15). He talks about how hard his father had to work, along with the challenging financial reality of a pastor's family:

> The churches he served in those days were small blue-collar congregations, never big enough or rich enough to support a married preacher with a growing family.

> . . . He worked hard and preached hard. He did not take vacations, and he never played. I played, but not with him. (16)

Larkin (2006) writes that he came from a long line of dysfunctional patriarchs, and he is writing for an audience that recognizes and appreciates the pain evoked in the rhetoric he uses to convey this troubled legacy. Larkin (2006) discusses the lineage of "troubled fathers" he inherited from both sides of his family—his paternal grandfather was a "bitter backslider, irresponsible and unfaithful," while his maternal grandfather "had terrorized his family with towering rages" (27).

Larkin's (2006) choice to describe his childhood this way implies at least two things about his *audience invoked*. First, he hopes to invoke readers from families that struggled financially. Second, his wish is for an audience that will understand and appreciate the consequences of growing up with an emotionally distant, workaholic father who passed down a legacy of troubled patriarchs.

Another fundamental way Larkin imagines his audience can be found in the linguistic cues he provides surrounding his description of both 12-Step meetings and meetings of the *Samson Society*. While the concept of "confidentiality" is clearly articulated in Larkin's (2006) recounting of 12-Step meetings, as well as *Samson Society* meetings, he nevertheless provides a window into this private world. In doing so he places his audience in the role of "voyeur"—giving them access to something that is understood as *confidential* and *sacrosanct* at the time it happens. Examples are found throughout Larkin's (2006) book and Larkin's speech (2012), where he offers his audience linguistic cues to "come on in and take a look around" recovery meetings. In a

section of his book entitled, "My First Meeting," Larkin (2006) provides the play-by-play of what was said, as in this passage:

> "Hello! My name is Joe, and I'm a sex addict." "Hi Joe!" said everyone else. Hi *loser*, I thought. "Let's open this meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the Serenity Prayer." (Original emphasis, 48)

The "greater good" Larkin believes he is accomplishing by invoking a voyeuristic role for his audience, and sharing the byplay of 12-Step and *Samson Society* meetings, is clearly demonstrated throughout his rhetoric. In his book and his speech he shares intimate details, albeit anonymously, of 12-Step meetings and *Samson Society* meetings. He follows these descriptions up by writing often of the *positive impact* of 12-Step recovery and the *Samson Society*:

> Bit by bit, as I continued to attend meetings, make phone calls, and work and rework my way through the Twelve Steps, I came to terms with the world and myself. As I did, my destructive sexual compulsions gradually subsided. I could still feel the tug of temptation from time to time, but the urges lost their power when I shared them with my friends. (Larkin, 2006, 106).

In his speech Larkin (2012) touts the benefits of 12-Step recovery meetings, after having shared (anonymously) with his audience the inner workings of these meetings:

> But I do want to say, if, uh, especially to pastors, if you're in this room and you have never been to let's say an A.A. meeting, get thee to an A.A meeting. Go! I can guarantee there are hundreds of them within just a few miles of this place. Find an open meeting. Go in, sit down, shut up and listen. I'm so grateful that

> God used twelve-step recovery to pluck me from disaster, to set me on a new path. Twelve-step recovery opened doors and windows on the gospel that I had never seen. Put that together with some great gospel preaching in a new church, unbelievable how my life changed.

Ultimately, by preserving the confidentiality of his subjects Larkin is trying to cast his *audience invoked* as "voyeurs" who get to witness the "work" of recovery meetings, without compromising the integrity of the meeting process and its participants. As such, Larkin is able to utilize an otherwise forbidden venue for an outside audience to champion the life-changing effects of 12-Step recovery and the *Samson Society*.

Larkin takes the "voyeur" role of his *audience invoked* one step further during the "Pirate Monk Radio" podcast. During these digitally recorded broadcasts, Larkin and various members of the *Samson Society* conduct a "mini-meeting," during which they discuss a variety of topics. In providing this window into the operation of a *Samson Society* meeting, Larkin explicitly casts his listening audience in the role of "voyeur." The difference is that all of those being recorded have willingly given up their anonymity, ostensibly for the greater good that is supposed to come from sharing their wisdom.

The last role I will discuss is the role of "Christian brother" that Larkin invokes for his audience. This role is quite straightforward and perhaps the most obvious, as the subtitle of Larkin's (2006) book suggests—Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood. Larkin (2006) writes, "Today I understand (most of the time) that I am a man among men. I need my brothers and my brothers need me" (76). There are at least thirty-nine

other references Larkin (2006) makes to "brothers" and the "brotherhood" in his book. Ultimately, the linguistic cues Larkin (2006) provides regarding this role cast his audience as "brothers" who are invoked into the "authentic Christian brotherhood" created by the *Samson Society*.

One role Larkin does not completely cast his audience in is that of "David," the redeemed biblical hero who is Samson's counterpart throughout Larkin's (2012; 2006) rhetoric. The role of "David," as my upcoming analysis will indicate is the preferred masculinity of Larkin's ministry; however, in order to take on the "David" role, one must become a successful and learned member of the *Samson Society*. Thus, it makes sense that Larkin would not totally invoke this role for his audience, as they are assumed to be primarily prospects and not established and practicing members of the *Samson Society*.

Summary and Conclusions of "Audience"

In the preceding discussion of Larkin's (2012; 2006) rhetoric I examined both conceptualizations of "audience," beginning with *audience addressed* and then moving to *audience invoked*. What I discovered is that in his book proposal Larkin (2005) describes in detail the audience he wants to address—evangelical Protestant men, between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, who are seeking an authentic faith life in the company of like-minded men. This demographic description of his audience identifies a group that could be constituted as a society of Christian "brothers," who meet regularly and co-create "authentic Christian brotherhood." This formation into a constituted society is sustained by the rhetorical means Larkin employs—casting his *invoked* audience into the roles of "friend," "Samson," "traveling companion," "voyeur," and "Christian brother."

CHAPTER 3

The Life-Story Narrative of Nate Larkin

Having discussed the notion of "audience" I will now turn my attention to the *narratives* of Larkin's rhetoric. The first narrative I will analyze is the life-story of Nate Larkin. The primary location of this narrative is offered by Larkin (2006) in his book. As such, I will begin my analysis with a logistical overview of Larkin's (2006) book. Next, I will go through a brief description of the elements of the title. I will then focus the majority of my analysis on the rhetoric found in Larkin's (2006) book; however, in his foundational speech Larkin (2012) briefly mentions his life-story narrative and as such, I will also provide a review of that section of his speech.

Logistics

Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood, was written by Nate Larkin and published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. in 2006. It is available in written form, as well as in digital form as an e-book in Apple, Inc.'s iBooks library. The publisher, Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishes popular Christian authors, including Billy Graham and Max Lucado. The company, now owned by publishing magnate HarperCollins, also is one of the world's largest publishers of the Bible.

Larkin divides his book into four parts. The first section is entitled "Confessions of a Preacher's Kid," and it contains the first five chapters. The second section is entitled, "I, Samson," and it contains two chapters. The third part is entitled, "A New Way of Life," and it contains two chapters. The fourth section is entitled, "The Pirate Monks," and it contains the last three chapters.

The Title of the Book

Larkin's (2006) book is entitled, *Samson and the Pirate Monks: Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*. There are six components to this title: 1) Samson; 2) Pirate Monks; 3) Calling; 4) Men; 5) Authentic; and, 6) Brotherhood. What follows is a brief discussion of these components, based on the contents of the book and my interview with the author (Larkin, 2014).

Samson

For his purposes Larkin (2006) is referencing the biblical character Samson from the Old Testament. Specifically, he frames Samson as an actual historical figure, as opposed to a mythical or archetypal character, whose life story is laid out in some detail in Judges, chapters thirteen to sixteen (*NIV Bible*, 2015). Such treatment is congruent with the greater evangelical Protestant narrative that treats biblical figures as real, historical people, and it serves to provide Larkin with an easily recognizable ethos. [6]

Larkin's (2006) choice of the Samson character was influenced by two factors. First, there was his childhood introduction to Samson, and interest in the character, through his father's reading of Bible stories:

> I first encountered (Samson) in the full-page color illustrations of *Egermeier's Bible Story Book* (Warner Press, 1969). In those pictures, Samson was the ideal man, striding through Canaan bare-chested, a housewife's dream. He had a

[6]Using the term "evangelical Protestant narrative" is not without difficulty, as defining a unified voice within evangelical Protestantism is easily contested (see Hackett and Lindsay, 2008); however, scholars who have studied evangelical Protestants have attempted to define the narrative components and in doing so, have generally found that having a "literal view of the Bible" is a core element of what it means to be an "evangelical Protestant" (see Barna, 2013; Hackett and Lindsay, 2008; Hart, 2004; Newport, 2005; Noll, 2011a; 2011b; 1994).

> fabulous physique, chiseled features, and great hair. Samson was invincible in battle and irresistible to women. By contrast, I was a skinny kid with glasses, very vincible in battle, and completely resistible to women. When my father closed the storybook and we all closed our eyes to pray, I sometimes imagined that I was Samson (Larkin, 2006, 61).

The effect of invoking childhood memories of his father reading the Samson narrative to his family is that it gives the reader a window into Larkin's childhood religious education and as such, it allows for the identification with Larkin's experience in a way that engenders sentimentality.

The second reason Larkin chose Samson is because of his self-described similarity to the biblical character. After attending his 12-Step Sex Addicts Anonymous group for several months Larkin (2006) decided to give himself the task of reading the Bible all the way through "for the very first time" (57). "There, unexpectedly, I encountered myself in the story of Samson" (Larkin, 2006, 57). As I will discuss later there are specific aspects of the life of Samson that Larkin compares himself to and as such, it is a primary reason for choosing to name his ministry the *Samson Society*.

The effect of utilizing Samson and treating him as an actual person who lived is powerful. Naming the ministry after a recognizable figure from the Old Testament of the Bible serves to identify the ministry as Judeo-Christian without an elaborate explanation. Prospective ministry members at a minimum are familiar with "Samson," and that familiarity can serve to peak Larkin's audience's interest. It can also provide a link to the biblical Samson for the contemporary evangelical Protestant man Larkin is recruiting. In

addition, Larkin has the luxury of enacting whatever aspect he desires of the biblical narrative of Samson. While Samson is not around to either condone or reject the use of his name, the simple act of appropriation goes unnoticed even as Larkin casts Samson in an unflattering light. The full use of "Samson" and the Samson narrative by Larkin will be further investigated during my upcoming analysis.

Pirate Monks

The second component of Larkin's (2006) book title is the use of the term "Pirate Monks." This term is actually a fairly straightforward characterization Larkin makes of the prototypical "sinner-saint," as he explained in the following passage:

> It was also at the pub, about a year after we started, that our group gained its nickname. By this time, our weekly gathering had grown to about twenty-five guys, and the meeting-after-the meeting was taking up half the pub. What happened that night was probably inevitable. Eventually, if you cram enough guys into one room and give some of them beer, somebody is going to start talking like a pirate . . . Scott Dente broke the silence. "I've got it!" he said. "What?" asked Joe. "The two words that perfectly describe the Samson Society! Pirate Monks!" "Aaaarrrggghh!" said Joe grinning. "Aaaarrrggghhh!" we all cried, raising our mugs in a raucous salute to the brotherhood of sinner-saints. (124)

The formation of the *Samson Society*, and Larkin's first group of "Pirate Monks," will be further discussed during the analysis of the narrative Larkin provides regarding the creation of his ministry.

Calling

The third aspect of Larkin's (2006) book title is the term "calling." By using this term Larkin is implying two things. First, that there is a "caller," and second, that there is an audience being called. As the author of the book it would seem obvious that Larkin is doing the "calling." In writing and having the book published he is clearly inviting men to join his cause—he is promoting a "call to action."

There is another potential "caller" for this particular audience, and that entity is the Christian God. The term "calling" has a rich history among evangelical Protestants, and it is for this reason that I argue Larkin chose this word. The idea that God is calling someone to act in a certain way resonates with many prospective and current members of the *Samson Society*. Max Weber famously characterized the "modern calling" more than a hundred years ago when he wrote, "One of the constitutive components of the modern capitalist spirit, and moreover, generally of modern civilization, was the rational organization of life on the basis of the *idea of the calling***.** It was born out of the spirit of *Christian asceticism*" (Original emphases, Weber, 2002, 122). More recently, as Williams (2013) noted in his research findings, "The idea of a calling is also alive and well among evangelical Christians" (255). Thus, by using a term (calling) with such a rich and identifiable history among his prospective audience Larkin (2006) imbued the title of his book with an easily recognizable and salient belief for many evangelical Protestant men.[7] Ultimately, he tapped into an aspect of an evangelical Protestant

[7] The idea of a "calling" is a common theme within parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries (See: Cole, 1982; McCartney and Diles, 1995; and, Morley, 1989). An example is found in the Promise Keepers' Statement of Faith, which describes the Great Commission so prominent in evangelical Protestant

narrative and invited his audience to inquire if God were indeed calling them to read his book and join his cause. If so, then an audience member would be wise not to ignore "God's voice" and to instead, heed "God's call."

Men

The fourth component of Larkin's title makes it clear his ministry is for men. While a woman might not be discouraged from reading the book, the ministry Larkin is promoting is exclusively comprised of men. The masculine ideology promoted by Larkin's ministry will be discussed in detail later in my analysis of the narratives.

Authentic

The fifth component of Larkin's title implies that his ministry is genuine. As a modifier of the next component (i.e., "authentic *brotherhood*"), Larkin is implying that his ministry is not "fake" or "untrue." A reader seeking a ministry that is authentic is being told that it can be found within the *Samson Society*. In addition, a reader is being told that Larkin's particular *brand* of Christianity is authentic (i.e., his theology is correct, as opposed to others that may not be).

Brotherhood

The sixth and final component of Larkin's book title is "brotherhood." This component provides the reader with an idea that Larkin is promoting some type of association. But what type of collection of individuals is being suggested? The answer is obvious—a family. By interpellating *Samson Society* members as "brothers" and the

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rhetoric, "Our primary *calling* is to communicate the Gospel to everyone in our generation and nurture disciples. Nothing must divert us from carrying out our Lord's Great Commission until His glorious return to reign in righteousness" (Emphasis added, See Appendix G).

ministry as a "brotherhood," Larkin engages Charland's (1987) first ideological effect, providing men an identity with inherent motives and interests to which Larkin can appeal. A "brother" has "brothers" and therefore must inevitably belong to a "family." While members of a family may have differences, they also have something in common. In this case what they have in common is a shared belief in Larkin's cause (i.e., authentic brotherhood), as well as a shared belief in evangelical Protestantism. I will elaborate further on the importance of "brotherhood" in my analysis of the narrative surrounding the formation of the *Samson Society*, as I did in my discussion of *audience addressed* and *audience invoked* in the previous chapter.

Narrative 1—Larkin's Life-Story

The title of "Part One" of Larkin's (2006) book is, "Confessions of a Preacher's Kid." As the title of this four-chapter section suggests the narrative Nate Larkin presents of his life-story is a carefully confessed selection of his personal and family history. It is written in a self-described effort to render his story instructive and beneficial to himself and others (Larkin, 2012). As I will demonstrate, and as history has shown through the birth and growth of his ministry, he accomplishes both of the aforementioned purposes. Larkin does this through laying out for the reader in great detail what I identify as his personal cycle of Burkean guilt-purification-redemption. His guilt revolves around his self-described sex addiction, and he discusses it frequently throughout his book. I begin this part of my analysis by focusing on Larkin's guilt, moving on next to the purification of his guilt, and finishing with his redemption.

Guilt

For Burke (1966), guilt is symbolized through three sources. First, human symbol using inevitably results in some kind of social order—namely hierarchy. Guilt about one's place within this hierarchy develops over time, whether one feels guilty about being privileged and too high, or guilty for not having risen higher or high enough. Second, because language allows humans to create the concept of the negative, rules are developed, often in the form of "thou-shalt-nots." Inevitably these rules are broken, since no one is capable of upholding all of the rules. Thus, failure and disobedience result in guilt. Third, within symbol use is the inevitable perfectionistic tendency whereby humans create terms designating ultimate states of perfection. Because they will inevitably fall short of these ideals, guilt follows. For Larkin, all three sources of guilt are elaborated in his life-story narrative, and the following is a discussion of each one.

Hierarchy

Early in his life-story narrative Larkin (2006) describes his childhood and early adulthood understanding of Christian hierarchy:

> I thought that preachers and church leaders were Christians for whom personal sin had become a thing of the past, leaving only semi-sins such as speeding or grouchiness to serve as sermon illustrations. I believed that big league Christians devoted their days to prayer and Bible study. They no longer experienced fleshly desires because their flesh had been transfigured long ago. (7)

Larkin spends time in the early part of his life-story narrative conveying, through baseball metaphors, his belief that he was not able to live up to the demands of being a "big league

Christian," primarily due to his personal struggles with lust. As a result, prior to becoming a pastor he thought of himself as below these "big leaguers," and he expressed his guilt and disappointment: "My dream was to play in the big leagues someday, but I wasn't sure how to get there. Nobody seemed to want to play catch, and I couldn't get the hang of the game" (8).

Once he became a pastor Larkin moved in the other direction with his guilt. By becoming what he refers to as a "professional Christian," Larkin goes from feeling guilty about his inability to make it to the "big leagues," to being the proud, invaluable clergyman:

> The life of a pastor was intoxicating and isolating. I was now a professional holy man, the man with the answers, and the expert on all things spiritual. A meeting of the church wasn't official unless I was present, and the ideas of other did not become plans without my blessing. People listened when I spoke. I was marriage counselor, professor, confessor, and leader of the expedition. I was indispensable, and I was *very* impressed with myself. (Original emphasis, 13)

Unfortunately, according to Larkin (2006), his esteemed position within the Christian hierarchy was fraudulent, and any guilt he may have felt in holding such an esteemed position over his congregation was supplanted by the guilt he felt in violating a series of "thou-shalt-nots." The following two episodes from his life-story narrative convey the guilt he eventually experienced for his undeserving privilege.

The Negative

The first episode concerns "an outing sponsored jointly by the seminary and a feminist group called Women Against Pornography" (Larkin, 2006, 9) that Larkin attended with his wife while he was studying to be a pastor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He describes the event in this passage:

> I got my first look at hardcore pornography with my wife sitting beside me in one of those tiny blackened booths. The flickering images disgusted us both and we couldn't wait to get outside. But at the same time, somewhere deep inside me I could feel a strange and beckoning fascination, as though a cellar door had been opened. Those images lit a fire in me that would burn uncontrollably for nearly twenty years, a fire that smolders still. (9-10)

That the seminary, the institution charged with training Larkin theologically and professionally, would provide him with the opportunity to view hardcore pornography, in the presence of his wife no less, in an effort to reinforce the immorality of said pornography, is particularly ironic. Larkin (2006) framed this episode as transformative and life changing. "Overnight . . .I soon found myself venturing alone . . . in search of this powerful new drug" (Larkin, 2006, 10). While this was clearly not the intention of the seminary or the Women Against Pornography, it was nevertheless a kairotic moment for Larkin, and an ironic twist to his life-story narrative.

Larkin (2006) describes what happened after this trip:

> A shameful cycle quickly developed. It would begin with a feeling of emptiness or dissatisfaction, followed quickly by a craving for relief . . . On one of these

> forays, I stepped out of a peepshow booth and almost bumped into an assistant professor from the seminary. I immediately turned and fled, praying he hadn't recognized me, but a few days later he accosted me in the theological library. He said it was good to know that I was open-minded, and he wanted me to understand that his wife was fully aware of his activities. It made their marriage more interesting. Did my wife feel the same way? I blanched, suddenly remembering that our wives had met. No, I told him, she most certainly didn't. Well then, he said conspiratorially, we both had a very good reason to keep this matter quiet, didn't we?

The irony of both his introduction to hardcore pornography and his "bumping into" his professor is not lost on Larkin. The anxiety he felt following both incidents is conveyed in his writing and it sets the stage for his increasing guilt.

The second episode from Larkin's life-story narrative concerns his initial foray into prostitution one Christmas Eve night. Larkin (2006) describes it as follows:

> It was a cold night, unusual for south Florida. I was on my way to preach at a candlelight service in a chapel downtown when I saw a girl in a thin coat walking along the avenue. I pulled over to give her a ride. She got in, shivering, and thanked me. Within seconds she had propositioned me, offering oral sex for twenty bucks. As it happened, I had a twenty-dollar bill in my wallet that was earmarked for the offering plate. My heart was in my throat. I said yes, and she showed me where to park. (14)

Larkin (2006) goes on to recount the aftermath of the episode, writing he was "panic-stricken and sick with guilt" (14). The fact that Larkin's initial foray into prostitution happened on one of the Christian Church's most important days is framed by Larkin (2006) as particularly sad and situationally ironic. It also clearly conveys the intensity of Larkin's transgression to his audience, as he has not just acted out against his Christian marital covenant; he has also desecrated a day full of deep religious symbolism for Christians—the eve of the birth of their savior. Thus, this life-story episode serves as a striking example of Burke's second source of guilt—the negative (i.e., "thou-shalt-nots").

That he would continue to seek out prostitutes following this initial incident of infidelity was, according to Larkin (2006), inevitable. "I had been unfaithful to my wife, and no matter how guilty I felt about it I would do it again. That much I knew" (14). The inevitability Larkin refers to can be framed, in Burkean terms, as consistent with the unavoidable and ever-repeating nature of the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption (Burke, 1970, 223). It can also be viewed as what Burke (1969a) defined as "true irony":

> True irony, however, irony that really does justify the attribute of "humility," is not "superior" to the enemy ... True irony, humble irony, is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one *needs* him, is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within,* being consubstantial with him. (514)

Larkin's consubstantiality with his guilt can be seen in how he predicts his future bad behavior as "inevitable," as well as with his use of "shame" in the aftermath of both his initial pornography episode and his initial prostitution episode. By describing the

inevitability of his guilt (i.e., I feel bad for my *behavior*) and his shame (i.e., I am a *bad person*), Larkin reinforces the fundamental ontological principle of "original sin" within the Christian narrative. This emphasis transitions into Burke's third source of guilt—perfection.

Perfection

For Burke (1970) humans express conceptualizations of perfection in symbols; specifically, through the "search for the title of titles," a "secular summarizing term," or a "god-term" (25). In Larkin's (2006) case his perfection, his "god-term," is *integrity*, and it is situated within a narrative that argues for the primacy of clerical and personal perfection and integrity (i.e., pastors are expected to uphold the values and principles of the faith without disobedience and personal failure[8]). It was also, as Larkin had initially defined it, unattainable. As such, his pursuit of it would eventually lead him back to feelings of guilt, as this passage captures:

> Determined to fix myself, I pored over popular devotional books during my study times—especially books about holiness and victorious living—hoping to find the magic combination of concepts and disciplines that would enable me to reclaim my integrity . . . I kept pledging to do better, but the resurgence of hope I felt with every fresh start was soon overwhelmed by another failure and a tidal wave of despair. I simply could not achieve integrity. (40)

To absolve one's guilt first requires its symbolization in some form that makes it possible to confront it (Bobbitt, 2004). For Larkin, his episodes of infidelity culminated

[8]For a discussion of the narrative of clergy perfection, see Evers and Tomic, 2003; Lehr, 2006; Meek et. al., 2003; and, Morse, 2011.

in what he described as the "Death of a Fantasy," the title of his fourth chapter. He writes, "Finally, after five years in the ministry, I quit" (40). Giving up on his dream to be a pastor was demoralizing for him and he felt incredible guilt over it. Thus, Larkin's (2006) guilt is symbolized in his writing about leaving the ministry, and he summed up the situation this way:

> Eventually I reconciled myself to the ugly truth. I was a failure as a minister and a leader. I was a huge disappointment to everyone, especially God and Allie, and the best I could hope for was to live out the rest of my days in a moral and spiritual twilight. There was no hope for change. (42)

Persuading an audience to feel guilty in Burke's theory involves tapping into the ways in which that guilt is already situated. As Bobbitt (2004) noted:

> In Burke's theory guilt is inherent in human symbol-using activity. The guilt exists before the rhetor speaks. The rhetor's challenge is not to convince the audience of its guilt, but to symbolically manifest their preexistent guilt in a manner consistent with the sources of that guilt so it can be absolved through purification. (39)

For Larkin this is a relatively straightforward process, as "original sin" is a preexisting condition of Christians, and falling short in one's efforts to live a life of "integrity" is a fundamental source of Christian guilt already present in the evangelical Protestant narrative consciousness of Larkin's target audience.[9] As such, it acts constitutively, tapping into Charland's (1987) second ideological effect of a "pre-existing audience" by

[9]For a discussion of the Protestant narrative of "original sin" in the United States, see Finstuen (2009). For a cultural history of the narrative of "original sin," see Jacobs (2008).

reminding Larkin's Christian readers of one of the fundamental elements of their transhistorical Christian birthright—the burden of "original sin."

Purification

In Burke's theory, "Purification is the fulcrum of the process of guilt-purification-redemption" (Bobbitt, 2004, 41). Thus, it is the mediating process that transforms guilt into redemption. Burke (1966) focused on two primary forms of purification—mortification and victimage. Mortification involves some type of self-sacrifice. Carmack (2014) explained this process by noting, "Individuals symbolically offer something to society to restore balance, usually in the form of publicly acknowledging mistakes" (862). Victimage is "purification by sacrifice, by *vicarious atonement*, unburdening of guilt within by transference to chosen vessels without" (Original emphasis, Burke, 1966, 478). Thus, rhetors invoking victimage typically identify a scapegoat or villain to transfer guilt to (Carmack, 2014). Burke (1970) later compared these two forms of purification, noting that while mortification absolves guilt "suicidally" through self-punishment, victimage absolves guilt "homicidally" in the slaying of the scapegoat. Burke (1966) also noted that an important aspect of the purification process is choosing to perform a self-sacrifice *equal* to the sinful act (mortification), or, selecting an *appropriate* scapegoat or villain on who blame can be placed (victimage). Thus, the *proportionality* of guilt is important.

Two other types of Burkean purification have been identified and utilized in scholarship—transcendence and transformation—and both are applicable to Larkin's rhetoric. Transcendence was defined by Burke (1966) as "the building of a terministic

bridge whereby one realm is transcended by being viewed in terms of a realm 'beyond' it" (187). Thus, as Brummett (1982) noted, Burkean transcendence happens "when one redefines some action as part of a new higher context" (549). An example noted by Bobbitt (2004) was Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, in which he "transcends the physical and sociopolitical orders for the spiritual order when he speculates that the strife and bloodshed of the Civil War may be God's judgment upon the nation for the sin of slavery" (47). Transformation, a process of change and movement such as a "metamorphosis," while not necessarily fully developed by Burke in his theory of guilt, is nevertheless alluded to, as Rueckert (1982) noted in the following passage:

> Purification is always a process—movement and change—something is always expelled or sloughed off, and the end is always a change of some kind, whether physical, spiritual, or psychological. Of necessity, purification is almost always depicted by "active" or "process" images. (104)

Bobbitt (2004) described how in Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech King used transformation several times as a form of purification. For example, "King also speaks of the faith that will enable us 'to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood'" (59).

Mortification

Larkin (2006) uses mortification numerous times throughout his life-story narrative. The most common form is a personal "confession" of the behaviors associated with his sex addiction. Larkin (2006) described his first admission of guilt to his wife:

> One cool winter evening, after a weekend men's retreat where I had heard some guys tell their stories, I sat down with Allie and confessed the truth about my struggle with pornography . . . Telling the truth made me feel a lot better, and for a time the compulsion seemed to disappear. *Confession is the key to freedom*, I concluded. (Original emphasis, 12-13)

The next level of confession Larkin (2006) writes about is his attending 12-Step meetings. He writes in detail about the first Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) meeting he attended and the emotional stress he felt at the beginning: "I blushed and sat down. *Sex addicts*. The term sounded dirty, shameful" (Larkin, 2006, 48). Following the meeting Larkin (2006) conveyed the mixed outcome he experienced: "On one hand, I was not alone, and that was very good news. On the other hand, I was not unique. There was a term for guys like me—*sex addict*—and that was extremely disappointing" (Original emphasis, 49).

Larkin (2006) conveyed the purifying nature of his confessions as a significant part of his life-story narrative, as evidenced in the following passage in which he characterizes the effect of his 12-Step meeting attendance:

> After each confession they affirmed my courage and called me to a deeper level of honesty, humility, and trust. Bit by bit, as I continued to attend meetings, make phone calls, and work and rework my way through the Twelve Steps, I came to terms with the world and myself. As I did, my destructive sexual compulsions gradually subsided. I could still feel the tug of temptation from time to time, but the urges lost their power when I shared them with my friends. (106)

This thread of his life-story narrative functions as follows: Confess my "brokenness," at least to a trusted group of people, and thus, punish myself for my "sinful acts," risking humiliation, embarrassment, a blow to my reputation, etc., and, as a result I will be purified.

While attending meetings moved Larkin from confessing his sex addiction to his wife to confessing to a larger group of people, it is the act of writing and publishing his book (i.e., confessing his life-story narrative to the public) that is the ultimate act of mortification. The fact that he has made his life-story public through his book elevates his "self-punishment" from the confines of his marriage and his 12-Step associates to a potentially much wider audience. In doing so Larkin (2006) is conveying to his readers the magnitude of his feelings of guilt, and thus the extent to which he is willing to punish himself and sully his reputation.

Victimage

Early in his life-story narrative Larkin (2006) describes his adolescent struggle with puberty:

> The natural awakening of my sexual impulses was not a subject I could discuss openly with anyone, and its manifestations left me deeply ashamed. My involuntary and progressively obsessive interest in the female form—the rampaging thoughts and physical responses produced by the flood of new hormones—caused me indescribable distress. Sunday after Sunday I resolved to conquer lust, but the climate of shame and secrecy in my religious environment

forced me to battle the beast alone. On those terms the battle was unwinnable. (8)

Larkin characterizes his lust as a "beast," his sexual impulses having been a "natural awakening," and his interest in young women as "involuntary and progressively obsessive." He also casts blame on his "religious environment" for his inability to seek help and as such, scapegoats his church as partially responsible. Through these characterizations Larkin frames the early formation of his sex addiction as an unavoidable consequence of being male in an unresponsive and repressive religious milieu, and he scapegoats his guilt in a "not my fault" rhetoric that focuses blame on God for designing men and women a particular way, and, women for being so irresistible.

Larkin continued this scapegoating throughout his life-story narrative, referring frequently to his "lust" as a natural, inborn compulsion that had to be fought and tamed, and, the "pressures of the ministry" as preventing him from "coming clean" about his addiction. Eventually he corrals "the beast" as a result of the work he does in his S.A.A. 12-Step group and, as he noted, "For the first time in my adult life, I'm experiencing some victory over lust" (55). Thus, in his suffering through the consequences of his God-given challenge of overcoming "lust" in a restrictive and unhelpful environment, he has purified his guilt and made himself worthy of redemption.

Transcendence

As previously mentioned, throughout the early part of his life-story narrative Larkin (2006) discussed his failed attempts to achieve a faith life that was imbued with "integrity." Early on he writes, "My hopes for integrity were dealt a terrible blow by

puberty" (8). In discussing his thought process regarding entering the seminary he noted, "I had been regarding integrity as a precondition for entering the ministry . . . What if integrity is really a product of the ministry?" (9). Realizing he was a "sex addict," Larkin lamented, "I would never become a man of integrity" (49).

After framing his god-term "integrity" as an unattainable condition he felt guilt over, Larkin (2006) goes on to purify his guilt by transcending his definition of integrity in the following passage:

> In a later conversation, the same friend pointed out that my idea of integrity was unrealistic and unbiblical and that this basic misunderstanding had prevented me from experiencing the power and sweetness of the gospel . . . Yes it is true, he said, that God wants men of integrity. But integrity is not perfection. It is not completion. It is not even purity of intention, something that, frankly, we are all incapable of achieving. Rather, integrity is a combination of *rigorous honesty* about my own condition and *humble faith* in the steadfast love of God. (Original emphases, 57)

Brummett (1982) defined Burkean transcendence as "when one redefines some action as part of a new higher context" (549). For Larkin (2006), integrity took on a new meaning and purpose. No longer was it that unattainable state, just out of reach for the ordinary Christian. Instead, it was transcendently redefined as a *process* of confessing honestly and believing humbly, and its actual practice invoked a *higher* condition of Christian living. Thus, the guilt he felt over not being the "perfect" Christian was purified

transcendently through a reformulation of his "god-term," setting the stage in an additional way for his redemption.

Transformation

According to Rueckert (1982), Burke provided many images as agents of purification through change and movement, including: fire; journeys, pilgrimages, and quests; "movement of any kind from negatively charged to positively charged, such as . . . night to day, down to up"; the "act of unburdening or divesting" of any form; "imagery of ascent (mounting)"; and, dying and killing (105). Thus, transformation of guilt is another method of purification.

A final way that Larkin (2006) conveyed the purification of the guilt around his sex addiction is through personal change and transformation. Early on in his efforts to purify his guilt Larkin (2006) exclaimed, "the dragon is slain" (13). In reflecting on the effect of attending his first few 12-Step meetings Larkin (2006) wrote, "I am beginning to see real change in my character" (55). After several years of 12-Step meetings, Larkin (2006) noted, "The most powerful proof of God's existence was the transformation that was taking place in my character" (106).

Larkin (2006) also uses "movement" language when he writes often about his "recovery journey," and the "sanctification" that has taken place in his life. He summarizes his transformation in the following passage:

> My recent life journey has taught me that the expanding life of Christian liberty, the ongoing process of emancipation that the Bible calls sanctification, is not a

> death march to holiness. No, it's a dance—a beautiful and intoxicating dance that God leads. (127)

In describing his life journey this way, Larkin (2006) uses the metaphor of a "dance," with God in charge, to characterize his purifying transformation—a metamorphic "emancipation" no less. In addition, the juxtaposition of a "death march" with an "intoxicating dance" paints his transformation as movement and change in a positive and purifying direction.

Redemption

Having reviewed the various iterations of his guilt and the processes of purification for that guilt within his life-story narrative, I now turn to Larkin's (2006) writings concerning redemption—the "temporary state at the end of the cycle before it repeats" (Bobbitt, 2004, 61). Rueckert (1982) described it as follows: "Redemption as an achieved state is a moment of stasis, the still moment following the fusion and release of a symbol-induced catharsis" (137). Rueckert (1982) went on to describe redemption occurring when "a fusion at a higher level of discourse takes place to produce a perceived unity among many previously discordant ideas and things" (138).

The temporary state—the moment of "stasis" producing "a perceived unity"—for Larkin (2006) is described progressively throughout his life-story narrative. The first moment of redemption is captured in the following passage, where Larkin (2006) has just confessed for the first time to his wife the struggles he has had with pornography: "I promised to leave it all behind. Telling the truth made me feel a lot better, and for a time the compulsion seemed to disappear" (13).

Larkin (2006) goes on to recount his numerous failed attempts at "quitting" his sex addiction, only to lose that temporary "stasis" when he would relapse: "I was hunting desperately for a private solution to my private problem, and like the guy who lost his chewing gum in the henhouse, I thought I found it several times. Nothing, however, worked for very long" (40). Larkin (2006) continued to recall his endless cycle of guilt-purification-redemption, noting: "Throughout those turbulent years, my private prayers always began with the plaintive plea 'forgive me.' . . . I kept pledging to do better, but the resurgence of hope I felt with every fresh start was soon overwhelmed by another failure and a tidal wave of despair" (40). Later in his life-story narrative Larkin (2006) described what happened following his initial foray into 12-Step meetings—a two-month "abstinence" from acting out sexually that eventually ended in relapse:

> This first relapse was demoralizing. When I finally got around to telling my sponsor about it, he smiled and said that the crash was inevitable . . . That fabulous feeling that felt like sobriety had actually been a novel form of intoxication, a temporary euphoric state that is so common among recovering addicts that they have given it a name: "The Pink Cloud." (75)

Eventually Larkin achieved "sobriety" and as a result his cycles of guilt-purification-redemption changed in quality and character, but not necessarily in frequency. In the eighth chapter entitled, "The Rebirth of the Real Me," Larkin (2006) describes his cycles this way: "This new life of faith . . . feels very unnatural at times, awkward and frustrating. Learning to live this way is like learning to ski, only harder. I still fall down a lot" (95). He continues, referencing his "grace-filled" moments of

redemption: "But there are those times, between spills, when I find my balance and feel the pure joy of grace . . . until self-confidence overcomes me and I swerve into a tree" (95).

Another Venue for the Life-Story Narrative

As previously mentioned, evangelical Protestant men's ministries commonly use public speeches as a rhetorical venue in furthering their goals. As such, analyzing a speech by Nate Larkin is just as essential to understanding his rhetoric and the rhetoric of the *Samson Society* as investigating his book. Thus, I will be providing an analysis of how Larkin's (2012) speech differs from his book. To begin this process I will be looking at two sections in Larkin's speech where he conveys elements of his life-story narrative.

Selecting one of Nate Larkin's speeches for analysis was actually a very easy and straightforward process, and it involves engaging with the digital media of the *Samson Society*. Listed prominently on the left side of the web site of the *Samson Society* is a title, "I, Samson." Underneath the title is a link to a speech with the following description: "If you want to know how it all began, watch and listen as Nate Larkin delivers the foundational message of the Samson Society."[10] Not surprisingly, an important part of this speech consists of Larkin discussing elements of his life-story narrative.

This forty-five minute talk was recorded in front of a live audience at the Orlando 2012, Grace & Men Conference at Orangewood Church in Maitland, Florida, on January

[10]For a screen shot of this from the *Samson Society* web site, see Appendix L.

21, 2012.[11] The "Grace & Men Conference" is put on by a parachurch evangelical men's ministry called *The Gospel Man Fellowship*. According to Harvey Kirkpatrick, founder of *The Gospel Man Fellowship*, its conference is designed to:

> focus on this core issue of helping men see the Gospel of Grace as the foundation of their lives and frankly their only hope of living what we would call "a godly life"... and doing it together. It is my conviction that, for a few good and a few mistaken, even broken reasons, these truths are underemphasized in men's lives and sometimes men's ministry. (*Gospel Man*, 2015)

In addition, Kirkpatrick (2015) elaborated on what he hopes his conferences will continue to consist of, and what he hopes to accomplish with the events:

> There are key elements that I/we seek to have in our events: a man telling a story, his story versus primarily preaching a text; a man being more authentic and vulnerable than men are used to; a man being frank about his brokenness; a man explaining that the Gospel of Jesus' grace is not religious moralism which is what most men think it is; a man who is finding more joy and security in the Gospel than he has had before; a man willing to dialogue in Q&A (a beautiful thing I saw/experienced in the L'Abri conferences).

[11]Larkin's (2012) speech can be divided into five parts. The first part is his Introduction, where he provides his audience with a brief review of the strict religious upbringing aspect of his life-story narrative. The second part of the speech is very similar to a section of Larkin's (2006) book, in which he reviews the historical life-story narratives of Samson and David from the Old Testament of the Bible. The third part of the speech is also very similar to a section of Larkin's (2006) book. In this part he reiterates the "four distinctions between the lives of Samson and David" that he writes about in his book. The fourth part of the speech is Larkin's discussion of 12-Step recovery groups. The fifth and final part is Larkin's conclusion, in which he encourages his audience to attend a 12-Step recovery group meeting, and, he briefly mentions the *Samson Society*. For a complete transcript of the speech, see Appendix K.

As part of one of these conferences Nate Larkin's speech served two purposes. First, it offered him an opportunity to evangelize his ministry and recruit new members. Second, it was a contribution to a larger conference that had a purpose beyond the *Samson Society*. As such, it contributed to the larger goals of the *Gospel Man Fellowship's* event.

Growing up Larkin

The following is a transcript of the first two minutes of Larkin's speech in which he characterizes his childhood:

> I grew up in a church that was not very much at all like this one. I grew up in a little non-denominational denomination that came out of the "Holiness Tradition." We were very very serious about holiness, which we defined with a long list of things that real Christians do not do. So in the home that I was raised in we didn't smoke drink chew, or go with those who do. We didn't dance. We didn't listen to rock and roll on the radio. We didn't go to the movies. We didn't have a television. We didn't play baseball, any…we…on Sundays, we didn't play any game that involved a ball. No bicycles on Sundays. Couldn't play with the neighbor kids on Sundays. Not sure what that was about. We did not have any game in our house that involved the use of dice. No cards, of course, but also no dice, which ruled out Monopoly. Until we discovered the spinner! The spinner was legal. It was kinda like being raised by the Christian Taliban.

Larkin's introductory remarks serve several crucial rhetorical purposes: (1) They introduce the audience to Larkin's rhetorical style; (2) They provide the listeners with an

overview of his religious upbringing; and, (3) They suggest to the audience a direction in which Larkin is headed.

Larkin begins his speech by poking fun at the notion many small, Protestant churches subscribe to—namely that by not aligning with one of the major denominations the church is free from the shackles of denominational association. In reality, by creating its own structure with leadership, rules, regulations, policies and practices, the church is actually manufacturing its own scaled-down mini denomination. As a result the church embraces a belief in structural organizational difference from the larger, main-line Protestant denominations that in reality does not exist (i.e., they think they're different but they're really not.)

Pointing out such a paradox early in his introduction, which engenders a laugh among the live audience members, is an early indication by Larkin that he is willing to take chances with his rhetoric. The manner in which he does so is by poking fun at the irony of "nondenominationalism." Teasing in this instance opens him up to the possibility that members of the audience may be offended, as the venue he is speaking at is a self-described nondenominational church. Thus, Larkin demonstrates his willingness to risk alienating his audience, albeit in a minor and light-hearted manner. It also allows him to appeal to those who may be disaffected within his audience. In the end the payoff for this approach happens when he gets the laugh he was hoping for, engendering endearment among those in the live audience.

In describing the "Holiness Tradition," Larkin provides the audience with his rhetorical experience of a particular theology that members of the audience, both live and

those watching the video after the fact, are likely familiar with. Using a popular colloquialism—"we didn't smoke drink chew, or go with those who do"—allows Larkin to succinctly sum up a piece of his family of origin's theological narrative. He goes on to personalize his childhood environment by listing the rules he was forced to follow, including one that does not make sense to him—"Couldn't play with the neighbor kids on Sundays. Not sure what that was about."

In less than two minutes Larkin has introduced himself to the audience by choosing to relay, with humorous overtones, the restrictive Christian environment he grew up in. In doing so he lets the audience into the beliefs, attitudes, and values that shaped his childhood, allowing those with whom he shares such an upbringing to identify with the narrative. Those who do not share his upbringing are then moved to sympathy for him, as he characterizes his early life as tantamount to "being raised by the Christian Taliban." Invoking such a metaphor crystalizes his description in a way that carries with it great rhetorical power, introducing Larkin as both an identifiable hero and sympathetic agent in this rhetorical situation.

In addition to orienting the audience to where he came from religiously, painting such an oppressive picture creates an opportunity for Larkin to describe the evolution of his beliefs. It also creates a rhetorical anticipation in which the audience may wonder what the result of such restrictions was on his life. Thus, the trajectory of his values could only have been away from such a stifling environment, as no one in his or her right mind and with freedom to choose would continue to subject him- or herself to such an oppressive personal system. Ultimately, the "feed forward" nature of his introductory

remarks allows Larkin to set the stage for the sharing of his personal story, while creating curiosity among the audience who undoubtedly require an answer to the question, "So how did he turn out after all?"

In the second half of the introduction of his speech Larkin presents his audience with his subject, the "biblical superhero," Samson:

> Now another thing that we didn't do in our house was we did not buy or read comic books. There was no Superman, no Batman, no Green Lantern in our house growing up. My father had no use at all for caped superheroes in tights. The only superheroes that were allowed in our house were real heroes, Bible heroes. Jesus of course, the ultimate superhero, and, Samson, who I first encountered in the full-paged colored illustrations of *Eggermeier's Family Bible Story* book that my father read from every day during family devotions. I can still see it, that picture of Samson standing there after a battle. To me he seemed like the ideal man. He had chiseled features, a remarkable physique, great hair. He was invincible in battle and irresistible to women. I, on the other hand, was a skinny kid with glasses who sometimes got pushed around on the playground by bullies, girl bullies. Sometimes when my father closed the book and we bowed our heads and closed our eyes in prayer, I imagined that I was Samson.

This section of Larkin's speech continues his narrative of a strict Christian upbringing, which was also noted in Larkin's (2006) book. By conveying a story about what his father would not allow in the home (i.e., comic books), Larkin also continues to evoke sympathy from his audience for the oppressive circumstances of his childhood. In

addition, Larkin introduces his audience to the patriarchal nature of his childhood home. There is no mention of his mother's view on comic books and as such, through omission Larkin begins to demonstrate his father's power in determining the presence or absence of religious and cultural artifacts in the home.

More Guilt-Purification-Redemption

The fourth section of Larkin's speech also contains elements of his life-story narrative. Specifically, Larkin (2012) provides his audience with a condensed version of his personal cycle of guilt-purification-redemption:

> I was 42 years old when it dawned on me one very ugly night, sitting in my bedroom, with a wife that hated my guts. Suddenly it dawned on me that my childhood dream had come true. I had become Samson. I was a gifted guy. I'd done some laudable things—ton of potential. But my life was effectively over. I was doing the same thing, day after day, walking in circles, in darkness, no hope of escape.

Larkin (2012) continues by describing how far he has come in the quality and character of his personal cycle of guilt-purification-redemption:

> Ya know, not long ago, my wife talkin' about that night, she said, "Ya know if you'd have died then, I would have been relieved." She said, "I wouldn't, I wasn't gonna kill ya, but I would not have objected if God did." She said, "But if you had died then, I would have had a real problem because I would not have been able to call six close friends to carry your casket." 'Cause I didn't have six friends. I was well known, but nobody knew me. And she had just discovered

that, that even she didn't know me. Today I'm so grateful to say that that's no longer the case. When I die, and I will die soon, my family will have no trouble finding six close friends to carry my casket. I'll be carried in life by the same men who carried, I'll be carried in death by the same men who carried me in life.

At this point in his speech Larkin (2012) shares a personal anecdote from his experiences of attending 12-Step recovery group meetings:

> I went to that twelve-step meeting. I followed the guy in who I knew. Because I was new they, they had a special new-comers' breakout meeting. Anybody who wanted to could go spend some special time with me, 'cause it was my first time. And uh, this guy still didn't recognize me, he says. But he, he volunteered to go outside with me. We went outside and we sat on a bench underneath a tree in the evening, the fading light of the evening.

Larkin (2012) goes on to recount the experiences and conversations he had with his first 12-Step "sponsor," elaborating on how he came to a new understanding of his guilt and the process he needed to go through to reach redemption:

> Me, I was so covered up with shame about my sin that I was determined to set the land speed record for recovery. I mean I was in there to get it figured out and get it fixed and get gone, so I didn't have to be around these broken people. And I was completely focused upon my sexual sin. That was the only thing I saw. One of the first things my spon, my friend said he said, "Larkin, your biggest problem is that you think sex is your problem." I couldn't believe it. I said, I just told him that I'd spent three hundred thousand dollars on porn and hookers. I said, "What

> do you mean sex is not my problem?" He goes, "Well it's a problem. It's a big problem. You gotta stop what you're doin', and you can't stop on your own, and you need God and you need us, but if you think that just stopping that sexual behavior is gonna fix you and make you happy you are crazy! In fact, if all you do is stop that you, you'll become more miserable than you are today, because sex is not your problem. Sex is your favorite solution. It's the medication you use to numb the pain caused by your deeper problems, which, by the way, are common to man. And that's where we're goin'. We're gonna be talkin' about your pride and your unbelief and your fear and your anger and your resentment and your self-pity—all of that stuff.

This section of Larkin's (2012) speech accomplishes three important tasks. First, by stating "I just told him that I'd spent three hundred thousand dollars on porn and hookers," Larkin (2012) personalizes the nature and magnitude of his guilt to his audience. Second, Larkin (2012) provides a window into a very personal conversation and in doing so, demonstrates the degree to which he is willing to be open and honest. Third, Larkin's (2012) admission conveys the healing power of confession—the healing effects of confessing to his sponsor and to his live audience.

Summary and Conclusions of the Life-story Narrative

The first narrative I have analyzed consists of Larkin's (2006) recounting of his life-story in his book, along with rhetoric from Larkin's (2012) foundational speech. The particular way in which he has chosen to convey his personal narrative aligns with the confession of a perpetual cycle of guilt-purification-redemption. In constructing his

narrative in this way, as I will demonstrate, Larkin (2006) exemplifies Burke's (1957) description of "form," as well as Charland's (1987) third ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric—the illusion of freedom within a narrative.

As the founder of an evangelical Protestant men's parachurch ministry, Larkin (2012; 2006) has entered into a preexisting and well-established practice—the dissemination of a Christian writer's life-story narrative consisting of the written and oral confession of guilt, a process of purification, and ultimate redemption. A fundamental and universally articulated tenet of evangelical Protestantism is that in order to be "saved" one must profess one's faith in Jesus Christ (Barna, 2013; Graham, 2005; Hackett and Lindsay, 2008; Hart, 2004; Newport, 2005; Noll, 2011a; 2011b; 1994; Piper, 2007; Southern Baptist Convention, 2015). This profession of faith involves acknowledging one's sins, and being purified and redeemed by and through the saving grace of Jesus Christ (Barna, 2013; Graham, 2005; Hackett and Lindsay, 2008; Hart, 2004; Newport, 2005; Noll, 2011a; 2011b 1994; Piper, 2007; Southern Baptist Convention, 2015).

While the specific details of Larkin's narrative are idiosyncratic, the nodes of his life-story narrative are completely in line with this greater evangelical Protestant narrative. This familiarity of narrative gives Larkin's story particular appeal to his audience. In addition, while the reader of his book and listener to his speech travels through the specifics of Larkin's life-story narrative, the outcome was already a foregone conclusion—he will confess his sins, his guilt will be purified in a particular way, and then the climax will be when he is redeemed through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

The particular "form" of Larkin's life-story narrative is an example of what Burke (1957) first noted in his work *Counter-Statement*: "*Form* in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (124). In the case of Larkin's (2012; 2006) life-story narrative his audience can recognize the familiar pattern of moving from a confession of guilt through redemption, as they anticipate the narrative's satisfying conclusion. In addition, as Charland (1987) noted in relation to the third ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric, "The endings of narratives are fixed before the telling. The freedom of the character in a narrative is an illusion, for narratives move inexorably toward their *telos*" (Original emphasis, 140). In the case of Nate Larkin, the telos of his life-story narrative is to frame him as a Christian man, enacting the human cycle of guilt-purification-redemption, whom other Christian men can readily identify with. This sets the stage for the essentialism of his ministry, as well as the rhetoric surrounding its masculine ideology.

CHAPTER 4

Samson vs. David: The Masculine Ideology of the *Samson Society*

One of the foundational aspects of the *Samson Society* is its masculine ideology. [12] The primary location Larkin lays out this ideology is in this second narrative, which contains the four distinctions he makes between the biblical characters Samson and David. The rhetoric of this narrative is essentially identical in Larkin's (2006) book and Larkin's (2012) speech. In fact, Larkin's (2012) speech contains an extemporized version of what he wrote in his book six years prior. As such, I will focus my analysis of this narrative on where it is presented in Larkin's (2006) book.

As previously discussed Larkin (2006) explained his choice of the biblical "Samson" for his ministry title as a combination of two things: his belief that he saw himself in certain aspects of Samson's narrative; and, that he didn't want to seem pretentious by naming his ministry after Samson's successor, whom Larkin argues men should model themselves after—the Old Testament biblical character David.

Prior to examining these four distinctions it is important to note that, although Larkin is no longer an active evangelical Protestant *pastor* working as the leader of a church congregation, he nevertheless presents himself as an enlightened seminary-trained evangelical Protestant *teacher*. In this capacity, he enjoys a built-in lack of accountability to a larger religious "magisterium," or "teaching authority." Unlike a

[12]Masculine ideology has been defined as "normative prescriptions of masculinity," (Wade, 2008, 6) and, "beliefs about the importance placed on men adhering to particular cultural standards for male behavior" (Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku, 2004, 85). Kimmel and Messner (1989) explained the cultural experience of masculine ideology: "The important fact of men's lives is not that they are biological males, but that they become men. Our sex may be male, but our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture, and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable" (10).

Catholic priest, scholar, or theologian, who at a minimum would be required to reference the teachings of the Pope and the historical teaching body and authority of the church, Larkin is instead allowed to utilize a less strict biblical hermeneutic. However, his interpretations, if they are to be taken seriously by his evangelical Protestant audience, must start with the position of biblical literalism as previously referenced—that the Bible is the inspired, authentic "word of God," and any theological interpretation must be done from a standpoint that what the Bible contains "literally" happened.

To make his argument regarding the four distinctions between Samson and David, Larkin's (2012; 2006) primary rhetorical strategy is *identification*. He does this through his creation of "distinctions" between the biblical characters Samson and David. In particular, Larkin (2012; 2006) proffers the four-part "David" masculinity as the appropriate one for men to identify with. Through this process of identification, men enact the *Samson Society's* masculine ideology as a coping mechanism for the inevitable, naturally occurring cycle of guilt-purification-redemption that the contemporary evangelical Protestant man must endure throughout his day-to-day "Samson living."

Narrative 2—Samson vs. David

The second narrative is initially provided by Larkin (2006) in the second part of his book entitled, "I, Samson." This part contains two chapters—Chapter Six, entitled "Who Am I?" and, Chapter Seven, entitled "Walking Lessons." In Chapter Six, Larkin describes the distinctions between Samson and David, and in Chapter Seven, he provides examples from his life to personalize the distinctwnttions and further advocate for their relevance to his audience.

Before he offers his explanation of the "four distinctions" Larkin (2006) provides an overview of the historical Samson, whom he refers to as one of the "Bible heroes" (61). According to Larkin (2006), "The real Samson was born in Palestine, late in the twelfth century BC, during a time when the fortunes of Israel had fallen" (62). Thus, for Larkin he is describing Samson as a real person with a real life-story narrative that is described in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Larkin (2006) proceeds to first describe the events of Samson's life by providing a context. "The Hebrews desperately needed a deliverer . . . Samson arrived on the scene as a messianic figure, sent by God in response to the pleas of his people. An angel announced the good news of Samson's impending birth . . . Samson grew up knowing he was special" (Larkin, 2006, 62). Larkin (2006) goes on to summarize what he sees as the seminal moments of Samson's life; namely, his physical exploits that gained him a reputation as an amazingly strong and fearless leader of his community. He finishes his summary by recounting Delilah's betrayal of Samson, which led to Samson's capture by his enemies, imprisonment, and ultimately his death. In the end, "Samson died without accomplishing his mission" (Larkin, 2006, 65).

David's birth, according to Larkin (2006), "was a quiet one. No angels heralded the arrival of Jesse's youngest son" (65). Eventually, "God revealed his (David's) identity to a visiting prophet" (Larkin, 2006, 65). David's life as the king of Israel was filled with "episodic success against Israel's enemies . . . warrior, poet, musician, king; David was a tremendous leader" (Larkin, 2006, 65). Like Samson, though, David had that natural, God-given "lust" in his heart, and it led him down a road of self-destruction:

> But when he was about forty years old, the wheels came off . . . David caught sight of a neighbor woman taking a bath. Overcome by desire, he found a way to meet her . . . Almost overnight, David found himself doing things that Samson had never done, committing adultery and then covering up that sin with murder. (Larkin, 2006, 65)

After David's "fall" his life trajectory went in complete contrast to Samson's, according to Larkin (2006):

> Samson spent his last years alone, in bondage and blindness, and he died a failure. David, on the other hand, recovered. His collapse was a bitter experience, but he emerged from it a wiser man and a better king. David died a success, surrounded by friends and family, and he left a legacy. (66)

The question Larkin (2006) then asks his readers is, "Why the difference?" (66). The answer Larkin (2006) provides is, "David recovered *because he could*, and Samson didn't recover *because he couldn't*" (Original emphases, 66). At this point, Larkin (2006) introduces the four distinctions as his explanation for why Samson failed and David succeeded in the end, and, why men should *identify* with Samson first, and then *identify* with and *behave* like David—i.e., the *redeemed* Samson.

Isolation vs. Companionship

Larkin's (2006) first distinction is entitled "Isolation vs. Companionship," and it focuses on his description and interpretation of Samson's lack of friends and David's bevy of friends. He begins by making the argument that Samson was a loner:

> Samson is a major biblical figure. His life spans four entire chapters in the book of Judges, and he dominates every scene in which he appears. Samson's performances are so strong that the typical reader doesn't notice the utter absence of a supporting cast until someone points it out. *Samson was a man who never bothered to make friends*. Aside from his parents, the Bible gives us the name of only one person who ever got close to him: Delilah. (Original emphasis, Larkin, 2006, 66)

Thus the argument Larkin makes is: given that the Bible is the inspired word of God and the Truth, if Samson had friends we would be able to read about them, because they would have been mentioned, but they are not, so he must not have had any.

David, according to Larkin (2006), was just the opposite. He ended up having a plethora of friends:

> His (David's) friendship with Jonathan set a new pattern for David's life. Having made one friend he went on to make hundreds more. "Every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented," the Bible says, "rallied around him, and he became their leader" (1 Sam. 22:2). The names and descriptions of David's friends go on for pages. (Larkin, 2006, 67)

Thus the argument Larkin makes here is: since the Bible says David had friends, not only should we believe that, we also should believe that "having friends" is an important biblical tenet for what it means to be the right kind of man in God's eyes.

Larkin (2006) summarizes the essentialism and significance of this distinction this way: "When Samson fell, he fell alone, surrounded only by enemies. When David fell,

he fell among friends. It was those friends . . . who made his recovery possible" (68). Thus, Larkin (2006) is arguing here for the inevitability of "a fall" for his audience and thus, having friends as an essential precondition to enduring and recovering from the fall.

In addition, Larkin (2006) also qualified the type of friend David had and as such, the type of friend all men should have. He explains that, when David and Jonathan first met:

> Jonathan did a remarkable thing. The Bible says that the prince took off his armor and belt (his personal defenses) and gave them to David. Then he took his offensive weapons, his sword and his bow—*things David could hurt him with*—and he gave those to David too. Having made himself completely vulnerable, Jonathan offered his hand to David in friendship. They formed a covenant that day—a pact that saved David's life on more than one occasion, a promise that outlived them both. (Original emphasis, Larkin, 2006, 67)

Thus, to make oneself "completely vulnerable" is the ideal precondition of friendship for Larkin (2006).

Larkin (2006) follows up each distinction he makes in Chapter Six by providing corresponding details from his life in Chapter Seven, in order to give his audience a personal referent. In the case of this distinction, in which his focus is on having friends who make themselves completely vulnerable, he recounts how he built his circle of friends as he began to find sobriety from his sex addiction:

> Looking back, I mark the beginning of my recovery from the day I finally surrendered to the discipline of picking up the telephone each day to share the

> truth about my life with another guy and ask for his honest feedback. Dialing was excruciatingly difficult at first, each digit a mockery of my supposed self-sufficiency. But forcing myself to make the call brought enormous spiritual benefit. With each conversation I surrendered a little more to the reality of my place within the human race. Today I understand (most of the time) that I am a man among men. I need my brothers and my brothers need me. (Larkin, 2006, 76)

In sum, the first distinction Larkin (2006) makes is his way of saying, "men need adult male friends." Thus, for Larkin and the *Samson Society* this first aspect of masculinity involves reliance on other men, particularly in the ongoing navigation of a man's "fall," his "brokenness," and his spiritual life.

This first distinction helps lay the ground work for Larkin in advocating for the necessity of his ministry, as it can provide men a ready-made safe haven for establishing friendships in which men can be completely vulnerable. In addition, in writing about this first distinction between Samson and David, and advocating for the primacy of friends, Larkin makes no mention of women or having women friends. In fact, nowhere in any of Larkin's rhetoric does he mention the necessity of female friendships for men outside of heterosexual marriage, or, how to engage women in healthy friendship relationships. This is not surprising, given Larkin's self-described sex addiction, his infidelity, and overall negative life experiences of associating with women during his adulthood as a heterosexual married man. Nor is it surprising, given that women are the object of a man's lust in Larkin's life-story narrative and as such, present a natural and unavoidable

temptation, just as Delilah tempted Samson and Bathsheba tempted David in the Old Testament of the Bible (*NIV Bible*, 2015).

This first distinction resonates with prospective members of the *Samson Society*, many of whom are assumed by Larkin to be in need of a "safe haven" to establish "appropriate" homo-social bonding—far away from women who for millennia have been the source of men's problems. The practice of a man blaming a woman for something and trying to shirk responsibility dates back at least to the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis (NIV Bible, 2015). In Genesis 3:12, it is written, "The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it'" (NIV Bible, 2015). Prospective *Samson Society* members are undoubtedly familiar with this story from the Bible and as such, Larkin's audience would identify with a masculine ideology that encourages men to find refuge from the source of their sexual sin (i.e., women) "in the fellowship of Christian men."

Rover vs. Homebuilder

Larkin's (2006) second distinction is entitled "Rover vs. Homebuilder," and his focus is on his description and interpretation of Samson's lustful wanderings away from home and David's steadfast propensity to either stay at home, or at least not travel alone. Larkin (2006) begins by making the argument that Samson was a rover:

> The book of Judges portrays Samson as a man perpetually on the move. Never one to waste time sitting at home, Samson relished the freedom and anonymity of the road . . . He preferred the easy company of strangers to the suffocating

> sameness of family and friends . . . In scene after scene we see him traveling far from the beaten path, usually somewhere in enemy territory, always alone. (68)

In the preceding passage Larkin (2006) not only summarizes Samson's traveling exploits, he also provides a specific characterization and interpretation of this behavior. For Larkin (2006), Samson not only preferred to act this way, but given his lack of friends (i.e., distinction number one) Samson's wanderlust was a natural extension of his lack of social support.

David, on the other hand, was different. According to Larkin (2006), David preferred company:

> While he did travel at times—like most of us, he could scarcely avoid it—only rarely did he travel by himself. In road scenes we usually see David at the head of a throng or within a cluster of fellow travelers. When he was given the choice between heath and hearth, David generally preferred to stay home. The first thing he did after establishing Jerusalem was to build a house for himself there, a fine, comfortable house suitable for raising a family and entertaining friends. (68)

Larkin (2006) goes on to describe the benefit David derived from being so concerned with "home":

> David, when he fell, was at home. Even as he tumbled headlong into a private hell, David could still see his friends, and his friends could see him. And though he was too weak and confused to call out for help, his friends could see that he was in trouble, and they came to get him. (68)

Thus the argument Larkin makes here is: Since the Bible says David did not travel alone, and actually preferred to be at home, identify with David and do not travel alone. If given a choice be more of a homebody, because it is better to be at home when you inevitably fall than to be on the road. At least your friends can see you and be there for you.

As with the first distinction Larkin (2006) follows up this distinction in the ensuing chapter by providing details from his life, in order to give his audience another personal referent and bolster his argument. In the case of this distinction Larkin (2006) talks about being "present" versus "absent" in his own life. He goes beyond simply discussing being physically present or absent to include being psychologically and emotionally present or absent in his primary relationships:

> But now, with the encouragement of my new friends, my life slowly started changing. Not everything has changed—I still sometimes drift away during conversations, for example, and I tend to leave parties early—but generally I am present in my own life. I enjoy the company of others, and I spend my days openly, among family and friends. (Larkin, 2006, 78)

In sum, the second distinction Larkin (2006) makes between Samson and David concerns how men create the conditions for their choices. Thus, for Larkin and the *Samson Society* this second aspect of masculinity involves a recognition once again of the inevitability of a "fall," but also requires a particular kind of personal, environmental "pro-activism," a transparency of motive, and an intrapersonal "presence" in one's life and one's relationships. Men need to know that they are not doing themselves any favors by

indulging their "wanderlust," but if they have to "be on the road" they should prepare appropriately and try to avoid travelling alone. Ultimately, Larkin (2006) is arguing that picking up the pieces of a man's life after his "fall" is more likely when he is close enough to his male Christian friends that they can effectively help him. This aspect of Larkin's masculinity also suggests that men are too feeble to help themselves, either to avoid the natural, "lustful" temptations that women present, or, to figure out how to manage the aftermath of a "fall" on their own.

This second distinction appeals to prospective members of the *Samson Society* who believe in the importance of what Protestant minister and author Norman Vincent Peale famously wrote, "Planning your work and working your plan" (Peale, 1952). Being *in control of one's environment* and anticipating landmines is consistent with the "take charge" patriarchy of traditional evangelical Protestantism. Thus, whether it is the "Be Prepared" motto of the Boy Scouts, or, the image of being "in charge" as the "head of the household" that exists for traditional evangelical Protestant patriarchy, the audience Larkin is invoking aligns with this aspect of the ministry's masculine ideology.

Reflex vs. Reflection

Larkin's (2006) third distinction is entitled "Reflex vs. Reflection," and his focus is on his description and interpretation of Samson's lack of "communication with God" and David's constant "talking with God" through prayers of supplication and gratitude. He begins by making the argument that Samson was about "doing" and not "thinking." "He was the strong, silent type . . . Samson didn't second-guess himself. He didn't bother analyzing his motives or agonizing over his mistakes" (Larkin, 2006, 69). Larkin

(2006) goes on to characterize Samson as one who did not communicate with, or rely on, God:

> Samson believed his only security was in strength. He didn't like to show weakness—not to God, not to other people, not even to himself. It's interesting that of all the scenes from Samson's life described for us in the Bible, only one contains a prayer. Samson was the spiritual leader of Israel for twenty years, but he was not a man of prayer. He had more important things to do. His only prayer recorded in the Bible was a final, desperate plea for strength before his spectacular suicide attack at the Philistine temple. (69)

David, on the other hand, "was committed to self-examination, he knew that he would never discover the darker hollows of his heart without the help of God and others. He was not afraid to appear weak, because he understood that all flesh is weak" (Larkin, 2006, 69-70). Larkin (2006) goes on to write, "Rooted in a genuine relationship with God, David lived his life, all of it, out loud. And he left his honest prayers behind for the rest of us to echo" (70).

In keeping with his format Larkin (2006) provides his audience with another "don't be like Samson; be like David" argument. This one is very simple and straightforward: since the Bible says Samson never prayed and David did, and Samson was a failure and David was ultimately a success, then be "reflective" and think about your life, while making sure to "communicate" with God through prayer, as that will enhance your "reflection" and cultivate an appropriate, honest relationship with God.

As with the first two distinctions Larkin (2006) provides personal life experiences in the ensuing chapter to support his argument surrounding this distinction, and to demonstrate the validity of his advice. His primary method of "reflection" has become journaling—writing down personal reflections in a way that mirrors the way David wrote the Psalms that are found in the Old Testament of the Bible:

> After I had learned to be honest, someone suggested that I start addressing my journal to God, speaking to him out of my true heart as David did. Someone else recommended that I take some time each day to read a short selection from the Bible or a healthy devotional book, listening for God's voice. That person also urged me to compose a gratitude list every day. (Larkin, 2006, 81)

Thus, for Larkin (2006) another way of mirroring David involves "communicating with God" through the writing down of one's thoughts and feelings, just as the psalmist did. This is what it means to be a "man of reflection," as opposed to a man of reflex. For Larkin (2006) the third component of masculinity involves moving from a "reflexive doing" and self-reliance to a "reflective thinking" and reliance on God. In the end the argument goes, Samson and David (and you, my male reader) may have lacked "impulse control;" however, Samson would not give it a second thought, while David would write about it, think about it, and "talk to God" about it. Thus, being "reflective" is a reflection of a masculinity that argues for the unavoidable need for God.

This third distinction appeals to prospective members of the *Samson Society* because it provides a "way out" for dealing with something that God designed and men have no choice about—lacking impulse control. In particular, God designed men to be

sexually impulsive, but for evangelical Protestant men God also responds to their prayers (Peel, 1993; Trent, 1997). God is "active" in the lives of believers. So, this aspect of *Samson Society* masculinity says that the best way to deal with lacking impulse control of any kind, which you have no choice over anyway, is to "surrender it to God and pray about it" and He will take care of you. This is especially true if a man's impulse control has gotten "out of control" to the point of addiction, which is the case for certain members of Larkin's *audience addressed* and *audience invoked*.

Big Plays vs. Little Plays

Larkin's (2006) fourth and final distinction is entitled, "Big Plays vs. Little Plays," and his focus is on the differing ways Samson and David carried out their "mission to deliver Israel." He begins by making the argument that Samson was trying to go about his mission in a dramatic way:

> Samson considered himself a home-run hitter. He was larger than life, a franchise player, and he was swinging for the fences every time he came to the plate. Whatever the situation, Samson always believed that he was just one spectacular play away from final victory. (Larkin, 2006, 70).

David, according to Larkin (2006), was more measured in his attempt to accomplish his mission:

> Samson began his career in the big leagues by killing a thousand Philistines in one day. David, on the other hand, began his career by killing just one—but David killed the right one. From that point on, David's battle against the Philistines was a team effort, and his team eventually won. (70)

According to Larkin (2006), Samson died a failure and David died a success. Thus, Larkin's (2006) argument is that making the "big play" on one's own will ultimately fail, while doing the "little things" faithfully will lead to success for a man in accomplishing his God-given mission in life.

As with the first three distinctions, Larkin (2006) again provides his personal thoughts to support his argument in the ensuing chapter:

> The grandiosity of Samson has marked my life for as long as I can remember. Deep within my DNA, apparently, lies the conviction that I have been put on earth to do huge things, spectacular things, and that by virtue of my destiny I occupy a privileged place above the common run of humanity . . . Lately I have been dreaming that I am a bricklayer in a vast and fabulous city. The walls and buildings of the city have been rising for centuries, and millions of workers are engaged in the ongoing construction. My friends and I are laboring at the corner of a building, where we are constructing an ornate arched doorway . . . The dream, I think, is true. The city of God is being built, and it is being built one brick at a time. (83-84)

With this fourth and final distinction Larkin (2006) provides the last component of his view of masculinity. A man's predilection, which will ultimately produce an unfulfilling life, is for solitary and significant accomplishments that do not concern God; however, to be a man who succeeds in his godly mission is to join a team of evangelical Protestant men who involve themselves in building a community of Christian faith. Thus, this aspect of Larkin's masculine ideology requires a man to forego selfish desires

and focus on what every man should be concerned with—fulfilling God's mission for him. Ultimately, masculinity must go beyond the awareness and acknowledgement of the indispensability of God in a man's life to a lived *obedience* to what God's life-mission is for a man.

This aspect of masculinity also engages Charland's (1987) first two ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric. As Larkin's (2006) argument goes the city of God already exists, and it does so transhistorically, where ancestry is irrelevant and the mission is everlasting. Thus, in building his community "one brick at a time" (Larkin, 2006, 84), Larkin defines a man's life mission for his invoked audience as contributing to the centuries-old and ongoing creation of Christian fellowship and community.

This fourth distinction appeals to prospective members of the *Samson Society* because it taps into the notion that "God makes men for a mission." From the parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry *Promise Keepers*, to John Eldredge's (2001) *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul*, the idea of living out an evangelical masculinity with "mission" and "purpose" is well-established within the ethos of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. As Eldredge (2001) wrote, "Without a great battle in which a man can live and die, the fierce part of his nature goes underground and sort of simmers there in a sullen anger that seems to have no reason" (44).

Summary and Conclusions of the Masculine Ideology Narrative

The previous four distinctions serve as the seminal rhetorical message of masculinity for the *Samson Society*: 1) isolation vs. companionship; 2) rover vs.

homebuilder; 3) reflex vs. reflection; and, 4) big plays vs. little plays. Nate Larkin positions these distinctions in a point/counter-point framework that attempts to move his audience to first *identify* with an aspect of Samson's masculine character, followed by a redeemed aspect of David's masculine character. His image of Samson—as a loner, a rover, a recusant, and an egotist—is juxtaposed with his image of David—as a brother, a homebuilder, a supplicant, and God's loyal servant. At its core Larkin's (2006) primary rhetorical strategy within this narrative is *identification*. Larkin (2012; 2006) achieves this by connecting his view of a redeemed, Old Testament biblical masculinity to his *audience addressed* and *audience invoked* through the use of personal anecdotes—"*Identify* with me as Samson initially. Then make the transition to *identify* with the 'new' me, as David, and transform your definition of what it means to be a *man*." The end result of this four-part masculinity is that it appeals to prospective members by tapping into preexistent desires to: 1) conquer sexual sin; 2) maintain a strong, "masculine image"; 3) have "active communication" with God; and, 4) live a "mission-driven" life. By encouraging this transition in masculinity, Larkin attempts to create some of the preconditions for enlistment of his overtly addressed male subjects into his ministry, while providing "linguistic cues" to the audience he is invoking.

This process of identification happens primarily through Larkin's establishment of "common ground." Cheney (1983) describes this as Burke's first strategy of identification, "where the rhetor equates or links himself or herself with others in an overt manner" (148). Thus, *Samson Society* men can find recovery from sin in the company of like-minded and similarly burdened men. Prospects are accustomed to being told the

importance of "being prepared" for life's challenges, such as, "that beautiful, irresistible woman on the computer screen, or, the one sitting on the bar stool next to you," and they already appreciate the wisdom of being proactive. In addition, the evangelical Protestant faith of these men stresses the importance of "praying for the help of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." As such, these men understand the necessity for an active and faithful prayer life. The idea of a "purpose-driven life" is already presupposed by these evangelical Protestant men, and being reminded of their "mission and calling" through the examples of Samson and David is rhetorically effective. Ultimately, through imparting his four-part masculine ideology, Larkin (2012; 2006) offers prospective and current members of the *Samson Society* a shared masculine "identity" as *Samson guys*.[13]

Having summarized the appeal of this masculine ideology, I will now turn to the formation of the *Samson Society*. The story of how it all came about is the subject of Larkin's (2006) third narrative, and it is a primary location where his masculine ideology of "David living" is imparted.

[13]According to Larkin (2014), the term "Samson guy" is used regularly by *Samson Society* members to identify fellow members.

Chapter 5

The Formation Narrative of the *Samson Society*

The precursor to Larkin's (2012; 2006) third narrative, in which he discusses the formation of his ministry, takes shape in part three of his book, entitled "A New Way of Life." This part contains two chapters—Chapter Eight, entitled "The Rebirth of the Real Me," and Chapter Nine, entitled "Call No Man Father." In Chapter Eight, Larkin (2006) describes his personal "rebirth" as an evangelical Protestant man. He asks, "So what happens after a person is reborn? What is that person's new life like?" (93). He answers these questions by writing, "Well, I know what my life is like today, and I can tell you that it bears a strong resemblance to the life of the apostle Paul described in chapter seven of his letter to the Romans" (93). Larkin (2006) goes on to describe two selves—using "Paul's language" to identify the two selves as "spirit" and "flesh" (93).

Larkin (2006) characterizes the self of "flesh" as his old self and the self of "spirit" as his new self. In doing so he encourages his reader constitutively to accept the new narrative:

> The road ahead does not run through improvement of the old self but through acceptance of the new one, the *real* me. I am *finding* a life, not constructing one . . . The real me—the one God created at the start—is alive again, as spiritually alive as Adam was before the Fall. I am alive, and I am not alone. (Original emphases, 94-95)

Larkin (2006) begins to talk about why he is "not alone" in Chapter Nine. He writes about his initial urge, as he got "healthier," to provide counsel to other men who

were also struggling. After having these "one-on-one meetings" with a number of men for several months he realized he was becoming a "father figure" of sorts to these men, and he did not like that. He decided to find a way to meet with men, but as an equal. He uses the example of George Washington, who "became 'the father of his country' by *refusing the role*" (Original emphasis, 104). He writes about what he calls "the Founding Brothers" example from the days of James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin as a template for how to accomplish something larger than what one man could accomplish on his own. He discusses his growing "recovery" in relationship to the 12-Step group he attended, and how he was able to do with the group what he was not able to do by himself; however, while the group was helpful, it was also incomplete.

For Larkin (2006) what was missing from his 12-Step recovery group was an explicit ethos of evangelical Protestantism. As he began to contemplate what it would be like to have a group modeled after the 12 Steps of recovery he writes about realizing he needed to shift from attending a 12-Step group on the one hand, while having his one-on-one meetings with his evangelical Protestant circle of friends in which he was in a "father, counselor" role on the other hand. He writes about a day during which a specific set of conversations led to the formation of the *Samson Society*. "Later that day I started talking with a few of my friends about forming a true mutual aid society, a group of Christian men who would live their lives together openly as equals, playing as a team. The idea resonated with each guy I spoke to" (Larkin, 2006, 108). The fact that none of Larkin's friends were critical of his idea (or if they were he does not write about it) is important. It indicates unanimity of thought and as such, it suggests rhetorically that

creating this ministry was more than just an idea Larkin came up with by himself; rather, it was an idea that had collective momentum. Larkin (2006) goes on to write about what happened in the ensuing days:

> A few of us got together to discuss the concept further, and the outlines of the group started to emerge. We would focus on forming fraternal relationships and facilitating a lifestyle of personal repentance. Our outfit would not be a recovery group exactly, because it would include both addicts and potential addicts, guys who had become aware of the dangers of isolation and wanted to escape them. Unlike classic twelve-step meetings, where the religious pluralism can inhibit some Christians from fully integrating their faith with the experience, our meetings would be designed specifically for followers of Jesus. (109)

In order to model this new ministry after the 12 Steps while ensuring its Christian ethos, Larkin (2006) and the first members of the Samson Society made a decision: "We would retranslate the Twelve Steps, appropriating the principles that AA had borrowed from the Bible and rephrasing them in an effort to recover them for the church" (109). In addition, unlike classic 12-Step recovery groups, "our group would not segregate its members according to their sins. We would try to take this trip together" (Larkin, 2006, 109).

What Larkin (2006) describes in the fourth part of his book, entitled "The Pirate Monks," is the formation and operation of his ministry. This final part consists of three chapters, with the first one, Chapter Ten, entitled "The Adventure Begins." This chapter is Larkin's (2006) description of the first "official" meeting of the Samson Society. It is

a chronological recounting of the flow of the meeting, with numerous direct quotes by the men present, that Larkin assembled from memory and then had those who were quoted approve (Larkin, 2015).

Narrative 3—The Formation of the Samson Society

To investigate the "formation narrative" regarding the *Samson Society*, I will first briefly comment on the title of Larkin's (2006) book: *Samson and the Pirate Monks*. Second, I will discuss in detail the subtitle of the book: *Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood*.

The "Pirate Monks"

When Larkin (2006) wrote about his "two selves" in Chapter Eight, he was setting the stage for the genesis of his ironic "sinner-saint" term—"pirate monks." As noted previously, he describes the process of how his group spontaneously created the nickname in the pub they often met in following meetings. While the term "pirate monk" was created by Larkin's initial *Samson Society* group for an idiosyncratic purpose, it nevertheless is designed to capture the dual nature of *all Samson Society* members—both their "sinful, flesh self" and their "saintly, spiritual self" (Larkin, 2006).

The Brotherhood

To understand the second aspect of the formation narrative, I will argue that what Larkin (2006) is attempting to do by "calling men to authentic brotherhood" can best be understood as a form of *invitational rhetoric* (Foss and Griffin, 1995). As noted earlier, "Invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination" (Foss and Griffin, 1995, 5).

Three external conditions, which are safety, value, and freedom, created by a rhetor in and during a communication exchange, are present during invitational rhetoric (Foss and Griffin, 1995).

I believe that Larkin's (2006) subtitle, "Calling Men to Authentic Brotherhood," is an example of invitational rhetoric in that it is Larkin's invitation to evangelical Protestant men to come together in a specific way to form a particular type of organizational dynamic. Specifically, Larkin is attempting to frame his ministry as a "safe" place for men to be "open and honest" in their self-disclosure to one another. In doing so he is appealing to men who feel they are unable to live up to a certain evangelical Christian ideal, while also unable to admit their shortcomings to their fellow congregants. To create "authentic brotherhood" is to invite a man to open himself up, to make himself completely vulnerable, and to do, according to Larkin (2006), as Jonathan did for David in the Old Testament account of the beginning of their friendship—lay down his offensive weapons (e.g., verbal barbs, criticism, and attacks), as well as his defensive armor (e.g., his pride, his defensiveness and his unreceptiveness). Thus, in this narrative Larkin (2006) frames the *Samson Society* as an evangelical Protestant men's ministry where men can "recover their spiritual self," and feel safe, valued, and free to discuss anything in the process. In doing so Larkin offers his invitation of "authentic brotherhood" from a position of equality and mutual respect for his audience.

The first condition of invitational rhetoric—safety—is manifest by Larkin (2006) in the following passage, where he discusses the instructions that were given to his first group members at the beginning of the meeting, which continue to be given at local

group meetings: "In sharing, we speak honestly out of our own experience. We tell the truth about ourselves, knowing that our brothers will listen to us in love and will hold whatever we say in strictest confidence" (118). The idea of "strictest confidence" in a group-sharing situation was appropriated from 12-Step recovery, and it is designed to create an environment where the most intimate details of a person's life can be discussed without fear of exposure and in total "safety" (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; Larkin, 2006). Any prospective member of Larkin's ministry who has had experience with a 12-Step recovery group would immediately resonate with this condition of "safety" and find it appealing.

The second condition of invitational rhetoric—value—is manifest by Larkin (2006) in the following passage, where he recounts what he said to the first group at the first meeting: "The Samson Society, as I see it, is not an expert-based organization, and it does not have a single leader or class of leaders. Anybody can lead. Everybody can contribute. We're building this fellowship on the conviction that on any given day every Christian needs help and every Christian has some help to give" (114-115). The inherent value of each member is what Larkin (2006) writes about here, and it is another appropriation from 12-Step recovery (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; Larkin, 2006). This condition appeals to prospective members of the *Samson Society* who feel alienated or disrespected within their own congregation, but who may not want to outwardly criticize their church environment.

The third condition of invitational rhetoric—freedom—is manifest by Larkin (2006) in the following passage, where he describes what went on during the sharing portion of the first meeting of the "pirate monks":

> I listened in awe as the conversation unfolded. Each man brought his own story to the table, contributing a few fragmentary personal insights on the subject at hand. Each man led with his weakness, but most guys also had some experience, strength, or hope to share. Some quoted Scripture. The progression of the conversation sparked my own thinking. Eventually I took the floor and found myself saying things I had not expected to say. (119)

As further evidence that Larkin (2006) is invoking invitational rhetoric in his formation narrative, he recounts how members are invited to communicate with one another during the sharing portion of the meeting: "As a rule, we refrain from giving advice to others or instructing them during the meeting, believing that such conversations are best reserved for private moments between friends" (118). Thus, the self-determination and lack of one member trying to use persuasion to "change" another member, which invitational rhetoric evokes, is advocated for even within an evangelical Protestant environment. This is not surprising, given Larkin's familiarity with, and appropriation of, the principles of 12-Step recovery groups.

What *is* surprising for an evangelical Protestant men's ministry is to have a rhetoric that is not *entirely* patriarchal. As Foss and Griffin (1995) noted:

> The traditional conception of rhetoric, in summary, is characterized by efforts to change others and thus to gain control over them, self-worth derived from and

> measured by the power exerted over others, and a devaluation of the life worlds of others. This is a rhetoric of patriarchy, reflecting its values of change, competition, and domination. But these are not the only values on which a rhetorical system can be constructed, and we would like to propose as one alternative a feminist rhetoric. (4)

To connect the *Samson Society*, an ostensibly evangelical Protestant ministry, to a "feminist rhetoric" in any capacity would seem inappropriate and downright laughable on the surface. I would argue that through the appropriation of the egalitarian aspects of the 12-Step principles Larkin has at least created a founding narrative that is not an example of a traditional rhetoric, which seeks to persuade an audience; rather, it serves as an offering by Larkin to his audience to envision themselves in a mutually respectful conversation. As Foss and Griffin (1995) noted:

> The rhetoric we describe is a rhetoric used at various times by some women and some men, some feminists and some non-feminists. What makes it feminist is not its use by a particular population of rhetors but rather the grounding of its assumptions in feminist principles and theories . . . Because of the nonhierarchical, nonjudgmental, nonadversarial framework established for the interaction, an understanding of the participants themselves occurs, an understanding that engenders appreciation, value, and a sense of equality. (5)

The preceding quote is a good description of what Larkin (2006) seeks to create in his ministry, and it is one of the reasons his ministry is appealing to prospective members. Thus, this third condition of invitational rhetoric—freedom—appeals to

prospective members who resonate with the core 12-Step principles, clearly evident in the formation narrative of the *Samson Society*—equality, safety, value, reciprocity, and mutual respect (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; Larkin, 2006).

Summary and Conclusions of the Formation Narrative

To describe the formation of the *Samson Society*, Larkin (2006) tells his story in a way that he hopes will resonate with potential members of the *Samson Society*. In the formation narrative he relates, through involvement with a 12-Step Sex Addicts Anonymous recovery group, he formed relationships with other evangelical Protestant men who were instrumental in his achieving "positive sobriety." The experience led him to form the *Samson Society*, in the hope of creating an *invitin*g evangelical Protestant men's ministry that, borrowing from 12-Step recovery, has an organizational identity that promotes: 1) confidential and *safe* sharing of intimate life details by its members; 2) the *equal value* of each member and his contributions to the organization; and, 3) a process whereby any change that occurs in a man's life is not a result of the overt persuasive efforts of fellow members; rather, change happens as a result of a man's *self-determination* to work through his issues in the presence of like-minded men and with the help of Christian ineffable and metaphysical processes.

For Burke (1969a), *metaphor* is a means to discover the "thisness of a that," and for Larkin this meant discovering in 12-Step recovery a means to "authentic Christian brotherhood." Such a ministry appropriates the 12-Step tenet of maintaining a safe forum for the "working out" of a person's personal issues—a process, in the case of the *Samson Society*, while informed by a man's preexisting evangelical Protestant faith, does not

involve a hierarchical, authoritative teaching by ministry members to "persuade" or "change" a man.

From a constitutive standpoint, this formation narrative is powerful—it tells the history of the *Samson Society*. As it does this it functions to "collectivize" the ministry in a way that is articulated by Charland (1987) in the following passage: "In the telling of the story of a *peuple* (i.e., people), a *peuple* comes to be. It is within the formal structure of a narrative history that it is possible to conceive of a set of individuals as if they were but one" (Original emphases, 140). As I will discuss in my upcoming analysis of the religious ideology of the *Samson Society*, the "one" that is collectively conceived of by this ministry is the "body of Christ."

Embedded within the formation narrative of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* is a "logic"—a way of understanding the world that offers members of the ministry a position from which to understand and live out their faith. Thus, to be a "Pirate Monk" is to be constituted such that *recovery* is not only possible, but also necessary. Thus, without *recovery*, "this constitutive rhetoric would ultimately die and those it has constituted would cease to be subjects, or at least would remain, like children, partial and stunted subjects," lacking a mature faith, as well as accountability in their relationships. (Charland, 1987, 146)

At the end of his description of the first meeting of the Samson Society, Larkin (2006) writes about his reflections of how the men recited the "Lord's Prayer" at the end of their time together: "This time my brothers and I were approaching God together as his sons, expressing our devotion to him in unison. A few short minutes of authentic

fellowship had created a communion among us, a spiritual bond that deepened our sense of connection with God" (121). In finishing his formation narrative with this characterization of the conclusion of the first official meeting of his ministry, Larkin (2006) succinctly summarizes the key appeal of his ministry to prospective members—the creation of "authentic Christian brotherhood." What follows is an analysis of the fourth and final narrative of his book—the "Charter" of the Samson Society—which constitutes the ministry's religious ideology. The narrative of the *Samson Society's* Charter consists of the three rhetorical concepts that comprise the ideological discourse through which this authentic Christian brotherhood is purportedly created.

Chapter 6

The Charter: The Religious Ideology of the *Samson Society*

The *Samson Society* has a three-part Charter consisting of: 1) a seven-point Statement of Faith, entitled "The Fact"; 2) a Ministry Teaching Curriculum, which is centered around a seven-step generic "recovery process," entitled "The Path"; and, 3) a list of seven organizing principles, entitled "The Pact." This three-part document serves as the seminal rhetorical artifact that constitutes the *Samson Society's* religious ideology. In doing so, it serves to guide local meetings of the *Samson Society*, and it is found in the appendix to Larkin's (2006) book.

Narrative 4—The Charter: "The Fact," "The Path," and "The Pact"

Larkin (2006) constructs the *Samson Society* Charter narrative in the last three chapters of his book. In Chapter Ten, where he recounts the first official meeting of the *Samson Society*, he introduces the reader to the Charter by providing direct quotes from those members who read the three parts of the Charter out loud to the group. `

The Charter of the *Samson Society* is a fundamental form of constitutive rhetoric for the ministry. It functions similarly to the "White Paper" of the Québécois, which was identified by Charland (1987) as a "rhetorical document" articulating a core ideology (135). As a rhetorical document the Charter of the *Samson Society* is the persuasive framework that serves to locate members as "always already" constituted—preexisting members of the larger transcendent "body of Christ." As such, The Charter functions rhetorically to establish the religious identity of the *Samson Society*, while also creating a "call to action" within that identity. Thus, in the case of the *Samson Society*, to

paraphrase Charland (1987), the ministry exists rhetorically through the religious ideology that constitutes it.

To demonstrate the constitutive nature and rhetorical effectiveness of The Charter, I will be invoking Burke's (1969a) notions of metaphor, metonymy, and irony. I will also utilize material from Lakoff (2002), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Panther and Radden (1999).

Believing "The Fact"

As is typical of evangelical Protestant men's ministries, the *Samson Society* has a Statement of Faith. As noted in chapter one of this dissertation these statements are created by ministry founders as pronouncements of the seminal evangelical Protestant beliefs and values of their particular organization. For Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*, "The Fact" is their Statement of Faith (2014; 2006).

First introduced in Chapter Ten by Larkin (2006), The Fact consists of seven assertions. Larkin (2006) introduces his audience to The Fact when he recounts its introduction at the first official meeting of the *Samson Society*. One of the men present reads aloud some introductory remarks, which Larkin had prepared as part of the "Suggested Samson Society Meeting Format"[14]:

> Finally Mark spoke. "Welcome to this meeting of the Samson Society," he read. "We are a company of Christian men. We are also natural *loners*, who have recognized the dangers of isolation and are determined to escape them, natural *wanderers* who are finding spiritual peace and prosperity at home, natural *liars*

[14]The full text of the Suggested Samson Society Meeting Format can be found in Appendix A of Larkin's (2006) book, and, in Appendix J of this dissertation.

> who are now finding freedom in the truth, natural *strongmen* who are experiencing God's strength as we admit our weaknesses. As Christians, we meet at other times for worship, for teaching, or for corporate prayer. Today, however, we meet to talk. Our purpose is to assist one another in our common journey. We do so by sharing honestly, out of our own personal experience, the challenges and encouragements of daily Christian living in a fallen world. Our faith rests in the love of God, as it is revealed in his Word and in the life of his Son. This is the great 'Fact' of the gospel, which is the foundation of our charter. Who has the fact?" (Original emphases, 115-116)

As a blueprint for weekly meetings the "Suggested Samson Society Meeting Format" serves as seminal constitutive rhetoric. Through the description of this "company of Christian men" with "natural" destructive tendencies, Larkin and his associates have produced a document that engages Charland's (1987) first ideological effect of constitutive rhetoric—"to constitute a collective subject" which enables an "'ultimate' identification permitting an overcoming or going beyond of divisive individual or class interests and concerns" (139).

Following the introduction of The Fact another member of the group proceeds to read it aloud. Unlike some Statements of Faith of an evangelical Protestant men's ministry, the *Samson Society's* Statement of Faith is actually read aloud at the beginning of every local meeting of the ministry. Larkin (2006) explains the practical effect of reading The Fact and the rest of the Charter aloud:

> A man's first Samson meeting can be an overwhelming experience. There are probably a lot of guys in the room he doesn't know, and as the meeting progresses he hears some terminology that doesn't sound familiar. But . . . because they read the Society's central principles aloud at every meeting, he soon begins to figure out what the group believes, what it does, and how it goes about doing it. (125)

The reading aloud of important ministry beliefs and values is also another way that Larkin has appropriated ideas from 12-Step recovery groups, as the 12 Steps are typically read aloud at A.A. meetings (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001). The effect that this has is important, as reading The Fact aloud is a weekly auditory reminder to meeting attendees of how the *Samson Society* is constituted rhetorically. Reading aloud is also a practice that is quite common during evangelical Protestant church services, where "The Word" (i.e., a Bible passage) is "proclaimed" to the congregation, under the belief that the Bible commands that it should be read aloud.[15] Thus, this is another way for evangelical Protestant men to identify with the *Samson Society* as an evangelical Protestant ministry.

Below are the seven assertions that collectively make up The Fact, which is part one of the *Samson Society's* Charter:

The Fact:

1. God exists. In the timeless mystery of the Trinity, He is perfectly harmonious, perfectly whole.
2. God is our Creator. He designed us to live in eternal harmony with Him and each other, and to care for the rest of His creation.

[15]The evangelical Protestant belief that the Bible should be read aloud is grounded in the following passage from the book of Revelation, Chapter 1, verse 3: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." (NIV Bible, 2015)

3. Spurning God's fellowship, we all have sinned, forfeiting our created place and losing our spiritual lives.

4. I myself have personally defied God's law and rejected His love. Alienation from Him has produced darkness and chaos in my life, for which I have often blamed others.

5. God has continued to love me, even in my active rebellion, and in Christ has done everything necessary to restore me perfectly to Himself.

6. As I accept responsibility for my sin and find forgiveness in the finished work of Christ, I experience reconciliation with God and am progressively restored to harmony with myself and others.

7. Despite the lingering effects of sin, I am a restored son of the sovereign Lord, whose Spirit is at work in my weakness, displaying His glory and advancing His kingdom.

The rhetorical strategy of delineating seven assertions for The Fact—as opposed to a different number—can be understood as Larkin's (2006) attempt at an identification strategy where the biblical significance of the number seven is associated with the evangelical Protestant identity of the *Samson Society*. As Eidenmuller (1998) noted:

> The number seven appears many times in Christian Scripture. In Revelation, for instance, one reads of the "seven churches of Christ," the "seven seals" by which important knowledge of the end times was kept hidden, "seven trumpets," "seven thunders," "seven angels" and "seven golden bowls." The Book of Joshua records that a select group of Jews marched around the city seven times in order to bring about God's plan and victory for his people. And in Genesis, it is written that the creation of the world was accomplished in seven days. (66)

In addition to the numerological significance of having seven assertions, The Fact is strategically designed to go beyond a basic "Statement of Faith." What Larkin (2006)

has created with The Fact is clearly designed to indoctrinate members into the "recovery culture" that the *Samson Society* subscribes to. The Fact begins with the first two components as basic assertions of Christian faith (i.e., "God exists," and, "God is our Creator"). The next two statements are an example of where Larkin has appropriated elements of 12-Step recovery. Numbers three and four, especially when read aloud, imbue in members a constant reminder of how they have behaved (i.e., "we have all sinned"), and, what the outcome of that behavior has been (i.e., "darkness and chaos in my life"). Thus, numbers three and four represent a retrospective chronology designed to summarize the negative behaviors and consequences found within the life-story narrative of a member. The last three components, numbers five, six, and seven, remind the member of what his evangelical Protestant faith says about how the Christian God operates in his life (i.e., "God has continued to love me"), how a member is to approach his personal failings (i.e., "As I accept responsibility for my sin"), and, the end result of God's power and grace (i.e., "I am a restored son of the sovereign Lord"). In sum, within the seven assertions of The Fact the first three steps of the 12 Steps of A.A. are subsumed—life is unmanageable; I need help; I decide to turn to God, as I understand him, for help (see Appendix A for a listing of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous).

As discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, Burke (1969a) noted, "The basic 'strategy' in metonymy is this: to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible. E.g., to speak of 'the heart' rather than 'the emotions'" (506). Lakoff and Turner (1989) go one step further by describing metonymy as a kind of a mode of thinking, which is "used automatically, effortlessly, and without conscious

awareness" (104). As Panther and Radden (1999) argued, "We assume that metonymy is not, as has often been taken for granted, merely a matter of the substitution of linguistic expressions but a cognitive process that evokes a conceptual frame" (9).

For Larkin (2006) The Fact is the tangible list of seven assertions that conveys a man's evangelical Protestant faith, as it is played out within the confines of the *Samson Society*. For the evangelical Protestant man, labeling the *Samson Society's* Statement of Faith as "The Fact" works *metonymically* when, without conscious awareness, it is used as targeted "shorthand" to exemplify his ineffable, metaphysical, expansive Christian faith. In this way, The Fact serves as a theological "shortcut," having distilled down complex notions of evangelical Christianity to a simple seven-point constitution of the "truth."

As the *Samson Society's* "Statement of Faith," The Fact serves as primary constitutive rhetoric. In addition, Larkin's (2006) choice of the word "fact" can also be viewed as rhetorically strategic in relation to the Bible: An evangelical Protestant man, who ostensibly believes that "the Word" (i.e., the Bible) is a *fact*, comes to believe that the *Samson Society's* Statement of Faith (i.e., The Fact) is *also* a fact—an assertion that is the "truth" and an accurate reflection of evangelical Protestant doctrine. The end result of Larkin's (2006) *metonymic* rhetorical strategy is that just as "The Word" is part of the typical vocabulary of evangelical Protestants, "The Fact" quite seamlessly and unconsciously becomes part of the weekly discussion and everyday vernacular of the *Samson Society*. As such, it serves constitutively to define the religious ideology of the *Samson Society*.

Summary of "The Fact"

The Fact of the *Samson Society* is the first component of the ministry's Charter. It represents the ministry's Statement of Faith, and it is proclaimed out loud at every local weekly meeting. As the foundation of the Charter, The Fact functions constitutively as a primary source of the *Samson Society's* religious ideology. The Fact also works *metonymically*, as *Samson Society* members' evangelical Protestant faith is "reduced down" to a one-page list of seven "truth claims."

Following "The Path"

The second part of the *Samson Society's* Charter is called "The Path." Larkin's (2006) eleventh chapter of his book, entitled "How It Works: A Narrated Tour of the Path," is where he provides his explanation of this element of the Charter. This is also where he begins to weave into the Charter narrative a series of solicited letters from members of the *Samson Society* that describe their experiences, in an effort to provide personalized perspectives on the ministry.

Below are the seven "stages" that collectively make up The Path:

The Path:

1. Believing The Fact, I surrender to God in simple faith — making no promises, but merely asking for His aid.

2. I start attending meetings of the Society, and from its members I select a Silas, a trustworthy traveling companion for this stretch of the road.

3. In honest detail, I describe to God and to my Silas the course and consequences of my attempts to live apart from God.

4. Encouraged by my Silas and others, I develop the daily disciplines of prayer, study and self-examination. I abandon self-help, asking God instead to do for me what I cannot do for myself.

5. I choose to trust the Body of Christ, weighing the wisdom of my friends when facing decisions and seeking their strength when confronted by temptation.

6. When I can do so without injuring anyone, I make amends for damage I have caused. If direct amends are impossible or inadvisable, I demonstrate my repentance in other ways.

7. I offer myself as a Silas to others. Each day I ask God for the grace to seek His kingdom rather than my own, to serve those He places in my path rather than serving myself.

As the encapsulation of the Ministry Teaching Curriculum of the *Samson Society*, The Path serves as the seminal constitutive change *process* of the ministry. As a concept The Path is a *metaphor*, as it functions rhetorically to reframe the appropriated 12 Steps of "recovery" from Alcoholics Anonymous into Larkin's prescriptive formula of an evangelical Protestant "process of recovery from sin." Larkin (2014; 2006) labels The Path as the primary teaching curriculum of the *Samson Society*. "It doesn't take the newcomer very long to understand that the Samson strategy for living is summarized in the central column of its charter—the Path. The seven stages of the Path are discussed often at Samson meetings and retreats" (Larkin, 2006, 125). Larkin (2006) goes on to describe how he sees The Path—as completely in sync with evangelical Protestant doctrine:

> Nothing in the Path is new, of course. This is basic Christian discipleship, practical spirituality with a rich heritage firmly rooted in the Bible. Rather than setting forth a devotional method that marginalizes God and individualizes the Christian faith, the Path helps us face the fact that it is always God who saves and

restores us, and he is saving and restoring us all *together*. (Original emphasis, 125)

As is the case with The Fact, The Path has seven points as opposed to six, eight or some other number, ostensibly for the same biblically significant reason. Beyond the number seven The Path has several other rhetorical features I will analyze.

In his "Narrated Tour of the Path," Larkin (2006) goes through each of the seven stages of The Path. He begins by noting three aspects of the first stage of The Path—Believe, Surrender, and Ask:

> For those of us in the Samson Society, the "Path that leads to godliness and freedom" begins with faith in an objective Fact. The ability to recognize and believe that Fact comes as a gift from God. It reaches each of us by personal revelation, like a heavenly visitor arriving at the perfect time, and it inevitably produces surrender. (Larkin, 2006, 128)

Larkin (2006) goes on to feature three seminal elements of The Path in Chapter Eleven's Charter narrative—Silas, the body of Christ, and Making Amends.

Silas

In another appropriation from 12-Step recovery, the *Samson Society* believes that every member should have a "sponsor" of sorts. While not an exact replica of a 12-Step sponsor-type relationship, the "Silas" relationship in the *Samson Society* is explained by Larkin (2006) this way:

> The Samson Society does not consist merely of meetings. Joining a circle once a week to speak the truth about yourself will give you a *taste* of fellowship, but it is

> not the level of fellowship that will take you somewhere new . . . you must get up the next morning and join this band of travelers on the road. You must fall in step with one of them and walk beside him for a while, talking about whatever comes up. We call that traveling companion a *Silas*, a name that comes from the Bible. (Original emphases, 136)

Larkin (2006) goes on to explain that "The Silas relationship is not assigned by anyone; you pick a guy you trust. If he agrees, you make an open-ended arrangement to walk together for this stretch of the road, however long it lasts" (137). Larkin's (2006) rhetorical strategy in using the term "Silas" is *metonymy*, as Silas serves as a succinct label to "reduce down" and describe the complex and ineffable, sponsor-type relationship that Larkin claims is modeled after the relationship between the apostle Paul and Silas in the New Testament.

As Larkin describes it the Silas relationship involves a journey of "walking together on a sunlit path that is taking us somewhere. We are carrying each other's burdens, and Christ is walking with us" (Larkin, 2006, 139). Within The Path the Silas relationship unfolds as follows. Stage Two is where the relationship starts (i.e., "I select a *Silas*"); Stage Three is where the work of confession begins (i.e., "I describe to God and to my Silas"); Stage Four is where the development of new life disciplines is cheered on (i.e., "Encouraged by my Silas"). In keeping with 12-Step recovery, Stage Three is a reworking of the fifth step of A.A. ("5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."). Also, Stage Four is a reworking of the seventh and tenth steps of A.A. ("7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

And, "10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.").

Once a *Samson Society* member progresses through the first six stages, it becomes his turn to return the favor. Stage Seven reads, "I offer myself as a Silas to others. Each day, I ask God for the grace to seek his kingdom rather than my own, to serve those he places in my path rather than serving myself" (Larkin, 2006, 162). Larkin (2006) explains the belief behind the practice of "Silas-ing" another guy in the *Samson Society* once Stage Six has been completed, and it sums up the reciprocal and multi-faceted nature of the term Silas:

> The Silas role is like a booster rocket. We achieve liftoff on this journey by surrendering to God and seeking the help of another man . . . But a fresh surge of power comes when we agree to serve as a Silas to someone else. We are truly helped by helping, taught by teaching, and encouraged by encouraging. (166)

In the end what Larkin (2006) has done is cast every member of the *Samson Society* as *both* characters in the Paul/Silas biblical relationship he cites—every man is Silas' companion who needs companionship, and, every man is Silas the companion.

The Body of Christ

In his explanation of Stage Five of The Path, Larkin (2006) provides his definition of "the body of Christ," and why "trusting the body of Christ" is an important aspect of the *Samson Society*:

> Our view of ourselves is more realistic, and our view of Christ has expanded. We finally understand that our bodies—formed of flesh and bone—continually betray

> us, but *Christ helps us by taking incarnational form in the church*, the motley collection of fellow failures that the Bible insists on calling the *body of Christ*. "Confess your sins to one another," the apostle James urged us, "and pray for one another, so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). We trust Christ by trusting the body of Christ. (Original emphases, 151)

In the previous passage Larkin (2006) makes it clear that the *Samson Society* belongs *constitutively* to something larger than itself. Members of this ministry are not just a group of friends who self-disclose to one another; rather, his ministry's "motley collection of fellow failures" is part of something far more meaningful—the *incarnational form in the church* known as "the body of Christ."

In his speech, Larkin (2012) also discusses "the body of Christ," as he talks about his experiences related to the 12-Step practice of trusting a sponsor enough to confess one's transgressions:

> Up until that point I'd always imagined myself as either above or below the common rung of humanity. Either a little better or a little, you know it's that classic term, you know the addict is the egomaniac with the inferiority complex. That was me—just to become another bozo on the bus, was a wonderful thing—a great gift of addiction. I was forced into joining the human race. And then to find, you know I'd always been willing to trust Christ, but I'd never be willing to trust the body of Christ. In fact, I didn't even believe in the body of Christ. I thought that was a metaphor. I did not believe that Jesus is physically present on this planet in the lives of broken people. I wanna tell ya, I believe it today. And

> here's my experience. The greatest act of surrender I make to Christ every day is to pick up the phone and tell the truth to another member of the body of Christ. And here's the amazing thing. Time after time I call a guy who I know is as messed up as I am and Jesus answers the phone. He (Jesus) keeps his promise.

In this passage from his speech Larkin (2012) describes "the body of Christ" as a real, physical entity present "in the lives of broken people." When Larkin (2012) states that he is moving past viewing "the body of Christ" as a metaphor he is directly claiming that the *Samson Society* belongs *constitutively* within the larger, transhistorical "body of Christ." As such, Larkin (2012) rhetorically reframes the *metaphor* of "the body of Christ" in *real* terms when, as he says, "Jesus answers the phone."

Making Amends

The Sixth Stage of The Path is described by Larkin (2006) as "making amends" and demonstrating "repentance." This part of The Path is another appropriation from 12-Step recovery, and perhaps the most straightforward one. Step 8 of the 12 Steps of A.A. ("Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.") and, Step 9 ("Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.") are merged into Stage Six of the *Samson Society's* Path. For Larkin (2006), "making amends" within The Path is an *ironic* process in which sin is repurposed as the means to salvation.

Larkin (2006) describes his approach to making amends: "When other guys in Samson ask me about making amends, I give them the same advice I received from my twelve-step friends. I tell them to make their confession and apology as directly and

specifically as they can" (162). By way of example, Larkin (2006) spends considerable time in this section of his book recounting his own personal confession of infidelity to his wife, and his attempts at making amends in his life.

The primary rhetorical strategy Larkin (2006) uses in this section of the Charter narrative is *irony*. As noted in Chapter One of this dissertation, Burke's (1969a) example for irony is the "disease-cure" dialectic: "… we should 'ironically' note the function of the disease in 'perfective' the cure" (512). Burke (1969a) elaborates on this when he writes:

> As an over-all formula here, and one that has the quality of "inevitability," we could lay it down that "what goes forth as A returns as non-A." This is the basic pattern that places the essence of drama and dialectic in the irony of the "peripety," the strategic moment of reversal. (517)

Larkin's (2006) *ironic* trope is illustrated in the final paragraph of his characterization of Stage Six of The Path, where he discusses how sin is "repurposed," and, its confession is "perfective the cure": "It is also comforting to remember as we consider our many mistakes, that our heavenly Father has promised to weave even the worst of our failures into his grand story of salvation, to use even our sins and the sins of others for his glory and our ultimate good" (162). Thus, the sinner-saint, or in the case of the *Samson Society*, the Pirate Monk, is an *ironic* player in the "grand story of salvation." Ultimately, to paraphrase Burke (1969a), what goes forth as sin returns as sanctification.

Summary of "The Path"

As the encapsulation of the Ministry Teaching Curriculum of the *Samson Society* The Path serves as the seminal constitutive change *process* of the ministry. Larkin (2006) uses *metaphor*, *metonymy*, and *irony* to convey this section of the Charter narrative. As a concept The Path is also a *metaphor*, as it functions rhetorically to reframe the appropriated 12 Steps of "recovery" from Alcoholics Anonymous into what Larkin (2006) labels the *Samson Society's* "strategy for living" (125).

Affirming "The Pact"

The third part of the Samson Society's Charter is called "The Pact." Larkin's (2006) twelfth and final chapter of his book, entitled "Our Contract: An Annotated Summary of the Pact" is where he provides his explanation of this element of the Charter.

Below are the seven "articles" that collectively make up The Pact:

1. God is the sole owner of the Samson Society and its only authority. No member may speak for the entire Society.

2. All members of the Society are equals—friends and fellow servants, bound by love and honor. No member may command the obedience of another.

3. The Society owns no property, collects no dues or fees, pays no salaries, incurs no debts.

4. The Society is an extension of the Church Universal. It is not a corporate entity and can make no contracts with congregations, denominations, causes or campaigns, regardless of their merit.

5. Any two or more persons who believe the Fact, who agree to follow this Path and join this Pact, may initiate a meeting of the Samson Society.

6. We hold in strictest confidence any personal information shared by other members, unless permission to divulge it is given by any whom its disclosure might affect.

7. Members are fully authorized to create and distribute, freely or for profit, personal explanations and applications of the Society's principles — if they neither alter nor violate its Charter and do not prohibit others from copying their work.

Larkin (2014; 2006) labels The Pact as the organizing principles of the *Samson Society*, and he notes that these principles are appropriated from the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (see Appendix B for a listing of the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous). The primary rhetorical strategy Larkin (2006) engages with The Pact is *metonymy*, as this third component of the Charter "reduces down" the ineffable way in which the ministry is organized into a "living covenant with God."

Once again Larkin invokes the number seven, certainly for the same reasons of biblical significance noted with my discussion of The Fact and The Path. Larkin (2006) goes on to describe the primary purpose of The Pact: "Without the Pact, the Samson Society would eventually become a denomination, a corporation, or a cult—or it would self-destruct through turf wars, power politics, and scandal" (169). Thus, The Pact is Larkin's way of ensuring his ministry does not self-destruct.

Larkin (2006) begins his elaboration of the seven Articles by focusing on the egalitarian structure of the *Samson Society*: "Even though I was one of the guys who got the Society rolling in the first place, Samson does not belong to me, and my words do not carry unique authority" (170). He continues his discussion by connecting the first Article to the second: "The second article of the Pact is related to the first, but it carries the radical nature of our relationships even further. Not only does the Samson Society lack a human leader; it also lacks a *hierarchy*" (Original emphasis, 171). Larkin (2006) explains the beliefs around the third Article—that the Samson Society owns no property,

collects no dues or fees, pays no salaries, and incurs no debts: "The history of the church is replete with stories of vibrant Spirit-led communities that were undone—neutralized—by incorrect attitudes regarding property, money, or debt" (175).

The rhetorical strategy Larkin (2006) uses in conveying the egalitarian nature of The Pact is *metonymy*. In conveying the Samson Society as an organization of "equals" Larkin (2006) accomplishes two tasks. First, he eschews ownership, authority, or leadership in any way: "God is the sole owner of the Samson Society" is the first statement of the first Article. In making this metaphysical pronouncement, the *Samson Society metonymically* frames itself as entering into a simple "covenant" with the Christian God. Larkin (2006) elaborates on this metaphysical pronouncement: "Together we will respect God's ownership of this enterprise, acknowledging the supreme authority of Holy Scripture and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit" (170-171). Second, Larkin (2006) frames his ministry *ironically* as a place where "the person who wants to be great in the kingdom must become the servant of all" (171).

Proclaiming that "God owns the Samson Society," and "the Samson Society is an organization of equals" also provides Larkin (2006) with a convenient tautological tieback to the second assertion of The Fact—"God is our creator. He designed us to live in eternal harmony." The argument works this way: God creates what God owns, and God owns what God creates.

Two other aspects of The Pact that Larkin (2006) conveys are: 1) what he calls the "Church Universal;" and, 2) the emphasis on "confidentiality." To make his point that the *Samson Society* is a legitimate Christian ministry, and an authentic member of a

larger entity he calls the "Church Universal," Larkin (2006) writes, "Yes, the Samson Society is an authentic work of God" (180). Larkin (2006) backs up his claim of divine authenticity through appropriating the 12-Step principle of "holding what members say in 'strictest confidence'." According to Larkin (2006), God has done amazing things in *Samson Society* members' lives:

> Our meetings foster this kind of honesty by removing the programmed "Christian" group responses that routinely kill honesty. Let's face it: the reason many guys have stopped telling the truth in church is because most churches actively discourage truthfulness. (186-187)

Thus, in the *Samson Society* men tell each other the truth, which leads to healing: " . . . we expose our secrets to the light of God's grace and the healing power of the body of Christ. And healing does come—just as the apostle James promised it would: 'Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.' (James 5:16)" (Larkin, 2006, 191).

Summary of "The Pact"

The Pact of the *Samson Society* is the third and final component of the ministry's Charter. It contains seven Articles that represent the organizing principles that local groups follow. The Pact emphasizes the equality of *Samson Society* members, the divine ownership of the ministry, and the importance placed on the confidential sharing of life-story narratives among members. As a concept, "The Pact" is a *metonym*, as it functions constitutively to reframe the appropriated 12 Traditions of "egalitarian organizing" from

Alcoholics Anonymous into Larkin's living evangelical Protestant "covenant with God" guiding his ministry forward.[16]

Summary and Conclusions of the Religious Ideology Narrative—"The Charter"

Through the use of *metaphor*, *metonymy*, and *irony*, the Charter is more than the Statement of Faith, the Ministry Teaching Curriculum, and the organizing principles of the *Samson Society*: it is a procedural document that constructs an environment in which "Samson guys" can confess their brokenness to each other. What has been created in the Charter of the *Samson Society* is a document full of rhetorical effectiveness for its evangelical Protestant male audience, which is suggestive of why the ministry has grown from thirteen original members to more than an estimated ten thousand over the last ten years.

Moreover, as a rhetorical document, the Charter of the *Samson Society* is the persuasive framework that serves to locate members as "always already" constituted—preexisting members of the larger transcendent "body of Christ." Thus, in the case of the *Samson Society*, to paraphrase Charland (1987), the ministry exists rhetorically through the religious ideology that constitutes it.

The primary appeal of the religious ideology encapsulated in the Charter is that prospective *Samson Society* members need not alter their core evangelical Protestant beliefs to reap the benefits. What the *Samson Society* offers through its religious ideology is a tried and true method to "do" one's evangelical Protestant faith and be successful. Ultimately, being presented with a mechanism that has proven to be

[16]For a listing of the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, see Appendix B)

"successful" for other like-minded men, along with the cultural credibility of 12-Step recovery, creates a powerful combination that is difficult to ignore or dismiss—a combination that promises if you “believe The Fact, follow The Path, and affirm The Pact,” you can recover from the destructive effects of sin, be “saved,” and be the “authentic Christian brother” God is calling you to be.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to add to the body of research on parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries through a rhetorical analysis of the case of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*. My goal in doing this study was to discover the rhetorical strategies used by these religious groups to achieve their goals.

What I discovered is that the *Samson Society* is representative of parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. As such, my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society* offers an important contribution to the wider understanding of these groups, particularly in a "post *Promise Keepers* era," where no single group has reached the national prominence that *Promise Keepers* did. While no longer filling 60,000-seat stadiums, these ministries remain an important and popular part of the evangelical Protestant religious landscape.

Based on my analysis of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*, this is what can be inferred about parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministries. First, the audience Larkin addresses in his rhetoric is typical of other audiences addressed by these ministries, at least in general. These groups engage evangelical Protestant men, primarily between the ages of twenty-five to fifty, who are not completely satisfied with their faith life. Second, through the development of rhetorical materials, such as books, public speeches, web sites, and podcasts these ministries attempt to achieve "masculinizing" and religious goals. In particular, these groups create ideologies that infuse their version of "Muscular Christianity" with prescriptive "self-help" formulas for

living out a robust evangelical Protestant faith life. In doing so, these parachurch ministries assist men with achieving particular personal, interpersonal, and organizational goals beyond a man's church life.

This dissertation has analyzed the particular sources of persuasion that characterize the parachurch evangelical Protestant men's ministry the *Samson Society*. I have drawn on a rich source of concepts and tools from the rhetorical tradition in its modern manifestation. In particular, my analysis relied heavily on the helpful ideas of Kenneth Burke and Maurice Charland.

My analysis uncovered both the audience Larkin believed he was *addressing*, as well as the audience he was *invoking*. The four primary narratives I located and investigated were: 1) Larkin's life-story narrative, in which he draws on the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption; 2) the narrative of the masculine ideology of the *Samson Society,* in which Larkin *identifies* with Samson the "failure," and then David the "success"; 3) the *Samson Society'*s formation narrative, in which prospective ministry members are *invited* rhetorically to join the group; and, 4) the narrative of the religious ideology of the *Samson Society*, which promotes an appropriated 12-Step process of "recovery from sin." By looking through the lens of constitutive rhetoric I identified the ideological effects of the rhetoric of Nate Larkin and the *Samson Society*—ministry members "always already" exist as members of the "body of Christ"; members are constituted "transhistorically," where ancestry is a "concrete link" between the past and present; and, members' *recovery* and thus, their "salvation," is a predestined conclusion that is supported through their co-creation of "authentic Christian brotherhood."

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Appendix A

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Appendix B

The 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Appendix C

The Fact

1. God exists. In the timeless mystery of the Trinity, He is perfectly harmonious, perfectly whole.

2. God is our Creator. He designed us to live in eternal harmony with Him and each other, and to care for the rest of His creation.

3. Spurning God's fellowship, we all have sinned, forfeiting our created place and losing our spiritual lives.

4. I myself have personally defied God's law and rejected His love. Alienation from Him has produced darkness and chaos in my life, for which I have often blamed others.

5. God has continued to love me, even in my active rebellion, and in Christ has done everything necessary to restore me perfectly to Himself.

6. As I accept responsibility for my sin and find forgiveness in the finished work of Christ, I experience reconciliation with God and am progressively restored to harmony with myself and others.

7. Despite the lingering effects of sin, I am a restored son of the sovereign Lord, whose Spirit is at work in my weakness, displaying His glory and advancing His kingdom.

Appendix D

The Path

1. Believing The Fact, I surrender to God in simple faith — making no promises, but merely asking for His aid.

2. I start attending meetings of the Society, and from its members I select a Silas, a trustworthy traveling companion for this stretch of the road.

3. In honest detail, I describe to God and to my Silas the course and consequences of my attempts to live apart from God.

4. Encouraged by my Silas and others, I develop the daily disciplines of prayer, study and self-examination. I abandon self-help, asking God instead to do for me what I cannot do for myself.

5. I choose to trust the Body of Christ, weighing the wisdom of my friends when facing decisions and seeking their strength when confronted by temptation.

6. When I can do so without injuring anyone, I make amends for damage I have caused. If direct amends are impossible or inadvisable, I demonstrate my repentance in other ways.

7. I offer myself as a Silas to others. Each day I ask God for the grace to seek His kingdom rather than my own, to serve those He places in my path rather than serving myself.

Appendix E

The Pact

1. God is the sole owner of the Samson Society and its only authority. No member may speak for the entire Society.

2. All members of the Society are equals—friends and fellow servants, bound by love and honor. No member may command the obedience of another.

3. The Society owns no property, collects no dues or fees, pays no salaries, incurs no debts.

4. The Society is an extension of the Church Universal. It is not a corporate entity and can make no contracts with congregations, denominations, causes or campaigns, regardless of their merit.

5. Any two or more persons who believe the Fact, who agree to follow this Path and join this Pact, may initiate a meeting of the Samson Society.

6. We hold in strictest confidence any personal information shared by other members, unless permission to divulge it is given by any whom its disclosure might affect.

7. Members are fully authorized to create and distribute, freely or for profit, personal explanations and applications of the Society's principles — if they neither alter nor violate its Charter and do not prohibit others from copying their work.

Appendix F

The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper

Promise 1: A Man and His God. "A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Promise 2: A Man and His Mentors. "A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises."

Promise 3: A Man and His Integrity. "A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity."

Promise 4: A Man and His Family. "A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values."

Promise 5: A Man and His Church. "A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources."

Promise 6: A Man and His Brothers. "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity."

Promise 7: A Man and His World. "A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19-20)."

Appendix G

Promise Keepers: Statement of Faith

We affirm the historic Christian faith and proclaim the life-transforming Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is good news, the very best news anyone can hear.

1. The one living God, who eternally exists in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, loves everyone.

2. God uniquely revealed and inspired the Bible, so that it alone is God's Word written, hence the Holy Scriptures are the only inerrant authority for what we believe about God's moral law, salvation from sin and how we should live.

3. Since the disbelief and disobedience of Adam and Eve, all humans have failed to obey God's two major laws summed up by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have failed to love God with our whole being and we have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves. People have become slaves to selfishness and are alienated from God and one another.

4. Jesus' death in our place reconciles us to God. His atoning sacrifice provided redemption from the power of sin, forgiveness for our guilt, and reconciliation to Himself and others. We become acceptable to God, or justified, not by works, but by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, death on the cross to provide for our redemption, bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven, present ministry of intercession for us, and His return to earth in power and glory.

5. The Holy Spirit draws sinners to repentance, belief in the Gospel and trust in the risen Christ of whom it speaks. The Holy Spirit then assures believers of salvation, gives them gifts for servant ministries, and empowers them to meet the needs of the lost, the poor, and the oppressed.

6. All believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are members of His one international, multi-ethnic and transcultural body called the universal church. Its unity is displayed when we reach beyond racial and denominational lines to demonstrate the Gospel's reconciling power.

7. Our primary calling is to communicate the Gospel to everyone in our generation and nurture disciples. Nothing must divert us from carrying out our Lord's Great Commission until His glorious return to reign in righteousness.

Appendix H

Man in the Mirror

STATEMENT OF FAITH

1. I believe the Bible to be the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God. The Scriptures are without error and are unchangeable. They have the power to accomplish His purpose of salvation.

2. I believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons -- the Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- who is the Creator and Lord of the universe and who governs all things according to His will and purposes.

3. I believe in the deity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, and in His miracles.

4. I believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection and in His ascension to the right hand of the Father. I eagerly anticipate His visible and personal return in power and glory.

5. I believe that Jesus Christ is God's only provision for sin and that salvation is wholly a work of God's free grace and not of works, goodness or religious ceremony. When I put my faith in Christ alone for salvation, God credited me with His righteousness and justified me in His sight.

6. I believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful men, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

7. I believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling I am enabled to live a godly life.

8. I believe in the resurrection of both the saved and lost -- the saved unto the resurrection of life; the lost unto the resurrection of the damnation.

9. I believe Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, His body, which is composed of all people, living and dead, who have been joined to Him through saving faith.

10. I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded all believers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." I believe in a total commitment to this Great Commission and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Appendix I

Samson Society
Friendship and Discipleship for Men

The Path in Seven Weeks

The following seven-week format is just one way of journeying on the Path. It is essential to take this journey with a Silas; so if you don't have one, get one. There are many ways to experience each stage of the Path. A Silas should use creativity and his own experience to assist his brother in an experience of each stage of the Path. This seven-week guide is based on the Path and offers examples of how one might experience each stage.

Week 1: Meditations on the Fact

- Do you believe the Fact?
- Reflect on one statement of the Fact each day.
- Share doubts, struggles, etc. with Silas.
- What must I surrender to God?

Week 2: Course and Consequences before God

- In honest detail, write down your course and consequences by decade.
- To begin, move quickly, don't think too much about it, and write things down as soon as they come to you, no complete sentences. Four columns: Course (What Happened/My Immediate Response) and Consequences (To Myself/To Others).
- List as many names of persons you have harmed along the way.

Week 3: Course and Consequences before Silas

- In honest detail, share course and consequences with Silas.
- Silas may only ask questions of clarification. Be an active listener!
- No advice may be given unless specifically requested.

Week 4: Developing Daily Disciplines

- Develop new practices; create new habits.
- Stop for a moment and notice God!
- When you look at yourself, what do you see?

Week 5: Choosing to Trust the Body of Christ

- Clearing – community practice of clarity and discernment.
- Building a Team (see samsonsociety.com resources)
- Take the risk of calling your Silas immediately when faced with temptation.

Week 6: Making Amends

- With the counsel of your Silas, pursue helpful ways of making amends.
- Write letter(s), confess, and/or demonstrate repentance in other ways.

Week 7: Meditations on Being a Silas

- Take time to write down the ways you have been affected by your Silas.
- Reflect on the ways you may offer yourself to others.

Appendix J

Samson Society Meeting Format

Host: My name is _____. Let's open this meeting with prayer, followed by a reading of the 23rd
Psalm. [Asks someone to pray, another to read the 23rd Psalm]

Host: Welcome to this meeting of the Samson Society. We are a company of Christian men. We are also:

- Natural loners — who have recognized the dangers of isolation and are determined to escape them,
- Natural wanderers — who are finding spiritual peace and prosperity at home,
- Natural liars — who are now finding freedom in the truth,
- Natural judges — who are learning how to judge ourselves aright,
- Natural strongmen — who are experiencing God's strength as we admit our weaknesses.

As Christians, we meet at other times for worship, for teaching, or for corporate prayer. Today, however, we meet to talk. Our purpose is to assist one another in our common journey. We do so by sharing honestly, out of our own personal experience, the challenges and encouragements of
daily Christian living in a fallen world. Our faith rests in the love of God, as it is revealed in His Word and in the life of His Son. This is the **Great Fact** of the Gospel, which is the foundation of our Charter. [Asks someone to read *The Fact*]

Host: Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves. I'll begin and we'll go around the room. Those who wish may give a one-sentence statement of their reason for attending this meeting [Introductions follow].

Host: We in the Samson Society have been set upon a **Path**, a way of living that leads to godliness and freedom. Here is the description of that Path that is given in our Charter. [Asks someone to read *The Path*.]

Host: We have now reached the sharing portion of our meeting. In sharing, we speak honestly out of our own experience. We tell the truth about ourselves, knowing that our brothers will listen to us in love and will hold whatever we say in strictest confidence. We try to keep our comments brief, taking care to leave plenty of time for others. We address our statements to the group as a whole rather than directing them toward any one person. As a rule, we refrain from giving advice to others or instructing them during the meeting, believing that such conversations are best reserved for private moments between friends. The suggested topic today is _____(choose one from the list), — but we are not confined to that subject. You may speak about any issue that is currently commanding your attention. (If the group is large, divide into smaller breakout groups for sharing.) The floor is now open for anyone who wishes to speak.

Five minutes before the scheduled end of the meeting, the Host asks whether there are any final thoughts. When all who wish to speak have spoken, the Host says:

Host: The formal part of our meeting is now coming to a close, but you are encouraged to stay around afterward to talk, or to adjourn elsewhere for more informal fellowship.

Are there any announcements related to this meeting? Any announcements of other Samson Society meetings?

Host: As valuable as they are, these meetings are no substitute for daily Christian friendship. Just as our Lord's first disciples were sent into the world two-by-two, we too should look for at least one Christian companion, a fellow-traveler and advisor with whom to share this stretch of the road. The helper we select will be flawed and weak, like we are, but will nonetheless be willing to hear our story, protect our confidence, and talk with us briefly every day. We will walk together by mutual consent, gracefully accepting the fact that relationships change over time and that few relationships are permanent. Love, honesty and humility are our watchwords. Before we close, let us reaffirm the **Pact** under which our Society operates. [Asks someone to read *The Pact*.]

Host: Let's stand and close with prayer. (Prays simply for the needs expressed, leads in the Lord's Prayer.

Psalm 23

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.

3. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.

6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Topic List

Abandoning self-help Acceptance Adulthood Adventure Advice Adulthood Anger Argument Asking for God's aid Beauty Betrayal Blame Blindness Bravery Certainty Chaos Clarity Communication Comparison Competition Compromise Confession Confidentiality Confrontation Confusion Consequences Contentment Control Counsel Courage Creativity Criticism Daily disciplines Deceit Decision-making Defeat Defensiveness Demonstrating repentance Denial Destructiveness Determination Disappointment Disclosure Dishonesty Distraction Education Encouragement Enemies Enlightenment Envy Escape Family Fantasy Father Fatigue Fear Fighting Foolishness Forgetfulness	Forgiveness Freedom Friendship Fulfillment Gambling Generosity Gentleness Goals Goodness Grace Gratitude Greed Grief Happiness Hatred Healing Heroes Holiness Honesty Hope Humility Hunger Identity Injuries Insanity Integrity Intimacy Intoxication Isolation Joy Kindness Knowledge Laughter Learning Liberty Listening Living apart from God Longing Loss Love Lust Lying Making amends Making no promises Masculinity Medication Meditation Memory Mission Mistakes Mother Nature Neediness Obedience Patience Peace Perfection Persistence Power Powerlessness	Prayer Pride Progress Promises Quietness Quitting Rage Reconciliation Recreation Regret Resentment Respect Responsibility Rest Revelation Righteousness Risk Romance Sacrifice Sadness Sanity Secrets Seeking God's kingdom Self-Care Self-Centeredness Self-Discipline Selfishness Self-sufficiency Servanthood Service Sex Shame Simple faith Solitude Spirit Stealing Stewardship Strength Surrender Teamwork Temptation Tenderness The wisdom of friends Tolerance Toughness Transparency Trust Trusting the body of Christ Trustworthy companions Truth Unbelief Understanding Weakness Willingness Wisdom Women Worry Worship Wounds	

Appendix K

Transcript of Nate Larkin's speech, recorded at the Orlando 2012 Grace & Men Conference at Orangewood Church in Maitland, Florida, on January 21, 2012

I grew up in a church that was not very much at all like this one. I grew up in a little non-denominational denomination that came out of the "Holiness Tradition." We were very very serious about holiness, which we defined with a long list of things that real Christians do not do. So in the home that I was raised in we didn't smoke drink chew, or go with those who do. We didn't dance. We didn't listen to rock and roll on the radio. We didn't go to the movies. We didn't have a television. We didn't play baseball, any…we…on Sundays, we didn't play any game that involved a ball. No bicycles on Sundays. Couldn't play with the neighbor kids on Sundays. Not sure what that was about. We did not have any game in our house that involved the use of dice. No cards, of course, but also no dice, which ruled out Monopoly. Until we discovered the spinner! The spinner was legal. It was kinda like being raised by the Christian Taliban.

Now another thing that we didn't do in our house was we did not buy or read comic books. There was no Superman, no Batman, no Green Lantern in our house growing up. My father had no use at all for caped superheroes in tights. The only superheroes that were allowed in our house were real heroes, Bible heroes. Jesus of course, the ultimate superhero, and, Samson, who I first encountered in the full paged colored illustrations of *Eggermeier's Family Bible Story* book that my father read from every day during family devotions. I can still see it, that picture of Samson standing there after a battle. To me he seemed like the ideal man. He had chiseled features, a remarkable physique, great hair. He was invincible in battle and irresistible to women. I, on the other hand, was a skinny

kid with glasses who sometimes got pushed around on the playground by bullies, girl bullies. Sometimes when my father closed the book and we bowed our heads and closed our eyes in prayer, I imagined that I was Samson.

The real Samson lived in the 12th century b.c. in Palestine. The children of Abraham had taken, had moved into the land that God had promised to them, but it could not really be said that they were in possession of it. The Bible says that in those days the Philistines were strong in the land. The Philistines, or the Canaanites, were of, were a warlike agrarian people. Like Cain they placed their confidence in the fertility of their fields and their worship involved, uh, fertility and sexual, um, enactments of every description. So temple prostitution in the high places. Um, they were fierce warriors, and to maintain their dominance over the Israelites they instituted a strict policy of gun control. They made it illegal for the Israelites to own metal in any form, thus depriving them of what they would need to make swords and metal spear tips, good armor. The Israelites were reduced to plowing their fields with open, with uh, wooden plows, uh cooking on stones over open fires cause they couldn't make an iron cooking pot. Israel, uh, needed a deliverer. Not that everybody wanted one, there were quite a few people who decided that if you couldn't beat the Philistines, you might as well join them. So they'd begun to accommodate the Philistine culture. Some of them had married into Philistine families, given their children Philistine names, even started to worship at the high places. But there was always a remnant who remained faithful to the God of Israel who called out to Him for a deliverer. Well God heard and God sent Samson.

Now Samson's birth was very much a messianic advent. His birth was announced by an angel, first to his mother, then to his father. The angel instructed Samson's parents to set him aside with a special Nazerite vow. Never in his entire life would Samson enter a bar or a barbershop. Well Samson grew up knowing that he was special. His parents indulged him, dismissed his tantrums as the birthright of a gifted child. When he came of age, Samson set about fulfilling his destiny and he did so by adopting a very confrontational tone. He went out of his way to pick fights with the Philistines. One time, we're told, he went out and caught 300 foxes. Then he put them together in pairs, tied their tales together, tied torches to the tales, and then set the foxes loose in the grain fields of the Philistines. Now, understand this. The Philistine's god was Dagon, the god of grain. What Samson did was not just Eco terrorism it was a religious attack. The Philistines were furious. They responded immediately. They invaded. Well the terrified Israelites came out of their villages to see the approach of this glittering Philistine army. They had nothing to defend themselves with but bows and stone-tip arrows, and clubs. The Philistines made an offer. They said, "Give us Samson and we will let the rest of you live." So a whole bunch of Israelites went off to find Samson. It wasn't hard to find him. He was relaxing in his condo, a little cave down in Eden. When his brothers showed up and explained what had happened, he said, "Ok, well then, you better take me. Why don't you tie me up with this new rope and take me to the Philistines." So Samson was delivered into the field headquarters of the Philistine army by 3,000 unarmed Israelites. When he got there, the Bible says, something phenomenal happened. The

spirit of the Lord came upon Samson with power, and when it did he snapped those new ropes as if they were just flax. And then, looking around for something, anything that he could use as a weapon, he picked up what turned out to be a jawbone of a donkey. And with nothing more than that, he attacked and killed a thousand Philistines. It was unbelievable feat. Nobody had ever done anything anywhere near that. The Philistines were terrified. The Israelites were electrified. Overnight, Samson became the leader of Israel.

The Bible says that for the next 20 years Samson judged Israel. That is to say, he was their leader in all matters military, civil, and spiritual. Now, here's the interesting thing about Samson. The Bible never gives us any indication that he failed in his professional duties. Samson was functional. He was, even dutiful, responsible. He did his job. He showed up at 9:00. He clocked out at 5:00. He did his job. But after 5:00, Samson had a habit of disappearing. It was a habit he picked up as a young man when he used to wander through the backyards of Philistine neighborhoods looking for trouble and female companionship. It was a habit he should have dropped when he became the Philistine's public enemy number one, but by now he thought he was bullet proof. The Philistine's did everything they could to catch him. They paid informants. They set traps. Several times they came within just a whisker of catching him. Any sane man would have stopped, but Samson wasn't really sane.

And then one day, when he was about 40 years old, the wheels came off. He was relaxing at the home of a Philistine girlfriend—a woman who had already betrayed him 3 times. This time she rocked him to sleep, but not before finally extracting from him the secret of his great strength. And when he fell asleep, she cut off his hair. And then, called in the Philistines and woke him up. "Samson, the Philistines are upon you." He rose to defend himself as he had before, only to find that this time his strength had fled. The Philistines quickly overpowered him, bound him in chains, gouged out his eyes, and then took him to prison where they put him to work, serving their god, grinding grain. Samson's life was now effectively over. There was no hope of escape. He did the same thing every day, walking in circles in darkness.

But then one day, as if by a miracle, the doors opened, and they took him out of that little room. They took him to a religious festival, the Philistine equivalent of Mardis Gras that was being held at a big temple not far away. All the cream of Philistine society was there. And they brought him for the entertainment, the crowd. Samson could hear the crowd as they approached, could hear the roar that went up as they brought him inside the building, and his heart soared. He thought, "This is it! This is my chance to redeem my failed life!" Will the help of an unsuspecting boy he found his way to the two columns that formed the central structural support for the building. When he got there he put one hand on each column, breathed a quick prayer to God, and then pushed the columns apart. The building collapsed. The Bible says that Samson killed more Philistines in his death than he had killed in his entire life. And yet, Samson died a failure. When Samson

died the Philistines still ruled Israel. Nothing had changed. Not long after that God sent another deliverer. No angels this time. Nobody suggested, nobody suspected that the youngest son of Jesse was God's answer—not until he was pointed out several years later by a visiting prophet. Now like Samson, David enjoyed early success against the Philistines. In fact, David went on to accomplish what Samson had been unable to do. David actually defeated the Philistines; established the free and independent state of Israel with secure borders; established a capital city there, Jerusalem. Brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, and led a revival in worship. David was a poet, a musician, a warrior, a king. David was a great man. And when he was about 40 years old, the wheels came off. It happened, it seemed to happen overnight. David had actually set it up, whether he knew it or not, choosing to stay home when the rest of the army went into the field; choosing to go up on to his roof when it just happened to be bath time for the neighborhood ladies. But it was there that he caught sight of a beautiful naked woman, and that sight was enough to light a fuse that within days had taken David places he never thought he would go, committing adultery, and then, covering up that sin with murder.

So, two great men; two great failures. But after their failures, the lives of these two men went in different directions. Samson never recovered from his failure. He died alone, surrounded by enemies. David, on the other hand, actually recovered. David went on to become a better man and a better king. He died surrounded by family and friends and he left a legacy. Two great men. Two great failures. One man recovers. The other man doesn't. Why? I want to suggest to you that David recovered because he could, and

Samson did not recover because he couldn't. David recovered because he had learned to do the things that make recovery possible. Samson had never learned to do those things. I want to point out to you four ways in which the lives of these two men are strikingly different, and I think that these differences alone are enough to explain the differences in the way their stories ended.

Number one: Samson was a loner. David had friends. You know, Samson is a major Biblical figure. His story takes up four entire chapters of the book of Judges. That is an enormous amount of biblical real estate. The Bible tells us tons about Samson. And yet of all we know about Samson, the Bible gives us the name of not a single friend. In fact, the only associate of Samson's whose name we're told, aside from his parents, is Delilah, the woman who betrayed him. Aside from that, Samson didn't have any friends because Samson didn't think he needed any friends. Samson was Samson.

David was different. David began his life with a lot of solitude. And certainly, even prior to puberty, I mean he spent a lot of time in the fields with his father's sheep, there singing to God forming a close relationship with God. He was comfortable being alone. But his isolation ended on the day he killed Goliath. That was the day that David met Jonathon. The Bible actually paints the scene for us. It's a poignant one. Here's David flush from this victory, the handsome rugged young hero. And standing nearby is Jonathan who is King Saul's oldest son, Jonathan is the Crown Prince, heir to the throne. Now if he had any political sense, Jonathon would have known, and certainly he did

know, that standing there now under all that adulation was his major competition to the throne, and if, one would expect that at that point he would begin to isolate David in order to eliminate David. But Jonathan didn't do that. Instead, Jonathan approached David and he did two remarkable things. First, he took off his armor, that is to say, his defenses. And he gave his armor to David. Then, he took his sword and his knife and his bow and his arrows, things that David could hurt him with, and he gave him those too. Then, on the basis of that vulnerability he offered a friendship. David and Jonathan made a covenant that day—a covenant that saved both their lives on more than one occasion; a covenant that outlived them both. And that friendship actually became the first of many for David. In fact in the Bible, the list of David's friends goes on for pages—the thirty and the three hundred. David surrounded himself with losers and winners, with debtors and heroes and scoundrels and giant killers greater than himself. And together those men did what no one man could ever have done. Together, they defeated the Philistines.

Second difference between, between David and Samson: Samson was a rover. David was a home builder. Ya know, as I've told you, the Bible gives us many many scenes from Samson's life, but not really any domestic ones. We don't see him hanging out at his house with friends. When we did see Samson he's almost always on the move, behind enemy lines and alone. David was different. Yes, there were a few times when he was alone, but most of the stories that are given to us about David show him either at the head of a throng or in the middle of one. The first thing that David did after they captured Jerusalem was he built a home for himself there—a beautiful home suitable for

entertaining friends and raising a family. In fact, David was home when he fell. Samson could have called out for help when he was in trouble, but it would have done no good because nobody knew where he was. When David fell, he could see home and home could see him, and they could come to get him, especially one courageous friend named Nathan.

Third difference between the two men: Samson was a man of reflex; David a man of reflection. If you've read much of the Old Testament you know that the characters, the heroes of the Old Testament are always praying. They're forever praying, aren't they? Big, long, sometimes very repetitive prayers; everybody prays. That's another striking thing about Samson's story. Four entire chapters, a whole lifetime; one prayer—that desperate, "God help me!" seconds before he died. Aside from that, Samson didn't really talk to God. Samson really didn't talk to other people. Samson basically didn't talk. He was an action hero who kept it all inside. It was part of being strong. Don't say anything. David couldn't have been more different. Even when he was alone David talked. He talked to God. He poured out his heart to God. In fact, the biggest book of the Bible is just a portion of David's prayer journals. And when we read them, here's what's striking about them. David said everything to God. Now, we have our favorite Psalms, the ones that we set to music, you know, and they're usually the happy ones, the joyous ones, the ones about faith. Did you know that more than half the Psalms are laments? David spent an awful amount of time being angry with God, angry with people, wanting God to kill his enemies, feeling hopeless. But no matter how he felt, he said it!

He put it out there! In fact, the amazing thing is we have those psalms because he gave them to his brothers to sing. They'd never make it into our hymnal. But David would say, "Rough day? Hey, sing this. It might help." Samson didn't engage in introspection, in self-examination. He just got up and did stuff. Samson was blind long before they took his eyes. David lost his sight momentarily when he looked into that dazzling fire of lust. But he regained his sight because David really wanted to see.

Fourth difference between the two men: Samson made the big plays. David made the little plays. Samson, of course, was the original franchise player. He stands head and shoulders above everybody else in the Bible as far as military feats, feats of strength—unbelievable what that man could do. And he did huge things. I mean who in the world catches 400 foxes? 300 foxes, however it was. Crazy! David was different. Samson made his reputation by killing a thousand Philistines in one day. David made his reputation by killing one. But David killed the right one. Now David was not immune to the grand gesture. In fact we're told that toward the end of his life he was, he was sitting in his house one day in Jerusalem, long after his recovery and he's sitting there and he's so grateful for all that God has done. He can't believe how much God has blessed him, how much God has forgiven him, all that God has done. He's just overwhelmed, and then suddenly it strikes him. He's sitting in the finest house in Jerusalem, and God doesn't have a house. All he has is that box they've been carrying around the desert. And he thinks, "This isn't right! God is God. He's greater than any god. He should have not just the finest house in Jerusalem, he should have the finest house on the planet, in the

world! He should have the best, the most beautiful temple. That's what I'm gonna do! That's how I'm gonna thank him! That's what I'm gonna, I'm gonna build a house for God!" He got all excited, hired architects, began to order materials from all around the world, and then at, at some point he brought the answer, he brought the idea to God, and God said, "Uh, no. Thanks, but no. It's a nice thought, and a, a temple would be a good thing. In fact, your son can build me the temple. But there's something I need you to do right now. Go spend time with your boy." And at that point David shut the whole project down, laid everybody off, put all the materials into storage, and went and spent time with his boy.

I was 42 years old when it dawned on me one very ugly night, sitting in my bedroom, with a wife that hated my guts. Suddenly it dawned on me that my childhood dream had come true. I had become Samson. I was a gifted guy. I'd done some laudable things—ton of potential. But my life was effectively over. I was doing the same thing, day after day, walking in circles in darkness, no hope of escape. And at that point on some level I knew that if there was gonna be any hope for me, I was gonna have to learn to live like David.

Ya know, not long ago, my wife talkin' about that night, she said, "Ya know if you'd have died then, I would have been relieved." She said, "I wouldn't, I wasn't gonna kill ya, but I would not have objected if God did." She said, "But if you had died then, I would have had a real problem because I would not have been able to call six close

friends to carry your casket." 'Cause I didn't have six friends. I was well known, but nobody knew me. And she had just discovered that, that even she didn't know me. Today I'm so grateful to say that that's no longer the case. When I die, and I will die soon, my family will have no trouble finding six close friends to carry my casket. I'll be carried in life by the same men who carried, I'll be carried in death by the same men who carried me in life. But it had to start somewhere. It had to start so, as I told you last night I went to that, I went to that 12-Step meeting. I followed the guy in who I knew. Because I was new they, they had a special new-comers break-out meeting. Anybody who wanted to could go spend some special time with me, 'cause it was my first time. And uh, this guy still didn't recognize me, he says. But he, he volunteered to go outside with me. We went outside and we sat on a bench underneath a tree in the evening, the fading light of the evening. And this guy did two beautiful things. First, he gave me his armor. And then, he gave me things I could hurt him with. And then he said, "If you want, I'll walk with you a while." He became my first male friend since childhood. It's a strange thing, ya know, I kept wanting to put him in a father role. I wanted to ascribe all kinds of wisdom and perfection to the guy, and he wouldn't let me do it. He said, "Look, I'm messed up to. But when we're together" this guy was a Christian, of course, "Jesus is here. And I'll just share with you what other guys have shared with me, and I'll make some suggestions, and if you'll just be honest with me, I'm safe. You can be honest with me. You can tell me the truth. It's gonna get better." I had a tough time, I gotta tell you this, I had a tough time with 12-Step recovery in the beginning, mainly because it wasn't Christian enough for me. And I have a, I had a ton of religious pride. I

mean these guys wouldn't even call God by his proper name. It was all this higher power stuff. And I knew that my higher power could beat up their higher power. And, so, I figured that really my opinion trumped their opinion. I didn't, I was so arrogant! It's hard for me to trust these guys, very hard for me to tell them the truth. But they had this great advantage over me. What I was to learn was that most of 'em were Christians anyway. They just kept in on the down low so they didn't scare the new guys. Because a very high percentage of people who came into those rooms had been so badly wounded by the church that the use of Christian vocabulary would send them running. But here's what they knew. They knew that God loved 'em, no matter what. They knew that that love did not depend on how they were doing. And they knew that they could only follow him together. Me, I was so covered up with shame about my sin that I was determined to set the land speed record for recovery. I mean I was in there to get it figured out and get it fixed and get gone, so I didn't have to be around these broken people. And I was completely focused upon my sexual sin. That was the only thing I saw. One of the first things my spon, my friend said he said, "Larkin, your biggest problem is that you think sex is your problem." I couldn't believe it. I said, I just told him that I'd spent three hundred thousand dollars on porn and hookers. I said, "What do you mean sex is not my problem?" He goes, "Well it's a problem. It's a big problem. You gotta stop what you're doin', and you can't stop on your own, and you need God and you need us, but if you think that just stopping that sexual behavior is gonna fix you and make you happy you are crazy! In fact, if all you do is stop that you, you'll become more miserable than you are today, because sex is not your problem. Sex is your favorite solution. It's the

medication you use to numb the pain caused by your deeper problems which, by the way, are common to man. And that's where we're goin'. We're gonna be talkin' about your pride and your unbelief and your fear and your anger and your resentment and your self-pity—all of that stuff. But it was amazing as I began to trust him. Made, eventually several months in, made the emotional decision to actually join the group. I, I had to, I made the decision basically to join the human race. Up until that point I'd always imagined myself as either above or below the common rung of humanity. Either a little better or a little, you know it's that classic term, you know the addict is the egomaniac with the inferiority complex. That was me—just to become another bozo on the bus, was a wonderful thing—a great gift of addiction. I was forced into joining the human race. And then to find, you know I'd always been willing to trust Christ, but I'd never be willing to trust the body of Christ. In fact, I didn't even believe in the body of Christ. I thought that was a metaphor. I did not believe that Jesus is physically present on this planet in the lives of broken people. I wanna tell ya, I believe it today. And here's my experience. The greatest act of surrender I make to Christ every day is to pick up the phone and tell the truth to another member of the body of Christ. And here's the amazing thing. Time after time I call a guy who I know is as messed up as I am and Jesus answers the phone. He keeps his promise.

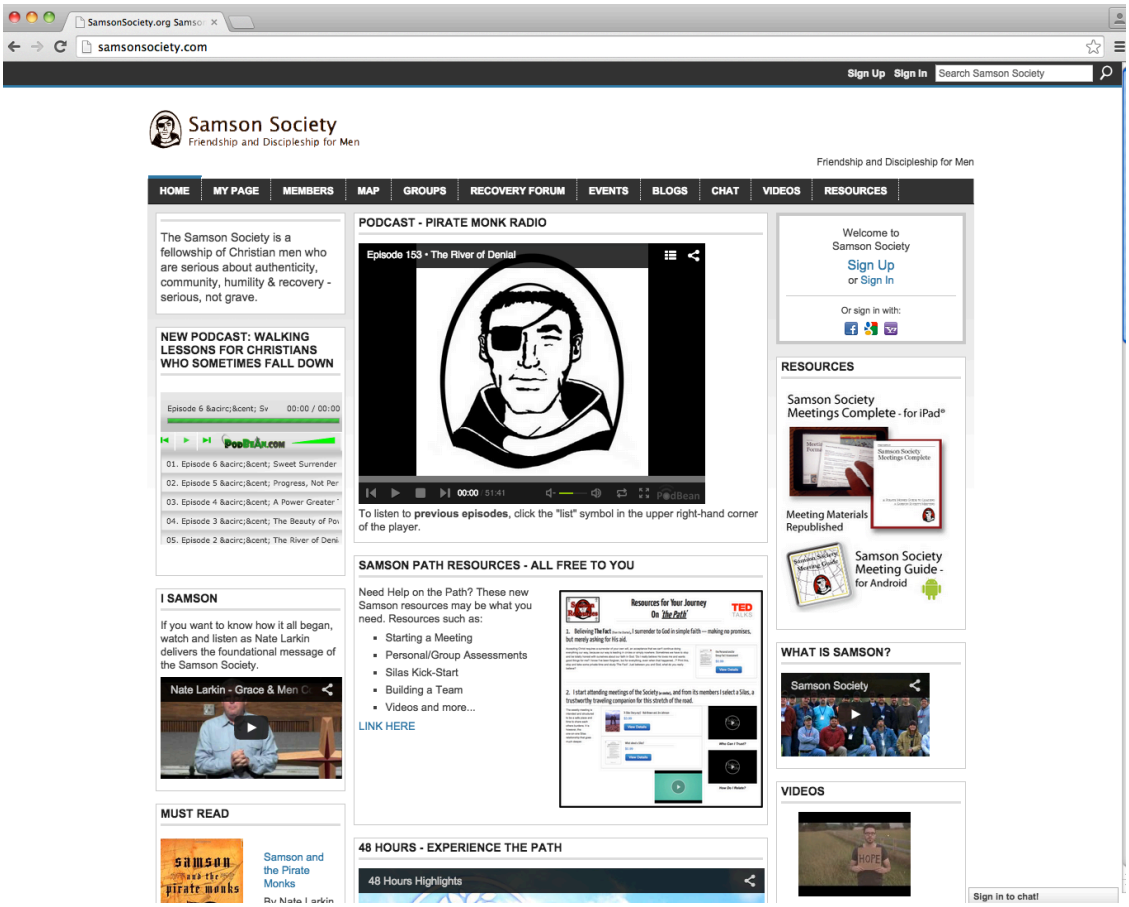
Well this is a huge topic, a huge subject. I've tried to cover some of it in Samson and the Pirate Monks. I wrote that to be a memoir and kind of a handbook, a field manual for guys getting started in a recovery journey. And thank the Lord, there's lots of—I'd, I had

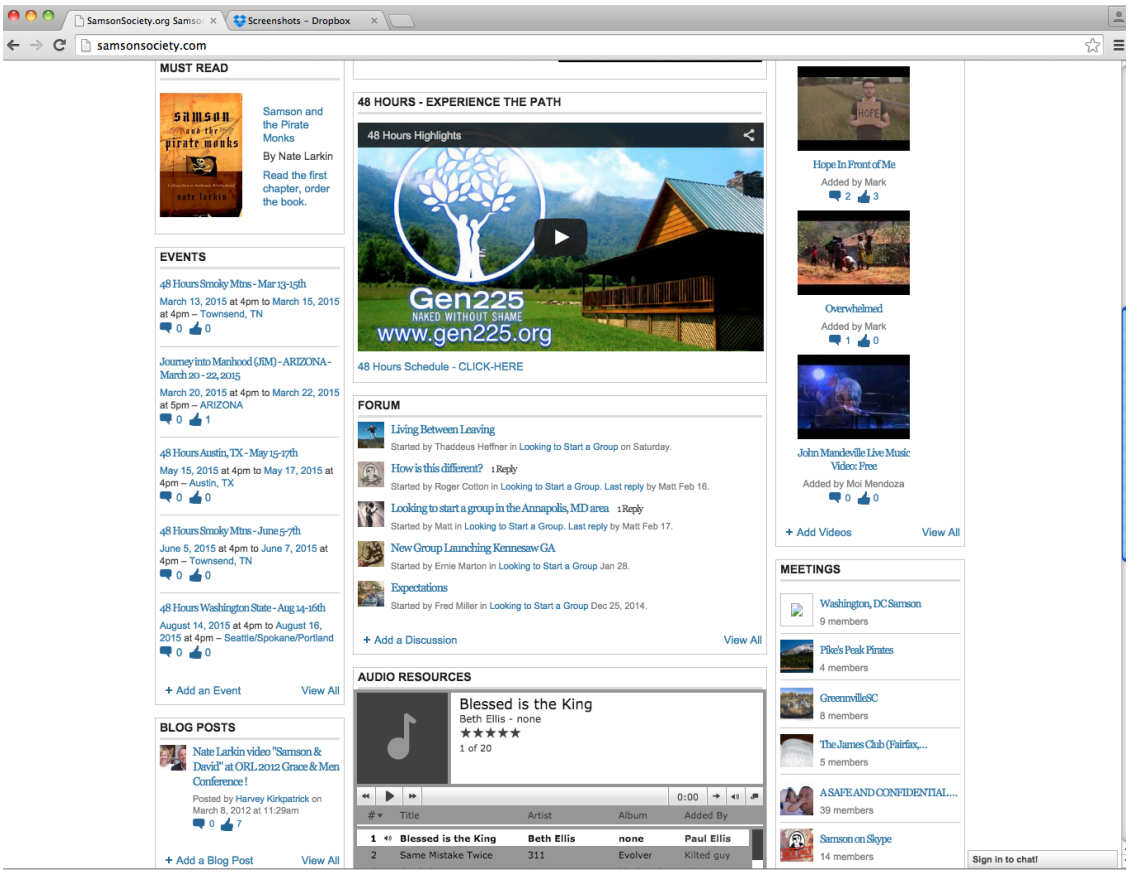
no idea how big the recovery subculture is until I entered it. It's phenomenal. I wanna tell you, those of you here, by the way I still drop in on 12-Step meetings. A few years ago, I had the privilege with a number of other guys, of starting a group just for Christian guys. And I found that there were lots of Christian guys who were as broken as me, but sometimes in other areas. Guys who really didn't fit in a classic 12-Step world, so we started something called the Samson Society. It's a company of Christian men. It's a, it's a group of failed heroes. The Samson Society is a place right smack dab in the middle of the Church that's intended to be a persona-free zone. It's a place where you can bring your real self, where you gain status by being authentic. It's a place where you can find other guys serious about walking in the same direction. Drop the pretense. Let's get down to actual real business, all the while knowing that we're not earning God's affection by doing so. We're only pushing back the effects of the fall. We're only appropriating the glory of the gospel. It's a wonderful, beautiful thing. But I do want to say, if, uh, especially to pastors, if you're in this room and you have never been to let's say an AA meeting, get thee to an AA meeting. Go! I can guarantee there are hundreds of them within just a few miles of this place. Find an open meeting. Go in, sit down, shut up and listen. I'm so grateful that God used 12-Step recovery to pluck me from disaster, to set me on a new path. 12-Step recovery opened doors and windows on the gospel that I had never seen. Put that together with some great gospel preaching in a new church, unbelievable how my life changed. Here's the thing, my wife today will tell you that she's been married to two guys named Nate Larkin, and as awful as those first twenty years were she says, she'd take 'em again in a heartbeat to get the last thirteen.

That's not because I changed. I spent my life trying to change. It's because I'm being changed. Because I stopped, because I finally surrendered, abandoned as unworkable the effort to do it myself and surrendered to reality—joined the body of Christ. When we do that change begins to happen.

Appendix L

The Web Site: www.samsonsociety.com




SamsonSociety.org Samso
Screenshots - Dropbox
samsonsociety.com
MUST READ
Samson and the Pirate Monks
By Nate Larkin
Read the first chapter, order the book.
EVENTS
48 Hours Smoky Mtns - Mar 13-15th
March 13, 2015 at 4pm to March 15, 2015 at 4pm – Townsend, TN
Journey into Manhood (JiM) - ARIZONA - March 20 - 22, 2015
March 20, 2015 at 4pm to March 22, 2015 at 5pm – ARIZONA
48 Hours Austin, TX - May 15-17th
May 15, 2015 at 4pm to May 17, 2015 at 4pm – Austin, TX
48 Hours Smoky Mtns - June 5-7th
June 5, 2015 at 4pm to June 7, 2015 at 4pm – Townsend, TN
48 Hours Washington State - Aug 14-16th
August 14, 2015 at 4pm to August 16, 2015 at 4pm – Seattle/Spokane/Portland
+ Add an Event
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BLOG POSTS
Nate Larkin video "Samson & David" at ORL 2012 Grace & Men Conference !
Posted by Harvey Kirkpatrick on March 8, 2012 at 11:29am
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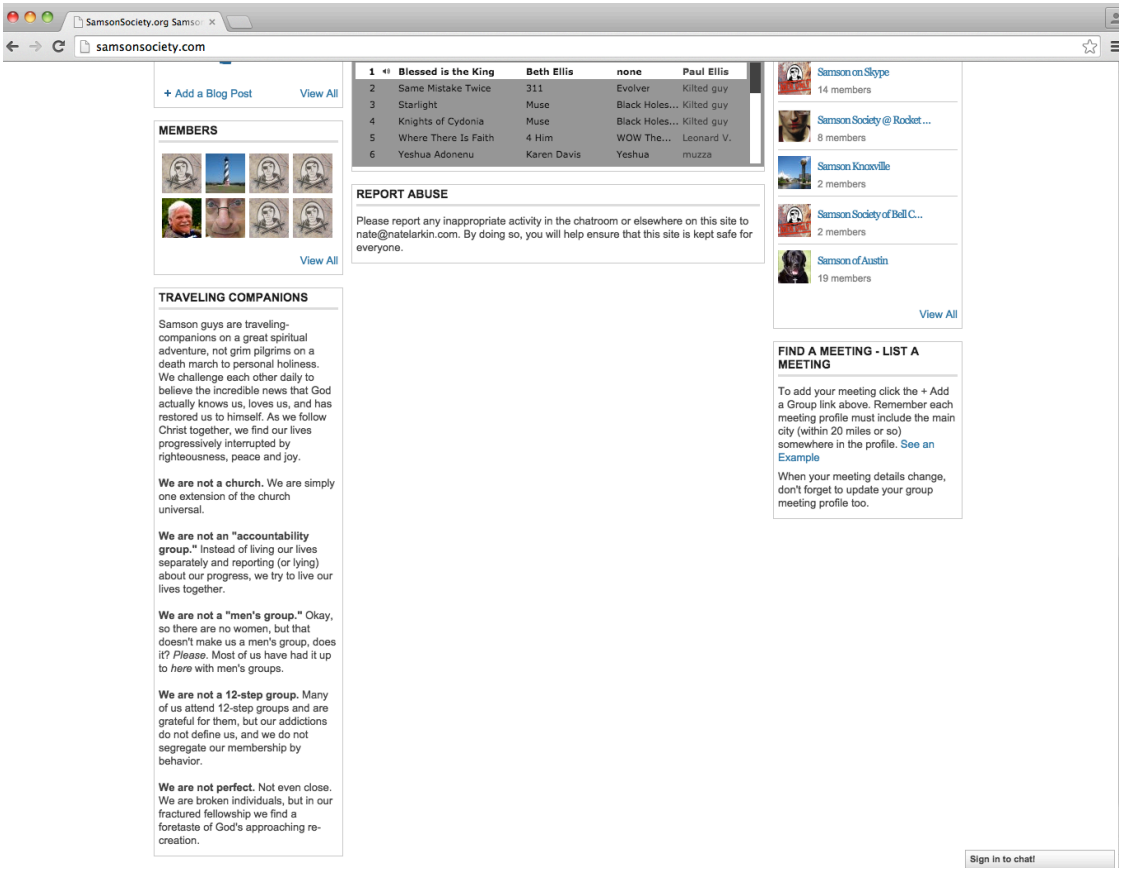
48 Hours Highlights
Gen225
NAKED WITHOUT SHAME
www.gen225.org
48 Hours Schedule - CLICK-HERE
FORUM
Living Between Leaving
Started by Thaddeus Heffner in Looking to Start a Group on Saturday.
How is this different? 1 Reply
Started by Roger Cotton in Looking to Start a Group. Last reply by Matt Feb 16.
Looking to start a group in the Annapolis, MD area 1 Reply
Started by Matt in Looking to Start a Group. Last reply by Matt Feb 17.
New Group Launching Kennesaw GA
Started by Ernie Marton in Looking to Start a Group Jan 28.
Expectations
Started by Fred Miller in Looking to Start a Group Dec 25, 2014.
+ Add a Discussion
View All
AUDIO RESOURCES
Blessed is the King
Beth Ellis - none
1 of 20
Title
Artist
Album
Added By
1 Blessed is the King Beth Ellis none Paul Ellis
2 Same Mistake Twice 311 Evolver Kilted guy
Hope In Front of Me
Added by Mark
Overwhelmed
Added by Mark
John Mandeville Live Music Video: Free
Added by Moi Mendoza
+ Add Videos
View All
MEETINGS
Washington, DC Samson
9 members
Pike's Peak Pirates
4 members
GreenvilleSC
8 members
The James Club (Fairfax,...
5 members
A SAFE AND CONFIDENTIAL...
39 members
Samson on Skype
14 members
Sign in to chat!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TRAVELING COMPANIONS
Samson guys are traveling-companions on a great spiritual adventure, not grim pilgrims on a death march to personal holiness. We challenge each other daily to believe the incredible news that God actually knows us, loves us, and has restored us to himself. As we follow Christ together, we find our lives progressively interrupted by righteousness, peace and joy.
We are not a church. We are simply one extension of the church universal.
We are not an "accountability group." Instead of living our lives separately and reporting (or lying) about our progress, we try to live our lives together.
We are not a "men's group." Okay, so there are no women, but that doesn't make us a men's group, does it? Please. Most of us have had it up to here with men's groups.
We are not a 12-step group. Many of us attend 12-step groups and are grateful for them, but our addictions do not define us, and we do not segregate our membership by behavior.
We are not perfect. Not even close. We are broken individuals, but in our fractured fellowship we find a foretaste of God's approaching re-creation.
1 Blessed is the King Beth Ellis none Paul Ellis
2 Same Mistake Twice 311 Evolver Kilted guy
3 Starlight Muse Black Holes... Kilted guy
4 Knights of Cydonia Muse Black Holes... Kilted guy
5 Where There Is Faith 4 Him WOW The... Leonard V.
6 Yeshua Adonenu Karen Davis Yeshua muzza
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Samson Society @ Rocket ...
8 members
Samson Knoxville
2 members
Samson Society of Bell C...
2 members
Samson of Austin
19 members
View All
FIND A MEETING - LIST A MEETING
To add your meeting click the + Add a Group link above. Remember each meeting profile must include the main city (within 20 miles or so) somewhere in the profile. See an Example
When your meeting details change, don't forget to update your group meeting profile too.
Sign in to chat!

Appendix M

The Podcast: "Pirate Monk Radio"