



Men: Their Stories, Their Struggles, Their Journeys



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Office Phone: 269.383.3597
email: office@ohmin.org

Connecting with Men and Men's Issues



Mark Bonham
Executive Director

Welcome to the men's edition of OHM's newsletter! With Father's Day so prominent on the calendar as this reaches you, we thought we would focus on men's stories, men's struggles, and men's journeys. I've invited two men to contribute that I have personally journeyed with and who have been key to developing men's ministry.

John Hamilton is no stranger to those who have been to SALTS. He was the first man to attend when SALTS focused on women and sexual abuse issues. The presence of a man who could hear and respond to women's stories opened a floodgate of longing that other men would get in touch with their hearts and engage the pain of the spouses, their children and their churches. Today a typical SALTS is 40% men and growing. The word is out: "SALTS is really for men – others are invited!" (See the comments of the men who attended the last SALTS elsewhere in this letter.) John is married to Mary Jane who typically writes our "What to do if..." column for Grace Group leaders, and is a father of two and a grandfather of six.

John Kuiper is a husband, a father of two sons, a financial advisor by day, a Grace Group leader locally, and a SALTS leader. Along with John Hamilton, John serves on the OHM Ministry Team and has been a faithful part of this ministry for seven years.

As Christian men, husbands and fathers we realize the struggle to engage in healthy relationships while we are plagued by the memory of significant hurts. All of us are victims of poor loving, as well as being guilty of loving poorly. We wrestle with connecting with our woundedness as well as our foolishness. These are the underlying themes of all of our stories. Understanding our woundedness helps explain who we have become, but does not excuse what we have done.

In my study of men and fathers I have read that some of men's stories center on striving to gain the blessing of their dads, while others strive to kill the longing for that blessing. Many men in their twenties and thirties carry doubts and cynicism about the manhood they have seen. Their search for authentic manhood has too often been a reaction to the man their fathers represent. In Grace Groups older men and younger men come face to face and talk honestly about their disappointments, fears, hopes and dreams.

They look at areas that need healing and areas that need change. This frequently leads to sorrow, repentance and brokenness.

As men in the process of being restored, we long to reclaim God's original design and intent. We long not only to be delighted in, but to delight in those who God has entrusted to our care. The degree to which we struggle with consistently doing this is often a reflection of the degree to which we have received such a blessing from our own fathers. All of us have significant deficits to overcome.

That is one of the reasons six men have banded together here in the Kalamazoo area. All of us have been to SALTS and been Grace Group leaders. We are all committed to this ministry. But we realize that we need each other to make more significant progress. We realize as well that we have allowed the stories of our fathers and other significant men in our lives to define us and rob us of our glory and our joy. We are committed to restoring God to His rightful place as the One who has called us to live for His story, His glory and His joy.

As we continue to make progress and gain insight we hope to develop forums to share what we are learning with other men. John Eldredge's

book, "The Way of the Wild Heart", is giving us some guidance at this stage of the journey. The work that each of us have done on our own stories encourages us to dig deeper and makes the group safe.

We invite men who are on similar paths to engage with us and let us know what they are learning. May this newsletter be a point of connection for males who long to be the men and fathers they were created to

Men comment on
their SALTS experience:

"It is where you experience the worst and best day of your life...on the same day!"

"I want to use my strength not to protect myself, but for others around me – my wife, my kids and in the ministry."

"I saw in myself how I used people for my good – not theirs."

"I am becoming able to enter conflict without self defense."

"This is a life transforming ministry – if you are open to being vulnerable."

"I saw how my relational style was sabotaging my relationships. I am learning to connect at a soul level."

"It is allowing me to be the person that I could only wish for myself"

Anger: When Male Strength is Used to Distance Others



John P. Hamilton

OHM Leader, Speaker,
Board Member

I've never met a man who wasn't angry at some level. Anger can look like the "bully," or look reserved and controlled while being passive aggressive. Anger takes on many forms and faces. Change starts only when you are willing to face that anger exists within you.

Men are often taught as little boys that showing emotion is weak and not acceptable. Yet anger is the one thing that can be seen as strength and seem acceptable. Little boys learn early that being angry is a way to be heard, gain control and protect themselves. But anger is really a cover for hurt or feelings of inadequacy.

For many years I have used anger for all of the above reasons. Anger was the friend I could trust and depend on to help get me through life's uncomfortable situations. Anger was where I thought my strength as a man was found. As a teacher and a coach I used anger to control my classroom and to motivate my players to perform well so that I could be seen as successful. I felt like I got paid for being angry. Who could ask for anything more?

Life seemed good. I retired from teaching/coaching and got involved in Open Hearts Ministry. My prayer life and devotions grew richer and deeper. I was having an impact in the lives of others but little did I know how frightening my anger was to my family, friends and ministry team. It would leak out as other-centered contempt seasoned with sarcasm. My wife was afraid of me. She did not trust me. She was silenced. I thought all this time I was leading with strength and yet she saw our relationship as a stalemate.

Four years ago my family, friends and ministry team took the risk of confronting my anger. I wish I could say that I was immediately broken by the damage of my sin. It took time, God's word, counsel, prayer and my curiosity to discover the truth for myself. It definitely took time to come to a level of despair where I was silenced by God and broken over the damage that my anger and the perversion of my strength had inflicted on others. Ironically, through all of this, God kept whispering, "You are good and this will be good." Eventually I did confess my arrogance, contempt and resistance to God and man's authority.

A key component in working through this was a close friend who listened as I poured out my resistance, my justification and my pain. He did not try

to “fix me”. He did not try to talk me out of what I was feeling. He was an advocate for me in hearing my pain, but he did not neglect to confront my sin.

Here are some key things I learned I needed to do from this experience:

- Stop justifying and making excuses about why I have the right to be angry.
- Realize that everyone who disappoints me is not my abuser.
- Trust friends and family when they speak into my life.
- Mentor my mind to be curious without defending myself.
- Listen to others so my response will be for them and not about me.
- Submit to, instead of compete with, the strength of others.
- Ask how others are experiencing me.

I am glad that the intervention I received followed the Matthew 18:15-17 principles:

- “If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault between you and him alone.” That happened several times.
- “If he will not hear you take two or more that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word will be heard.” Seven people spoke to me by ones or twos.
- “If he refuses to hear you tell it to the church (or ministry team) and let him be like a heathen or non-believer.” This speaks to being held accountable for my actions and being disciplined in some way. I felt my marriage was in danger and that I would lose my place on the ministry team or I would have to leave the ministry. God used a level of desperation to get my full attention.

Today I am thankful for those who saw beyond my anger and went after my integrity. I had choices to make



and their intervention helped me to make the “right” ones. Before this I was stuck. Now God is using me and my new found strength to impact others in meaningful ways. May God encourage you to explore what is behind your anger and discover your real strength in a

Band of Brothers in Kalamazoo



John Kuijer

SALTS Leader, Speaker,

OHM Ministry Team

Band of Brothers is a highly acclaimed HBO miniseries, based on the lives of soldiers in Easy Company, on the frontlines of the European theater in WWII. They parachuted into France on D-Day and were there through the victory in Europe. It highlights their experiences of life and death, fighting the enemy, and how they band together to accomplish this difficult task.

We have a band of brothers in Kalamazoo, attempting to accomplish the difficult task of being a man in the 21st century. We may not face physical life and death but we can face spiritual and emotional life and death. Most of the time we attempt to accomplish life on our own, without others. We have banded together and meet monthly for three reasons:

- 1) Tell our stories and the current struggles we face as a man, husband, father. After this we are better able to support and encourage each other.
- 2) Purposeful discussion of a book by John Eldridge – *The Way of the Wild Heart* (A Map for the Masculine Journey).
- 3) Birth a model of reaching out to men, to replicate what we are attempting to do with our group of six. We want to reach out to those men who are involved in the SALTS ministry – to encourage them to positively impact their world.

Our book discussion in chapter three challenged all of us. As we looked at our view of our Heavenly Father, in light of our view of our earthly father. I've always had a fear of God. Is it because I believed the passage in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"? Or is my fear of God somehow related to my fear of my earthly father? Am I using a unique set of lens to get a view God that might be quite fuzzy?

My view of God over the past 40 years has been quite consistent. He is a God of love. He loves the whole world, all of you reading this, but I'm not sure if He loves me. He is a God of power and miracles. He does powerful and awesome acts for others, but I'm not sure He would for me. He is a God of mercy. He has shown mercy to the world, but at times he seems to withhold his mercy from me. My basic theology of God is sound but I've struggled to connect with Him in a personal way. Why is that? Why the disconnect? Do you struggle with a more intimate connection to God? At the age of 51 I'm asking myself a question. How has my view of God

been impacted by my earthly father? I hesitate going there because of Ephesians 6:1, “Honor your father and mother.” Will an honest look at the past dishonor my father? Then I’m forced to ask the question that may be easy for some, but hard for those like me to ask. What impact did my father really have on my life? That involves some time of reflection, using a pen and journal to record my thoughts. This is where I can get stuck quite easily – it’s not easy to look at my past. Am I willing to persist? As I take the time to reflect back on my personal situation, I realize that I have an earthly father who is flawed, imperfect and loves that way. I have taken that grid and placed it on my Heavenly Father, who is sinless and perfect, who loves me perfectly.

There is a lot of difficult work to be done here. I can’t make it on the journey alone and neither can you. We need to find others to band together with, to help us sort through being a man/husband/father in the battle for our soul.



before.”

(cont. on page 6)

Men’s comments cont. ...

“I can celebrate the man God created me to be and not push him away.”

“I long to really hear what others are speaking and listen with my heart. I want to stop putting words in other people’s mouths and speaking for them.”

“I got a larger view of how I have been living and woke up to a disastrous downward spiral.”

“I’ve learned I base my behavior on rules instead of relationships... I need to learn how to celebrate.”

“I experienced people who would fight for me.”

“I have learned that there is anger behind my silence.”

“It has given me a vision for my marriage!”

“I have tasted freedom as I’ve never tasted it before. I am released from my fear and shame.”

“It is exhausting and renewing, painful and pleasing. A place for coming alive.”

“I was pursued and not permitted to hide...I’ve been a part of groups that gloss over and dismiss feelings and that didn’t happen here.”

“Every person, especially pastors, counselors, teachers... anyone who works with



Open Hearts Ministry
161 East Michigan Ave.
Suite 600
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Upcoming Events

August 17-18: OHM Leaders' Retreat, Kalamazoo, MI: Trauma Recovery

Oct. 15-20: SALT'S Muskegon, MI, including Spanish Speaking Groups

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