

Much like it took years to begin to truly embrace the reality of my own weakness, so too did it take years for me to begin to honestly embrace a regimen or practice of spirituality that would offer me insight on the real state of my soul. I am convinced that during these years of wandering as it were, I did not even have the tools to assess my spiritual state and thus projected to others whatever I choose or whatever seemed appropriate at the time. I was a chameleon not because I choose to be deceitful. I was deceitful because that was the persona my shadow self had created to keep me from really seeing myself clearly. This was the man I had to be to even exist in my own mind. The hiding from others was also a hiding from myself. The lack of spiritual disciplines was not merely sloth or laziness of soul. but an inability to even know where to start. I was unaware of my own true spiritual health and condition.

Meeting the True Me in a Tragedy

This may very well be why I was so easily absorbed and formed by the current events and conversations of the day. I was a reflection of what was happening to me in my outer world rather than a reflection of my deeper self and the callings and longings of the soul. The self I offered up to others was calculated and discreet, attenuated and driven. No one saw the real me for I could not even allow myself to go to those places of self-reflection. Offering up an authentic self would mean I had to do the work to know who the man was in the inner mirror of the soul. But truthfully I had done no deep soul work. I was a child in my spiritual life even though I had numerous degrees, had lead churches, and had written many articles on faith. This is not to denigrate the desire my heart had to be Christ-like. This is an awareness in retrospect that I was unable to offer up a true self in my service and faith walk. There was no true self to offer up. I was on some level an empty cipher acting out my life through a well-intentioned persona unable to even detect my own hypocrisy.

As is the case with many men and women, it is tragedy, illness, public humiliation, or a life altering tragedy that puts them in a place to begin this inner inventory. That is why I call this journey one of becoming. I am convinced no one ever arrives at this place without some painful incentive. Not in this life. Part of the heritage I grew up in had the foundational theological idea that perfection (sinlessness) was achievable and attainable through the surrender of self in prayer. This perfection was experiential through God's Holy Spirit and when one was ready to empty themselves of sinful acts or thoughts, the power to live above the fray of life was available. It was merely a matter of commitment, not spiritual disciplines or submission to other

men in authentic community. I was brought up to believe and live a life that was a counter to the narrative to the larger more dominant story of the secular world. As I grew older, what I found in the church was a woefully naive understanding as to how our stories are formed and sustained. Healthy self-awareness and transparency were nearly nil while projection of evil on certain societal ills was rampant. It was the “evil others”, the non-believers that were taking the world towards its end time’s inevitability. It was an outward looking projection which lead of course to a profound lack of any personal awareness regarding one’s own brokenness and responsibilities.

Discovering my Wounds

A little over 20 years ago I found myself sitting in a room with a few men I hardly knew. Rumor was at my church that this new group called Samson Society was a place where a man might find a degree of accountability. Rumor also was that the founder, Nate Larkin, was an ex-pastor who had found himself sexually addicted and his life in ruin. This sounded like my kind of group. A little over a half decade before I too had found myself broken. My marriage was near collapse and I found I had no community nor support system to cope with what life was throwing at me. A dear friend serendipitously crossed my path one day and quickly saw the despair written on my face. My health was suffering, my spiritual life a mess, and my identity shattered as I now looked at the future and felt helpless. He mentioned a men’s group he attended in Chicago and offered a place in the group if I was willing to submit myself to the group’s ways of engaging life and spirituality. At this point I was so desperate any help was welcomed. I had no idea that this encounter would realign the deepest trajectory of my soul, reunite my marriage, and set me on a path that to this day has been nothing if not the very salvation of God.

The 1st Samson Meeting

Now some years later as I sat in a Nashville church with these new men I was deeply aware that I had moved into a new region of my inner life. I knew intuitively that I was still quite vulnerable to allowing brokenness to once again rule my life. In that moment I decided I had no options but to jump into the deep end of the pool. So that night, on the 5th of June when my turn came around to share I decided to make a clear declaration of brokenness. On that date in that church (Christ Community Church of Franklin) I offered up my deepest assessment of my soul and allowed others to see just how much I needed them and the restoration only available in the Gospel and the Spirit of God. The response was nothing short of miraculous. I knew

immediately I had found a group of men where offering up these broken places was not a shameful act but one that created a sense of safety and honesty. I had found a new home in a new city. I sensed I belonged. I had found a family who knew my name.

In Retrospect

No one can ever predict the twists and turns of our lives but now in retrospect I look back on those early days of Samson as the foundation for something that appears to be small but beautiful, contained but growing, orderly and yet full of chaos, clearly biblical but full of paradox, theologically orthodox and yet full of spiritual mystery. This community has been the catalyst for the emergence of a new manifesto on men's spirituality. This experience with Samson has revealed to me and many other men that we can no longer sit on the sidelines as the church struggles to communicate to us. We can no longer sit back and merely observe, as men are continually passive and confused in their role and place in the church. This passivity leads many men to shut down and grow quiet as they feel as though those in authority are pushing them to the periphery and are unwilling or unable to engage in an honest dialogue. It is a dangerous indifference that is costly to both the men and the church.

Stepping Up and Being Present

My life in Samson has been less an articulation of what is wrong with the church and society and more a positive affirmation of what is taking place below the surface. It is a positive sharing and celebration of the discoveries of men in community that are running towards the challenges and calling out for a place in their families and church's lives. This makes the journey an encouraging declaration and an uplifting conversation around that process as it has emerged in Samson.

Samson Society is not a once and for all answer book to problems with men, sexual sobriety, and the church. That framing puts men and leadership in a defensive posture. This emerging community of the unashamedly broken open is more a discovery of how men appear to express their spirituality and the ongoing process of community that helps to name that posture of the heart and to bring it into the light. When other men who are willing to be mutually vulnerable challenge each other, the results are powerful and welcoming. When it is safe and mutual, men respond. It is in their spiritual DNA.

What the men of The Samson Society allow and foster is a desperately hungry heart that can no longer wait for top down leaders to model or walk in the brokenness and submission necessary for restoration. We are observing men begin to see that despite their personal shame, the Spirit is not through with them yet, and there is a divine hopefulness that beckons them back to the heart of the Father. We are discovering that a consistent desire for restoration and spiritual growth is fleeting at best and ultimately reveals we cannot attempt the journey alone. We are seeing men embrace the power, beauty, and mystery of human sexuality and desire its integration into their lives in its fullness and grieve over the demonization of sexuality's radiant gift. We are continually amazed to discover how many men truly desire a friendship and not just knowledge of God. We are consistently encountering men who are unable to be cynical anymore and therefore desire a place where the brokenness of the world is viewed through the eyes of love. In meetings and friendships we are witnessing one's speech and ways of engagement being filled with grace, holy laughter, and sensitivity to others

Our Declaration and Desire in Samson

Within the rhythm of life, we in Samson desire to be accountable to one another, to grow and journey together, listening to each other and the wider Christian community for wisdom rather than trusting only ourselves. We want to have a willingness to share life, rather than to make it private as we seek to walk together in a deep way rather than as strangers who only know the surface of one another. But most of all we wish to welcome all whom we encounter, when we are gathered and when we are dispersed, extending Christ's gracious invitation to relationship, meaning and life in all its fullness. We are moving out of darkness and isolation into the light. Praise be to the Father.