

Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity

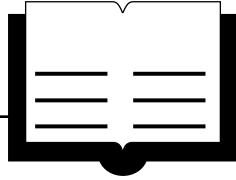
PEACEFUL *at* HEART

STUDY GUIDE

by Dan Epp-Tiessen



edited by
Don Neufeld
Steve Thomas



STUDY GUIDE

Peaceful at Heart: Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity

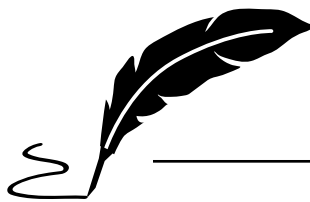
Don Neufeld and Steve Thomas, editors (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019)



Copyright © 2020 Mennonite Men
Written by Dan Epp-Tiessen



Dan Epp-Tiessen is a semi-retired Associate Professor of Bible at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. One of his side gigs at the university has been to teach in the area of gender studies. Dan enjoys reading, running, biking, gardening, camping, canoeing, and birdwatching. One of the greatest blessings in his life is family—his wife Esther, two sons and their partners, and two granddaughters. Dan is an active member of Home St. Mennonite Church.



PREFACE

We are pleased to introduce you to the companion study guide for *Peaceful at Heart*, *Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity*.

For far too long, many within our Anabaptist traditions have not had the opportunity to engage in dialogue, training or education on the topic of healthy masculinity. At the same time, conversations around masculinity have become increasingly important, especially as part of our conversation around peace in homes and communities. In addition, within the larger conversation on men's well-being, the question of peace and the relevancy of our peace theology has not been thoroughly explored as a possible resource for healing and thriving. In recent years in particular, conversations around masculinity, especially what has become known as "toxic expressions of masculinity," have become incredibly polarizing. Navigating these topics is challenging with the recognition that masculinity encompasses a continuum of expressions that has ranged from violence to healthy forms of masculinity. Our goal in developing this study guide is to assist you as you navigate these important—and difficult—conversations.

Written by Dan Epp-Tiessen, this study guide is a resource developed to help men in particular as they engage in much-needed conversations about masculinity, church and our Christian faith. Well-facilitated conversations like this have been a largely overlooked area of study within our Anabaptist faith communities. We hope to change this, providing support toward ending the stigma and normalizing conversations around masculinity through this study guide.

Our awareness and understanding of domestic/intimate partner and sexual violence is increasing. Now more than ever, the need is great for resources to engage in challenging conversations about what it means to be male in today's society.

Conversations about what healthy masculinity is, and is not, and how to follow the example that Jesus set, calls us to a deeper level of work than the culture around us. These are critical peacebuilding conversations essential for creating safe, peaceable spaces in our churches, homes, workplaces, communities and society, and the Anabaptist community have a unique contribution to make.

As Mennonite Central Committee Ontario began to look more deeply into this topic, we found significant gaps in the narrative that missed our faith perspective as Anabaptist Christians. We saw a need for resources that would encourage and foster conversations about masculinity in healthy ways—and point us to the author of our faith—Jesus. It is essential for us as a faith community to engage in meaningful conversations about the various healthy and unhealthy beliefs about masculinity, including patriarchal attitudes which have permeated our lives, culture and even our church traditions. It is our hope that this study guide provides an avenue to engage and invite men into the conversation, rather than turning them away.

Societal, cultural and personal habits and patterns develop over time. And unhealthy expressions of masculinity are not easily deconstructed. Our concepts of masculinity are also varied within our Anabaptist contexts and our frameworks of how we understand scripture and the basis of our theology. This can be a difficult path to navigate, but through this study guide we begin with one important and significant question, knowing that Jesus will need to be at the center of every conversation: to envision the preferred picture of what it looks like to see men as image bearers of God's peace thriving in community. This work takes inward reflection as we engage in conversations about male privilege and patriarchy.

We are deeply grateful for the many contributors to the book,

Peaceful at Heart: Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity, for which this companion study guide was developed. We are grateful for the vision of editors Don Neufeld and Steve Thomas, for creating the book that provides the foundation for these conversations, along with sixteen male and three female contributors.

Men will benefit from listening deeply to the voices of the women in the book, along with the voices of the women in their own lives. The book is not necessarily an easy read, but it is an important one—perhaps even a life-changing one. It raises many questions for men that will require us to exercise humility and a listening voice.

In the book, contributor Carol Penner discusses an important challenge, “how do we go from being peaceful at heart to peaceful at home?” For men, we hope this book will prompt deep reflection along with conversation, change and accountability where needed. As men, we want our homes to be places of peace and refuge, and to accomplish that, our homes must be the place this foundational peace is lived out. Actions will speak louder than words.

If we are to build peace in our world, we have to begin with our homes, families, communities and workplaces, and then move outward into society. This process of building healthy masculinity will require radical rethinking in ways that many have not previously considered, and a commitment to working together as a community. Together, we can become the change that is long overdue in our Anabaptist traditions.

It is a courageous step for men to move into these uncomfortable conversations. We are thankful you have decided to embark on the conversations contained within this study guide as you move forward in your own journey of healthy masculinity. Whether directly in a group with other men, or as part of the larger movement of men who are intentionally considering healthy ways of living as men, your involvement is a valued and important part of healing and thriving as men.

For those individuals who are serving as facilitators, we are incredibly grateful for your commitment to providing safe, open and welcoming spaces for participants as they engage in these deeply meaningful conversations. The editors of Peaceful at Heart would love to hear from you on your journey, and thoughts you might have about healthy masculinity. You can reach them at SteveT@MennoniteMen.org for those in the US, and DonN@MennoniteMen.org for those in Canada.

We are pleased you have chosen to join us in the launch of this important resource. We pray you will find it helpful as you navigate this path and the many productive conversations about healthy masculinity to come. May you be richly blessed on your journey to be peaceful at heart and peaceful in life.

From Rod Friesen, Restorative Justice Program Coordinator, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

Introduction

HOW TO USE THE STUDY GUIDE



Photo by Ashkan Forouzani on Unsplash

This study guide is intended to facilitate lively discussions about masculinity that are rooted in the chapters of *Peaceful at Heart: Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity*. It is designed to be as flexible as possible. It could be used by a men's group that meets for a number of sessions, by a mixed male and female study group, or by a mixed adult Sunday school class. Because the book addresses primarily men and issues related to masculinity, the language of the study guide is mostly male. My hope is that in mixed groups leaders will be sensitive enough to change the language so as to invite women into the conversation.

The guide is designed for eleven different sessions, although I assume that not every group will work through each session. Groups should feel free to pick and choose the sessions that seem most relevant to their context. In order to keep the number of sessions manageable, some of the sessions group together related chapters from the book. If two chapters from the book are too much for your group to focus on or read for a particular session, then feel free to discuss only one chapter. In the interests of providing flexibility, the number of questions for each session is significantly more than it will be possible to discuss in a single meeting. Leaders should use their judgment in choosing questions most relevant to their group.

For the group to function well and for meaningful conversation to happen, participants will need to spend 20-40 minutes in advance reading the chapter or chapters to be discussed. For minimum bulk orders of 10 books (or more) contact Don Neufeld, DonN@MennoniteMen.org (Canada) or Steve Thomas, SteveT@MennoniteMen.org (USA).

Format for Individual Sessions

Leaders should not see themselves as experts on the issues to be discussed, but as facilitators of a respectful conversation. Leaders should pay attention to drawing out the thoughts and feelings of quieter members of the group, as well as encouraging more vocal members to hold back at times in order to create space for others to speak.

I encourage leaders to create a warm, respectful, worshipful context for the discussion. This can be done very simply by welcoming people to each session, and then by beginning with a brief prayer (and perhaps also scripture reading) that relates to the topic of the session and invites God's presence into the discussion. Such an opening sets a particular tone by reminding people that the discussion takes place in the presence of God, and that participants engage in it not just

because interesting social issues are at stake, but because the issues relate to our Christian faith. The session can be rounded out by thanking people for their participation and then by offering a prayer that:

- expresses gratitude for the persons present and for the sharing and discussion
- pulls together some of the strands of the discussion
- invites the Spirit to transform participants in the direction pointed to in the discussion

Ground Rules

Because of the sensitive nature of some of the topics to be discussed, it is important that each group be aware of and agree to a set of ground rules. I suggest that close to the beginning of the first session leaders read or paraphrase the ground rules listed below, and perhaps even distribute a paper copy. The leader could invite participants to commit to these guidelines by asking them to nod their head, as the leader makes individual eye contact with each person. New members who join after the first session should also be asked to embrace the guidelines, and it may be helpful from time to time to remind the whole group of the ground rules.

1. Issues related to our gender strike at the core of our being and identity. Discussion of such matters, especially when there are differences of opinion, sometimes generates a level of anxiety, fear, or even anger not necessarily seen when discussing other topics. It is important to be sensitive to our deep vulnerabilities around issues of gender.
2. It is crucial that all participants respect the views expressed by others, even if they fundamentally disagree with those views. Differences of opinion should be voiced gently, sensitively, humbly and respectfully.
3. Sharing experiences is different than sharing opinions. When someone shares from their personal experience that sharing should simply be accepted as a gift and not challenged, debated, or evaluated as right or wrong.
4. Any study group focusing on masculinity will have to confront the sad reality of male violence. It is difficult to predict exactly when this topic will come up and so it will not always be possible to warn people ahead of time. Participants should be aware that almost certainly there will be members of the group who have experienced violence and abuse at the hands of a male, and possibly also study group members who have inflicted such violence. No one should ever joke or make light of such violence. The group should agree that it is always permissible for someone to quietly slip out of the room if conversation about violence, abuse, or any other topic becomes a painful trigger. Following or even during the session someone should check in with the person who left. Sometimes it may be important to encourage a person to talk to a pastor and/or seek professional help.
5. Confidentiality is important. The conversation will be richer and more meaningful if participants feel free to share their deepest convictions and personal life experiences. Such conversations require the trust and protection of an agreement that what is shared in the group, whether it be personal opinion or personal experience, does not get shared beyond the group without the special permission of the person involved.

The Vexing Problem of Language

A growing number of people are becoming uncomfortable with the language of “male” and “female,” often called binary language, claiming that these terms are too blunt an instrument and obscure the great diversity of people’s gender and sexual identity. Some persons do not experience themselves as fitting into the traditional categories of either male or female. Variations of the acronym “LGBTQ2+” (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, queer, two-spirited, and others) represent an attempt to be sensitive to people’s diverse experiences of gender and sexual identity.

of male and female are so deeply engrained in our human experience and biology that they are unavoidable, at least for the time being. This study guide uses binary language with considerable trepidation, and hopefully in a manner that does not stifle how people experience their gender and sexual identity.

While I am sympathetic to the concern that we should avoid language that limits how people are “permitted” to feel about and express their sexual and gender identity, I see no way to avoid binary language and all the shortcomings that come with it. None of the terms represented by LGBTQ2+ can be defined without using binary language. A lesbian is a woman who is physically, emotionally, and romantically attracted to other women. A transgendered person is someone whose gender identity does not match the male or female biological sex that they were assigned at birth. These definitions depend on binary language. It seems to me that the binaries

Questions Appropriate for Each Session

Some questions could be asked for every chapter of the book, perhaps as a way to start the discussion. In order to avoid repetition these questions will not be included in the guide for each chapter, but only once here at the beginning. While these questions might be appropriate for each chapter, it would probably become tedious to ask them each session, so leaders should use their discretion.

1. What was it like for you to read this chapter? What thoughts or emotions did it generate within you?
2. What are one or two key points in the chapter that give you greater insight into yourself as a male, or greater insight into other men that you know?
3. What one or two points in the chapter stand out for you as most important in terms of: nurturing a healthy Christian masculinity, helping men follow Jesus more faithfully, encouraging men to become more peaceful at heart?
4. Are there points in the chapter that don’t resonate with your experience, or that you disagree with?



SESSION ONE:

Setting the Stage

Reading: Don Neufeld, “Introduction,” pp. 1–6, and “Masculinity and Human Need,” pp. 9–25

1. On page 1 Neufeld states that men need to engage in conversation with each other about their masculinity. What might be some benefits of men speaking into each other’s lives about masculinity? Are there potential risks to such conversation? In what ways might it also be helpful to hear women speak into men’s lives about masculinity?
2. Neufeld’s discussion in chapter 1 is built on the premise that humans have universal needs, and that men’s (and women’s) sense of self is primarily shaped by the five core components of “meaning, connectedness, security, recognition, and action” (p. 10). In what ways do you find this helpful (or not helpful) for thinking about how men express and live out their masculinity?
3. How important is action (work and recreation) to you in terms of how you express your masculinity? What are healthy ways in which you see men expressing masculinity through action? What are unhealthy or distorted forms of action that men sometimes engage in as a way to establish their sense of self? How might the need to express ourselves through action connect with our Christian calling to serve God and neighbour?
4. One way in which men seek the recognition that is so essential to human well-being is by following the masculinity script handed to them by their culture and community (p. 14). What are some positive forms that such masculinity performance can take?
 5. What are some ways in which gender expectations can channel the male need for recognition into unhealthy directions?
 6. What healthy forms can the male need for security and the desire to protect self, loved ones, and community take? In what ways can that quest for security become destructive? What potential is there for men to meet at least some of their need for security by resting in the grace and love of God?
 7. During the last fifty years in western culture the traditional sources of meaning and purpose for males have been challenged and shaken up. Why have some men (and women) embraced the new freedom and possibilities for masculinity that have emerged? Why do other men (and women) feel unsettled by the shift away from traditional gender roles? Where do you personally fit in this picture?
 8. In reflecting on his experience as a social worker, Neufeld observes that much bad male behaviour that projects power and bravado actually arises from insecurity and vulnerability (p. 23). Has this been true in your own experience, or have you seen it in other men?

SESSION TWO:

Masculinity as a Work in Progress

Reading: Jamie Pitts, “Masculinities: Interdisciplinary Orientations,” pp. 26–42

Kurt Horst, “Tradition and Change in the Quest for a Healthy Masculinity,” pp. 43–59

1. In previous generations (and even today) many people believed that there was essentially one form of masculinity, and all men should conform to it. Pitts and Horst both point out that gender expectations vary significantly from one culture and time period to another. Masculinity is not a single fixed entity but is fluid, which means that individuals and societies can make choices about the masculinity expectations they embrace. What are your thoughts on this? Do you find such gender flexibility troubling, or freeing and life-giving, or some of both?
2. Pitts discusses how icons (images or pictures) which project a certain ideal of masculinity are one of the primary ways in which the masculinity expectations of boys and men (and women) are shaped (pp. 31–33). What and who are some of the prominent icons of masculinity in our culture? What defining marks of masculinity do these icons project? What kinds of interests or agendas are served by these images? Who gets hurt or undermined by them?
3. If you were to create a personal hall of fame filled with icons of Christian masculinity who inspire you, whom would you induct into your hall of fame? What ideals of masculinity would they exemplify?
4. Horst laments the dearth of books related to masculinity and the lack of attention in universities to men’s studies, in contrast to the great interest in women’s studies (p. 45–46). Why is it that so few males seem interested in reading about and exploring men’s issues and masculinity?
5. It has been argued that the Industrial Revolution created the most under-fathered generations of children in human history. Do you think that Horst would agree with this claim? According to Horst, what impacts did the Industrial Revolution have on men, women, gender and parenting roles, and home life (pp. 49–51)? How might boys and girls be impacted somewhat differently by the absence of their fathers?
6. Horst concludes by listing glimpses of things that give him hope that men (and women) are embracing healthy gender expectations (p. 58). How do you respond to the items that he lists? Do you see such developments in your own community, congregation or social circles? Are there additional items that you would add to Horst’s list?

SESSION THREE:

Minority Masculinities #1

Note: The next three sessions focus on chapters reminding us that multiple masculinities exist, and that different masculinity expectations come into play depending on a man's race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. These chapters name some of the unique challenges that men from minority groups face, and also raise issues related to masculinity more broadly. The questions for each session seek to honour both the group-specific and the more universal issues that the different writers raise. If it is too much for your group to focus on two chapters in a single session, then just choose to read and discuss one.

Reading: Leonard Dow, "An African American Man," pp. 63–71

Hugo Saucedo, "A Latino Man," pp. 72–80

1. On pages 64-65 Dow summarizes some of the challenges that come with being a black male in America. Are there social realities in your own community that Dow's observations open your eyes to? If you are from a majority group, what privileges do you enjoy that men from minority groups may not have?
2. How might the racism experienced by black men and men from other minorities impact their masculinity and self-esteem?
3. Dow describes coming to appreciate how his father served God and others and became an icon/image of healthy masculinity in and through his ordinariness, despite the obstacles he encountered. What qualities did Dow's father exemplify? Given the gifts and qualities that you have, how might God be calling you to serve God and others in and through the ordinariness of your masculinity?
4. What impact did expectations that a man should provide financially for his family have on Saucedo's father, and then later on Saucedo himself? How important is it or has it been for you to have a job and be a breadwinner? How important do you think it should be for men?
5. Saucedo laments the lack of fathers in the lives of many of the children in his community (p. 79). What are some of the important gifts that a father can give to his son(s); to his daughter(s)?
6. Saucedo observes that he did not realize how much machismo he grew up with (p. 73). (Machismo is a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness, generally linked to beliefs about male power, privilege, and right to dominate women and children.) Later, Saucedo claims that machismo and toxic masculinity create a prison for many Latino young men (p. 79). What might be some of the negative impacts of machismo on men, women and children? Did you grow up with elements of machismo? Do you see elements of machismo in your social circles or community?
7. Saucedo credits his mother, daughter, and other women for shaping him in many positive ways. What are some of the positive ways in which the important women in your life have shaped you and your masculinity?



SESSION FOUR:

Minority Masculinities #2

Reading: Harry Lafond, “An Indigenous Man,” pp. 81–94

Hyung Jin Kim Sun, “An Asian Man,” pp. 95–110

1. How might the self-identity and self-esteem of Indigenous boys and men have been affected by the loss of land, food sources, traditions, language and way of life, as a result of European settlement and colonialism?
2. Lafond’s journey has involved coming to understand his family history, especially that of the men. What were some of the ways in which Lafond’s male ancestors were affected by the developments mentioned above?
3. Lafond speaks of the need in his life to change the patterns of fatherhood that he inherited (p. 92). Are there patterns of fatherhood you inherited that you seek to avoid or change? Are there patterns that you cherish and wish to pass on?
4. Lafond states that in the Cree world every mistake provides an opportunity to learn about moving towards more healthy relations (p. 81). What mistakes have you made in terms of expressing your masculinity, and how are you learning from these mistakes to nurture healthier relations?
5. According to Sun, a prominent feature of South Korean masculinity is the belief that one only becomes a real man by serving in the military (p. 98). What are some of the personal and social consequences of linking masculinity with militarism and with violence or potential violence?
6. Sun notes that South Korean culture, like most Asian cultures, is communal. What might be some ways in which a communal culture either supports or impedes healthy masculinity? In your context, do you think men would benefit from a culture that is more or less communal?
7. Sun describes various stereotypes of Asian men in Hollywood movies (pp. 104–107). What stereotypes of men from Asian or other ethnic groups have you observed? What kinds of harm are caused by such male stereotypes? What is your response to Sun’s point that stereotypes constitute microaggressions (indirect, subtle, or unintentional forms of discrimination) which have a negative long-term cumulative effect (p. 106)?



SESSION FIVE:

Minority Masculinities #3

Reading: Pieter Niemeyer, “A Gay Man,” pp. 111–123

Note: Leaders should be careful to keep the discussion focussed on the content of Niemeyer’s chapter and avoid the temptation to delve into the discussion of whether the church should bless same-sex relationships or not. This complex issue requires its own study and discussion process. (One study resource can be found on the CommonWord website: see Dan Epp-Tiessen, “The Bible and Same-Sex Relationships,” <https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/19045>.)

1. What is your response to the way that Niemeyer challenges the traditional gender binaries of masculine and feminine (p. 111)?
2. How do you respond to Niemeyer’s claim that disdain for homosexuality and the resulting violence against the LGBTQ2+ community is the reason that many persons remain in the “closet” (p. 112)?
3. Niemeyer describes how fearful, discordant, and exhausting it was for him to live as a Christian gay man trying to follow the traditional expectations of masculinity held in the church and society. What are some ways the church might be able to walk alongside and support persons experiencing such struggles?
4. Niemeyer tells the story of freeing a goat stuck in a hay feeder as an analogy for his journey of discovering that by remaining in the “closet” he was working against God’s good intentions for his life. How do you respond to this analogy?
5. Niemeyer describes how the ministry of Jesus and the Christian faith involve the rupturing of tradi-

tional binaries and expectations (pp. 116–18). What might be some implications of such rupturing for healthy Christian masculinity?

6. What encouragement and inspiration do you find in the story Niemeyer tells of how his father changed during the last thirty years of his life (pp. 118–19)?
7. What is your response to Niemeyer’s claim that men have diminished their own lives and the lives of others by avoiding characteristics traditionally considered feminine (p. 121)?
8. What gifts and resources does Niemeyer see Jesus as offering us in terms of embracing healthy masculinity and becoming peaceful at heart (p. 122)?



SESSION SIX:

Men Reading the Bible

Reading: Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “Men Reading the Bible,” pp. 127–41

1. Yoder Neufeld points out that the Bible was written by men, tells stories mostly about men, and reflects primarily male experience (pp. 128–29). What challenges might the Bible’s maleness pose in terms of inspiring a peaceful, non-oppressive masculinity?
2. Yoder Neufeld asks whether the Bible’s patriarchy belongs to the core of its message and should therefore remain authoritative in terms of what it means to be a man. Or is the Bible’s patriarchy the culturally conditioned packaging that we can set aside after we have carefully unwrapped God’s revelation that comes to us in Scripture (p. 127)? How do you respond to this question? Can you think of specific examples of the harm that has been caused when the church interprets the Bible’s patriarchy as reflecting the will of God?
3. The church has sometimes understood the Bible as having been dictated by God. In contrast, Yoder Neufeld advocates for an incarnational understanding of scripture, that sees the fully human words of the Bible as also being the words through which we hear God speak to us. Do you find this incarnational understanding of scripture to be a helpful framework for coming to terms with the Bible’s patriarchy, while still hearing “in its pages the living word of God that engages and transforms the world” (p. 130)?
4. Yoder Neufeld describes the male characters of the Bible as both role models and cautionary figures, with the same person often representing both (pp. 132–33). Which biblical characters do you see as helpful role models for contemporary men? Which ones should we view as cautionary figures? Given how the Bible sometimes praises the horrible actions of male characters, like Joshua’s leadership during Israel’s campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Canaanites, what criteria can we use for evaluating the actions of a particular biblical character as cautionary or exemplary?
5. What are some ways in which Jesus and Paul deviated from the masculinity expectations of their day (pp. 134–36)? What might be some of the implications of such deviations for how to live as faithful Christian men today?
6. Yoder Neufeld concludes with seven proposals for how to read the Bible as men (pp. 139–41). Which of these proposals do you find particularly helpful and important?



SESSION SEVEN:

Following Jesus in Community

Reading: David Augsburger, “Men, Masculinity, and Discipleship,” pp. 142–57

Gareth Brandt, “Men in Community,” pp. 158–68

1. Augsburger summarizes the agenda and way of being that Jesus invites us to embrace (pp. 148–49). Which of these points do you find most helpful in terms of nurturing a healthy Christian masculinity?
2. Augsburger defines Christian discipleship as coming to see ourselves as irreducibly valued and undeniably loved by God. In response we come to trust, value, and love Jesus, and we choose to join ourselves to him and his agenda (p. 146). How might commitment to such discipleship help to shape healthy men? How might resting in the love of God contribute to making men more peaceful at heart? What are some concrete ways in which men can actually find their rest and peace in God’s love?
3. Augsburger asserts that following Jesus closely makes us hungry to connect with other disciples (p. 153), which takes us to the core of Brandt’s chapter. According to Brandt, what are some of the main reasons that men need community to support their life of faith (pp. 158–61)? What are your responses to Brandt’s call for a more communal spirituality (p. 161), and to his claim that “God’s love, presence, and guidance is mediated through others in community” (p. 161)?
4. Brandt quotes Don Neufeld’s claim that, “As a place of unconditional welcome for a growing boy, for a struggling man, or for the stranger who comes through the door, Christian community can be the place of safety for men to be known fully and to experience unconditional love . . .” (pp. 158–59). Does this description reflect your experience of Christian community? What steps can we take to make our congregations reflect Neufeld’s ideal more closely?
5. Brandt claims that men need connection at a deeper emotional level. This is what women want from men and what men need from each other (p. 161). What are your thoughts on this?
6. Brandt lists several obstacles that can prevent men from finding deep emotional connectedness: fear of vulnerability, fear of being judged, working too hard, selfishness and superficiality (p. 161). Do you see these obstacles in your own life or in the lives of other men?
7. Brandt shares testimonials about community that he received in response to a set of questions that he asked his male friends (pp. 164–68). Are there particular responses that resonate with your experience? How would you respond to the questions that Brandt asked his friends (pp. 163–64)?

SESSION EIGHT:

Abuse—The Elephant in the Room

Session Eight: Reading: Carol Penner, “Masculinity Close to Home,” pp. 242–44

Note: Several writers touch on the topic of men’s physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of women, children, and other males, even though no single chapter is devoted to the topic (pp. 3–4, 15–16, 19–20, 112). In the afterword Carol Penner asks, “How can we talk about peace and masculinity without talking about intimate partner violence and child abuse” (p. 243). She calls such violence the elephant in the room that cries out to be acknowledged and addressed. In response to Penner’s challenge, this study guide includes a session on abuse. Leaders should inform group participants ahead of time when abuse will be the focus of discussion so that they can be emotionally prepared. Because abuse is a difficult and heavy topic, groups should not conclude their series with this session, but should meet at least one or two more times after they have tackled this challenging topic.

1. What are some of the dynamics of unhealthy masculinity named in the book that contribute to abuse? Can you think of other factors that encourage abusive behaviour on the part of men?
2. What are your thoughts in response to Don Neufeld’s analysis on pp. 15–16 of some of the causes of abuse?
3. Why does the abusive behaviour of men so often go unnoticed or unnamed, or even when noticed why is it sometimes tolerated and not confronted?
4. Penner asks why male violence so often happens in the context of family relationships (p. 243). How would you respond to this question?
5. Penner mentions the shocking number of young women among her congregants who have experienced date rape (p. 244). Why do some men feel entitled to sex and resort to abusive force to get it?
6. Given that Christians in the Anabaptist tradition pledge their faith in a non-violent Jesus, why is it often difficult to acknowledge the violence of abuse that is sometimes present in our homes, families, congregations and church institutions? Does the Anabaptist peace position equip us to confront issues of abuse, or does it make confronting abuse more challenging because we assume it could not happen among Christians committed to peace and non-violence?
7. The term “microaggressions” is sometimes used to name inappropriate actions that are harmful, especially if repeated over the long haul, but are not so severe that we label them as abuse. Do you see patterns of male microaggression against women that may not be labelled as abuse but still undermine them?
8. What are helpful ways to confront a friend, family member, colleague or church member who is acting abusively, and how do we support them in making positive change in their lives?

SESSION NINE:

Connecting the Inner and Outer Lives of Men

Reading: Marty Troyer, “The Gospel Gift of Peace,” pp. 169–83

Scott Brubaker-Zehr, “Cultivating an Inner Spiritual Life,” pp. 204–17

1. What does Troyer say about some of the ways in which Jesus modelled how to keep our inner and outer selves connected and nurtured in healthy ways (pp. 170–72)? How can Anabaptist leaders like Hans Denck and Menno Simons help us grasp what Jesus modelled? What are the specific challenges that you find for yourself in what Troyer says about Jesus, Hans Denck, and Menno Simons?
2. Troyer claims that Jesus’s call to discipleship is not primarily a call to morality but an invitation to receive the abundant life that he promised (p. 171). Christianity begins with God’s love for the world and God’s gift of saving *shalom* that is freely offered to all (pp. 176–77). What potential for the healing of our masculinity is there in such an understanding of Christian faith?
3. What are your thoughts about Troyer’s analysis of factors that can make us peaceless at heart and can harm us psychologically (pp. 172–75)?
4. Troyer writes that, “A Christian message of *shalom* from an Anabaptist perspective offers a consistent vision for peace as an inner experience of salvation that overflows into specific peaceful action” (p. 178). According to Troyer, becoming peaceful at heart and hence peaceful in action, requires a long process of formation, effort, vulnerability, and personal healing (p. 181). What are some specific ways in which men can engage in such a process of formation? Which of these are important in your own formation and journey of faith?
5. Troyer argues that inner healing is essential in order for men to become peacemakers in their communities. However, he asserts that the process is circular, in that living peacefully and becoming engaged in addressing the hurts of the world can lead to spiritual and psychological healing and well-being (pp. 181–82). What are your responses to this claim?
6. Brubaker-Zehr observes that many men do not seem to be in touch with their feelings, interior states, spiritual experiences or with God’s presence in their lives (pp. 204, 206). How do you react to these claims? What might men gain by being more in touch with their inner self and their spiritual life?
7. Brubaker-Zehr describes his experience of coming to realize his need for a deep personal experience and relationship with God to sustain him in his ministry. Would you agree with him that, “For Christian faith to be meaningful and vibrant, there needs to be some primary experience of God (p. 205)? What shape does your longing for a relationship with God take?
8. Brubaker-Zehr groups the responses he received from the men he interviewed into seven categories (pp. 208–10). Which of the categories relate most closely to your experiences of God?

SESSION TEN:

Becoming Peaceful at Heart

Reading: David Evans, “Trading Manpower for the Power of Love,” pp. 187–203

John Powell, “Becoming Men of Peace and Reconciliation,” pp. 218–32

1. Evans describes how the ideology of manpower ensured that, “the lessons I learned of manhood were lessons of domination, intimidation, homophobia, misogyny [fear and/or hatred of women], and ultimately fear of losing power” (p. 187). Have you been exposed to and impacted by such a version of manpower? How are various elements of manpower communicated and perpetuated in society?
2. Evans and Powell both argue that the power and privileges that come with belonging to a majority masculinity group go largely unrecognized and unquestioned by the men who benefit, but are most visible to groups and individuals who are disadvantaged or oppressed by such power and privilege (pp. 188–89, 222). What are your responses to this claim? If you are from a majority group, what are some of the ways in which you are privileged? If you are from a minority group, what are ways in which you are disadvantaged?
3. Evans describes the additional challenges he faced as a result of being black, when it came to embracing healthy masculinity and male self-esteem (pp. 192–93). How does his description help you better understand the experience of minority men?
4. Evans challenges men to engage with women in order to learn how to love themselves, other men, women and other persons, because women are often better at practicing love than men are (pp. 198–200).

What are your responses to this challenge?

5. Powell describes an experience of being deeply wronged and hurt, and then coming to a place where he was able to forgive (pp. 225–26). What role does forgiveness play in your own journey towards healthy masculinity?
6. Powell quotes Martin Luther King, “One of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses, that the new situation demands” (p. 227). What new attitudes and mental responses do today’s changing racial and gender situations demand of you as a man?
7. Evans concludes by challenging men to learn from Jesus about how to reject manpower and embrace healing love (pp. 201–2), while Powell holds up Jesus as a model for reconciliation (pp. 229–30). In which specific aspects of Jesus’s ministry do Evans and Powell find hope for healthy masculinity?



SESSION ELEVEN:

Moving Forward

Note: If your group has been meeting for a number sessions it may be helpful to have a final wrap-up session that does not focus on a particular chapter but gives participants a chance to reflect on how they have been impacted by the readings and the discussion. Another option is to devote just part of your final meeting time to closing reflections. If you use some of the following questions during the session, you may want to go around the circle once or twice and invite each person to respond. This can be an effective way to encourage quieter persons to share their wisdom and reflection.

1. What do you appreciate most about the overall experience of participating in this study process? What are one or two of the most important new insights that you gained from the readings and discussion?
2. What specific changes is God calling you to make in your life as a result of what you have learned and experienced in the sessions?
3. Were there things in the readings or the discussion that surprised or troubled you? Were there significant gaps in terms of topics that you would have liked to discuss?
4. How do you see your own masculinity, or masculinity in general, in a new light as a result of the series?
5. How has participation in the group empowered you to become more peaceful at heart and to extend God's peace to others?
6. In light of what you have read or learned, are there particular changes that you want to work toward in your community, congregation, or larger church body?
7. In 2018 the organization called Mennonite Men issued a statement of its commitment to a healing

ministry for men, that can be found on pp. 233–36. Your group could work through this statement, asking if it names the feelings, perceptions, and aspirations of the members.

8. As a way to lead the group in a closing commitment, the leader could read Steve Thomas's beautiful description of the vision for healthy masculinity that undergirds the book, found on pp. viii-ix.
9. Make sure to conclude the session by thanking everyone for their participation during the series. I also suggest closing with a prayer that:
 - thanks God for all the participants
 - thanks God for the ideas and experiences shared, for the learning that happened, for the community that was created, for the way lives were changed
 - asks God for ongoing guidance and empowerment as participants seek to live out healthy masculinity in their families, relationships, congregations and communities
 - asks God for strength to resist toxic forms of masculinity that seek to ensnare men in a web of domination, selfishness, entitlement and violence
 - asks God to grant us the abundant life of grace, love, reconciliation and shalom that is offered to us in Jesus, so that we become more peaceful at heart and become agents of God's peace, justice, grace and reconciliation to our world
 - ends with a blessing: "May God bless you and keep you. May the very face of God shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God's presence embrace you and give you peace. Amen!"

This study guide has been made possible in partnership with:

