In February 2009, the Dallas Morning News reported that Dallas police arrested and charged Jermaine Jakes, Bishop T. D. Jakes’s then twenty-nine-year-old son, with indecent exposure. According to the report, Jermaine Jakes masturbated in front of an undercover police officer in a Dallas, Texas park. In the press release about the incident, Bishop Jakes and his wife Serita express regret about the fact that their son did not live up to their “highest and best ideals” for their children. Although they describe him as an adult who has to make and take responsibility for his own decisions, they nevertheless conflate the responsibility they have for him with the responsibility they have with other members of their congregation as they “show him the same help, support, and restorative grace for which our family and church is noted. Through our ministry at The Potter’s House, as well as our own home, we have for years offered help in the time of need to all adults, our five children and other people’s children.” Jakes ends the press release by indicating that his family is not immune to the real issues with which all human beings struggle. Rather than a strict condemnation of his son, Jakes offers grace and a chance for redemption. “It is in moments like these,” he admits, “that I am so grateful that we do not preach that we are the solution, but we look to Christ for resolution. So then, as a very human family with real issues, like many other people, we will draw from the same well of grace to which we have led others to drink and be refreshed.” While this incident alone is not a definitive statement about Jermaine Jakes’s sexuality, it nonetheless solicits questions about black male Christian sexuality, brings attention to his father’s stance on homosexuality that I
articulated in the previous chapter, and brings into focus the father/son dynamic that is the focal point of this chapter. What remains to be seen is what Jakes sees as the reason for his son’s acting out. More research will need to be done to determine what role Bishop Jakes sees himself playing in his son’s behavior.

As I referenced in chapter two, Bishop T. D. Jakes agrees that men have a unique longing for their father’s affirmation and that Christians must look to God and to each other if they are to fill the voids left by physically or emotionally absent fathers. “One smile from dad,” Jakes insists, “is worth more than twenty kisses from mama. Mama tells you that you are wonderful even when you mess up. But if the old man nods at you and say[s], ‘That was real good, boy,’ now you got a ‘S’ painted on your shirt because it ain’t over until daddy says it’s over.” Jakes adds another dimension to the father/son analysis by insisting that fathers and sons need each other as reminders of what sons can become and what fathers have been. “When I looked at the mirror and saw him [his youngest son], I saw what I was,” Jakes remarks. He continues: “When he looked at me in the mirror, he saw what he would become. And we were mesmerized looking at what time would do and undo between us.” The image of the son and father looking at each other in the mirror brings to mind the urge of parents to live through their children, in essence to recapture lost time and unfulfilled dreams. Jakes laments that many fathers and sons have only a few fleeting moments together if they are able to connect to each other at all. Jakes grieves for himself and all the sons “around the world who look into mirrors and see no fathers looking back at them.” According to Jakes, healthy black male Christian embodiment requires fathers who mentor their sons and sons who can look to their fathers for guidance through the landmines of masculinity and the quagmires of race.

Jakes observes that women have their grandmothers, aunts, and mothers to help them navigate the changes of life and the hardships associated with being a black woman in a world that places a higher value on whiteness and maleness. Men, however, “have few fathers, few voices, few compasses, few teachers, few leaders, few guides to speak to us in the process and that is why we get lost in the journey of becoming what we were created to be. We get lost in the process, some get lost as early as fifteen and sixteen years old in the maze of masculinity” and eventually “collapse under a bush of despair.” Rather than having a support network to teach black men how to navigate the harsh social and economic realities of race, black sons