

**Spiritual Formation In Congregations**

by

Peter Leo Reid

B. A., in Religion, Bethany Bible College, 1979  
M. Div., Acadia Divinity College, 1995

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This thesis by NAME IN FULL was defended successfully in any oral examination on DATE OF DEFENCE.

The examining committee for the thesis was:

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Dr. X.Y. Zed, Chair

---

Dr. A.B.Cee, External Academic

---

Rev. A.N. Other, External Practitioner

---

Dr. U.B. Good, Supervisor

---

Dr. O. R. Else, Second Faculty Reader

---

Rev. U.L. Getit, Ministry Supervisor

---

Dr. I.M. Divine, Director of Degree Program (or designate)

This thesis is accepted in its present form by Acadia Divinity College as satisfying the thesis requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry.

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Author

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Supervisor

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Date

## ABSTRACT

Spiritual formation is a complex process consisting of the interweaving of spiritual disciplines and shared life experiences. Even devoted followers of Jesus Christ struggle to achieve lasting character change and progress in becoming more Christ-like. This thesis project studied one congregation with a view to intentionally lead people on a journey toward transformation through a spiritual formation emphasis.

After reviewing some of the literature used in the project, the discussion offers theological and biblical underpinnings for the concept of spiritual formation and provides an introduction to the classic spiritual disciplines. The research led to an interesting interaction of personality development and spirituality which demonstrates that understanding personality type can lead to greater spiritual development.

The thesis project included a series of interviews with a cross section of the congregation. The interviews focused on the spiritual journey of the interviewees. A one-day spiritual retreat was then held to help people find a place of solitude for spiritual reflection. Finally, a series of sermons was preached addressing the subject of spiritual formation. As with all such projects, there are strengths and issues yet to be explored. The central theme to emerge was that Christian people need a variety of spiritual disciplines to choose from in order to find a spiritual path which suits their personality type and helps them understand and accept others. Spiritual formation is difficult to achieve and works best when people intentionally accompany one another on a journey toward wholeness in Christ.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MOTIVATION FOR THE PROJECT AND REVIEW USEFUL WORKS**

#### Motivation for the Project

As a pastor I have long observed that people who sit under my ministry and the ministry of the local church struggle to achieve lasting character change. It has been true in my own life. People confess Christ as Lord, attend church services, listen to sermons, attend Bible Studies, and avail themselves of the ministries of the church. Yet these same people who know the Bible and love Jesus Christ have personality dysfunction and character deficiencies resulting from a fallen nature that stubbornly resist change. I believe that, as a Pastor, I must take this seriously and do all I can to help people move toward mature faith and lasting character formation. With this in mind this project is an attempt to further understand the problem and offer some practical steps designed to help believers deepen their walk with God, a process which leads to spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is a continual process whereby the Holy Spirit works in the life of Christian believers shaping and changing them to become more like Christ. The Christian community is the primary place where the Holy Spirit accomplishes change in the lives of believers. Such a life change or the formation of Christian character is meant to be developed in the context of Christians journeying together in a community of faith (Hebrews 10:24-25 TNIV). It is in the difficult task of relating to other broken, sinful people that true formation can take place.

The laboratory for this current study is the people who make up Immanuel Baptist Church. For eight years these dear Christian people were the community among whom I ministered and grew and who allowed me to use them as the raw material for the project. Immanuel Baptist Church is a diverse body of Christian believers from all walks of life who make up the widest possible range of spiritual pilgrims. People who attend Immanuel are from both ends of the spectrum, from people who are seekers and not yet believers in Christ, to mature saints who have been following Christ for a lifetime. It was in this context that my passion for spiritual development grew for it would seem that the length of time a person has been a Christian believer is not a true indicator of spirituality or of maturity. As I examined my own walk and watched the lives of others, I wondered if there was something more we could do as a people to “grow in grace.”

While it is unfair to generalize, it should be noted that the North American Church has emphasized an approach to discipleship that is information based. This approach to Christianity is primarily concerned with providing people intellectual knowledge of the Christian faith. Certainly knowledge of the Bible and understanding the history of the Christian faith are important components in the over-all spiritual formation of Christians. Baptist's have always been called “people of the book.” The emphasis on Bible study and a thorough knowledge of scripture is a very good thing. Information, however, must inform and shape life if it is to be transformative.



The clergy as the resident theologians preach, teach and inform lay people what to believe and how to behave as devoted Christians. This thesis is a plea to broaden this approach and offer holistic Christian discipleship. Such an approach is actually a very old one that was modeled by Jesus himself as he led his disciples on a journey of transformation. When Jesus met Simon and his brother Andrew he presented them with the notion of being remade; “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19 NIV). It was a radical call to follow Jesus’ way of life as well as his teachings. Jesus challenged them to become like their teacher. Richard Foster who has written much on spiritual formation calls this type of living “The With-God Life.”<sup>1</sup> Foster was mentored by the philosopher and Christian thinker Dallas Willard who says that we Christians must become “apprentices of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

An important question is raised in light of the call to radical discipleship: why is there not more substantial change in the lives of many believers? Some current models of discipleship have emphasized obedience to the teachings of Christ but have not always focused on character formation. The undergirding idea of spiritual formation presupposes the notion that people on a faith journey will change significantly, but there is a problem. People who honestly seek to follow Christ find within themselves a stubborn resistance to Christ-like behavior. The question remains, is the discipleship training and Christian education offered to Baptist believers producing the desired result? Do people realize they are on a journey to become more like Jesus Christ? Can people

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, ed., *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 975.

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart, Putting on the Character of Christ*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 14.

hear hundreds of sermons and attend numerous Bible studies yet show little progress in what the Bible calls the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22-26)?

The process of spiritual formation is a complicated process in which many agencies are used to form people into the likeness of Christ. The practice of spiritual disciplines, life experience, personal suffering, relationships and personality differences are all part of the intricate array of experiences leading to spiritual formation. True spiritual formation takes place in the context of congregational relationships and must be expanded beyond individual experiences. It is my hope to present a view of the Christian life as people who are on a life-long journey of being “with God,” moving toward greater wholeness and Christ-likeness.

The Bible makes it quite clear that each person is born with a sinful nature that presents an obstinate resistance to the will of God. There is in each person something that resists change and is basically unwilling to bow the knee to Christ. This is evidenced in Paul’s writings to the Galatian church. “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:16-17 NIV). Paul contrasts the acts of the sinful nature with the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in the lives of Christians who put to death the works of the sinful nature and keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25). The Gospel of Jesus Christ invites people to change and grow and be all they can be in Christ. The Church has been challenged to follow the path toward Christ-

likeness (Romans 8:29). This is the mandate of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7).

Though the “fall” marred the “image of God” in humans, the redemptive work of Christ is restoring us. From the very beginning God created human beings in his image to bear the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26 -31). The New Testament is replete with images which remind Christian believers they are on a journey toward wholeness. Such concepts as perfection (Matthew 5:48), holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16), and transformation (Romans 12:1-2) are part of the New Testament motif. Christian pilgrims are people who are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10). The nature of the Christian Gospel is to call people to be all they can be in Christ. But the question remains, how do people grow toward this maturity? How are people transformed into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ? What is the process of change found in scripture and in the practice of the Christian Church?

Change is not something that can be accomplished by mere human effort. The whole concept of Spiritual Formation assumes that it is God who is changing people and shaping them into the likeness of Christ. This is not to say that Christians are to be passive in the spiritual formation process since there is a part for humans to play. Christian believers must become partners with God in this wonderful journey toward maturity. This is well illustrated by John Ortberg in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted, Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*.

Consider the difference between piloting a motorboat or a sailboat. We can run a motorboat all by ourselves. We can fill the tank and start the engine. We are in

control. But a sailboat is a different story. We can hoist the sails and steer the rudder, but we are utterly dependent on the wind. The wind does the work. If the wind doesn't blow – and sometimes it doesn't – we sit still in the water no matter how frantic we act. Our task is to do whatever enables us to catch the wind.<sup>3</sup>

Spiritual transformation is very much like sailing, we may get involved in the process but we cannot make change happen. People who attempt this transformation without the gracious working of God's Spirit will fall into one of two errors. Either they will become arrogant and self-righteous adopting "works righteousness" or, they will become discouraged and give up in failure.

The believer was never intended to live the Christian life in such a manner. Instead believers are exhorted to hoist their sails in a direction that allows them to catch the wind of the Spirit. Catching the wind of the Spirit means Christians must not rely on human ingenuity and strength alone to live the Christian life. The believer has to cooperate with God and get in a position to receive the powerful wind of the Spirit.

How do Christians enter a place where they are able to receive the Spirit's power? The answer is both profoundly simple and difficult at the same time. Christian believers must acknowledge the presence of God and allow the Spirit of God to permeate every aspect of their lives. There are spiritual disciplines which help people to be more attuned to the presence of God. It is through the practice of reading the scriptures, meditating on the scriptures, learning to be quiet and listening to God, finding solitude and praying to the heavenly Father that Christian believers open themselves to the transforming work of God. The spiritual disciplines don't make people righteous or holy; people are not

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<sup>3</sup>John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted, Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 55-56.

suddenly made worthy of God's love, for God's love is unconditional. In essence this is the cooperative relationship between Christian believers and God. There is a posture and there are disciplines which when properly practiced by Christians will place them in a position where it is possible to catch the wind of the Spirit and to experience the transforming grace and power of God.

It is true that all people are on a journey to wholeness in Christ yet, not all people will follow the same path to arrive at this place. God has created people with unique differences in personality. It is my contention that a "one size fits all" approach to a spiritual journey toward Christ-likeness just does not work. Certain spiritual disciplines will work well for some personality types but not for others. Some personality types need to approach God in a very intellectual and cerebral manner in order to understand the nature of the love of God. Other people find that their relationship with God must be more intimate and these people need to have a deep emotional connection. There are those who discover their relationship with God is greatly enhanced by experiencing the beauty of creation. For these people what they can see, taste, touch, smell and feel will remind them of the beauty and power of a God who created everything. Others are awed by the mystery of creation and the mystery of a God who is beyond comprehension. For these people God is "wholly other" and humans are so small and finite that what can be known of God is infinitesimally minute. Often these folks are content to contemplate the mystery of God and enjoy God's presence in silence and solitude. For this reason it is critical to help people discover their personality type and to incorporate spiritual

disciplines that fit their personality type while at the same time assisting them in a journey of transformation.

Christians who are becoming like Christ are learning to embrace their humanity and become comfortable in their own skin. Those who become more whole in Christ are those who are most capable of being fully human and alive. God has created us body, soul and spirit to enjoy fellowship with Him and to enjoy creative community on earth. Those who are being shaped and formed by the Spirit of God are able to relax and enjoy being the person God created them to be. Eugene Peterson has translated two verses in Romans chapter twelve in an interesting way that brings to light what God is up to in our lives; “So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren’t” (Romans 12:5b-6 TM). When people are experiencing the transforming grace of God they are finally able to be the persons they were meant to be. A more Christ-like person is more fully human since God created humanity to reflect the nature and image of God. People who are free to be themselves are actually free to love God and love their neighbors.

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been movements of the Spirit drawing people to a deeper level of piety. While each of these movements have elements of similarity it is also true that these movements have inherent differences. It is possible to go back to the early church and see there are differences in approach to spirituality. If

one reads the writings of the Apostle Paul or the writings of the Apostle Peter or the Apostle John, it is easy to detect differences in the flavor and approach to Christian discipleship. In the early centuries of the Christian church there was an emphasis on asceticism promoting simplicity, solitude and disciplined prayer. Out of the Protestant Reformation came the Puritans and the Pietists who brought a renewed sense of devotion to private reading of the scriptures and personal devotion. Richard Foster identifies six “streams” of spirituality which have influenced the history of the Christian Church. He refers to these movements as; The Contemplative Tradition, the Holiness Tradition, the Charismatic Tradition, the Social Justice Tradition, the Evangelical Tradition, and the Incarnational Tradition. Foster suggests that each of these traditions reflect a different dimension of the Christian life. He also contends that Jesus Christ through his life and ministry is the only person who fully embodied all six dimensions of Christian spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

In chapter three of the thesis, using Corinne Ware’s and others’ insight, I will attempt to show that people will be drawn to a form of spirituality which best suits their God given personality type. Each of us should develop spiritual disciplines to aid in spiritual growth and certain disciplines will inherently suit our personalities and enable us to become the person God called us to be. As part of this project, I developed and offered a spiritual retreat to introduce people to a deliberate spiritual formation emphasis. By having people disengage from the busyness of life and find a place of solitude it is hoped they will learn

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<sup>4</sup> Foster, Richard, *Streams of Living Water, Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), XVI.

to become more attentive to the presence of God. It is as we become more attentive to this “presence” that we are shaped by the transforming power of the Spirit.

I tried to help members of the congregation become familiar with classic spiritual disciplines by preaching a series of sermons on this subject. The sermon series was meant to be an introduction and gave practical tips on practicing the spiritual disciplines in daily life.

Throughout this project it has been my hope to provide understanding as well as practical skills for people in their spiritual journey. My goal has been to see more Christian believers experience significant growth in Christ likeness. As human beings we have a tendency to get stuck at certain points in our journey to wholeness. It is possible to move forward and experience a substantial measure of healing and growth but it is not automatic, simple or easy. To make major progress in the “transforming of our minds” it will mean learning to cooperate with God and becoming attentive to the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.

In order for this process to work in any meaningful way in a person’s life, it requires a desire to change and an awareness of the need for change. This project presupposes the willingness of congregational members in the spiritual formation process. It is hoped that people will be stirred and motivated to participate willingly and intentionally in the ongoing work of spiritual formation. While this project focuses primarily on Christian



people who have come to call Immanuel Baptist Church home, it is hoped that the project may have an application to the wider Christian audience.

### Review of Useful Works

I must begin by acknowledging that the emphasis of this project has been greatly influenced by my own spiritual heritage and tradition. Growing up in the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition with its strong emphasis on holiness of life has colored my approach to ministry over the past thirty years. While I have attempted to move away from the legalistic tendencies of this tradition, I have been profoundly enriched by its emphasis on piety. In that sense I must give thanks to my forbearers and honor the richness of the aspects of the holiness tradition that challenge me to full obedience to Christ and holiness of life. I have been also deeply impacted by strong preaching which called for sanctification and Christ-likeness. In addition, I am indebted to a small host of “prayer warriors” and saints who have served as loving examples and guides on this journey of transformation.

Building upon this tradition and becoming exposed to other traditions and approaches to spirituality I have had my horizons broadened and my preaching ministry strengthened. It is in my study of key authors, however, that the potential for new approaches to congregational ministry emphasizing ongoing spiritual formation provided a new place from which to view my leadership in congregational ministry. In the next few pages I will review some of the pertinent and useful books that have shaped the project.

## Celebration of Discipline

As much as any single author, the writings of Richard Foster inspired the shape and scope of this project. While I have read a number of Foster's works including, *Prayer*, *Streams of Living Water* and, *Celebration of Discipline*, as well as several of his articles. It is the *Celebration of Discipline* that deeply impacted and influenced this project. I first read *Celebration of Discipline* more than twenty years ago and found my own life and spirituality profoundly affected. The research for this project has only reinforced the timeless truths found in the book which in turn has influenced my ministry and the preaching at Immanuel Baptist Church and thereby helped inform the current project. Foster does a masterful job of taking the spiritual disciplines and the writings of some of the classic saints down through the ages and making them completely accessible to the person in the pew. Indeed, one of the powerful affirmations made by Foster that has under girded this current study is; "Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself. Let us be among those who believe that the inner transformation of our lives is a goal worthy of our best effort."<sup>5</sup>

It was through reading this book that I first began the practice of regularly fasting. I was influenced by Foster's teaching on meditation and learned to spend time reflecting and ruminating on the text of scripture. From reading Foster I learned the art of centering prayer. In understanding the need for solitude I began to take regular Sabbath days for quiet reflection. Before reading *Celebration of Discipline* I believed in healing prayer but through Foster's approach I began regularly praying for people to be healed.

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<sup>5</sup> Foster, Richard, J., *Celebration of Discipline*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 9.

In his discussion of the corporate disciplines Foster writes a delightful chapter on the need for the Christian church to celebrate. In Foster's book, *Celebration* itself is a discipline. He claims that celebration gives strength to life and adds joy to the Christian community. He writes, "Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: 'I bring you good news of great joy...'"<sup>6</sup> Foster does an excellent job of delineating and discussing the inner disciplines, the outer disciplines and the corporate disciplines of the Christian faith. Fortunately he offers practical advice on how to put these disciplines into practice in the Christian's life. Like most of the authors who write on spiritual formation he warns against the dangers of legalistic self effort. This book has become a classic and offers Protestants a great introduction to the spiritual disciplines.

### Sacred Rhythms

Ruth Haley Barton's, recent book, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* is wonderfully rich and extremely well written and of particular relevance to this project. Her book is deeply spiritual but filled with practical advice for developing these sacred rhythms that help a person arrange life for a transforming encounter with God.

Barton describes the angst of people living in a fast paced consumer society. She tells how she and many others in full time ministry were caught in the trap of busy-ness and the need to be doing more and more. In the introduction to the book Barton talks about something she affectionately called, Christian Fatigue Syndrome. She remembers being

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<sup>6</sup> Foster, Richard, J., *Celebration of Discipline*, 163.

in a planning meeting where the church staff was discussing the commitment involved in becoming a church member. At the time something like five to nine commitments per week were expected of those wishing to be members of the church. Barton said she was caught in the trap of constantly being involved in worthy causes. She experienced deep frustration and weariness with this driven approach to ministry and the Christian life. She admits that at the time she really could not fully imagine what Jesus meant when he said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10 NIV). Barton acknowledged that she had this deep longing for something more in life. It was this nagging, persistent inner pressure that drove her to make some drastic changes in her life. Barton states; “There are moments in our lives when we cry out inwardly, “I don’t care what anyone else says, there has to be more to the Christian life than this!”<sup>7</sup> Thus Ruth Haley Barton embarked on a journey of transformation.

Ruth Barton is candid about her own attempts and her failures at trying to simplify her life and arrange it according to certain spiritual disciplines and sacred rhythms. She writes lucidly about solitude, creating space for God; scripture reading, encountering God through *Lectio Divina* and Prayer, deepening our intimacy with God. She writes a very helpful chapter about honoring and taking care of one’s body. Her chapters on Self-examination, bringing one’s whole self to God, and Discernment, recognizing and responding to the presence of God were a great help understanding how to recognize sinful patterns of relating to others. She also offered advice on discerning the guidance and voice of the Lord. In her final chapter on creating a rule of life for spiritual

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), 17.

transformation Barton talks about the need to be very intentional in setting aside time daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly to pull back from the crowds and the technology of our age and find solitude for renewing the soul and connecting with the God who longs to be with us. This advice has been particularly helpful as I minister to people who are tired of the frenetic pace of the Twenty-first century world.

### Soul Feast

Another important resource for this project was the book, *Soul Feast, An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* by Marjorie J. Thompson. Thompson acknowledges that the current spiritual hunger even among those who avoid church is symptomatic of our times. She diagnoses this spiritual hunger rather cogently;

A sea change is occurring within and beyond our churches. Its current expressions have been building for at least a generation. In terms of its pervasive character in American society, I suspect what we are witnessing today may be close to the significance of the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century. The change represents a powerful impulse toward spiritual wholeness at a time of unprecedented personal and social fragmentation. The spiritual yearning is evident well beyond the boundaries of traditional faith communities.<sup>8</sup>

Thompson attributes this heightened spiritual hunger to four factors prevalent in the current North American culture. 1) the influence of rationalism on western culture, 2) the rise of technology and the rapid rate of change, 3) a Post-Modern appreciation for mystery, 4) a culture of pervasive fear.<sup>9</sup> She then outlines three personal factors that cause people to be spiritually needy and hungry today. 1) suffering and tragedy, 2) dissatisfaction with organized religion and, 3) renewed interest in religious experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marjorie, J. Thompson, *Soul Feast An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie, J. Thompson, *Soul Feast An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

Finally she clearly articulates the spiritual reasons for this hunger. She talks about the innate desire for the transcendent in every human heart which ultimately people cannot escape. This particular chapter describing the spiritual yearning of our times and giving a biblical rationale for a truly spiritual life is solidly reinforced by good theology, scripture, tradition and common sense insight.

Thompson also writes clearly about developing spiritual disciplines or practices that aid the Christian in experiencing an authentic spirituality. She writes,

“The Spirituality I am describing is dynamic. God’s Spirit is continually challenging, changing, and maturing us. Although we may be able to point to a single and decisive conversion experience, remaining faithful involves a journey of continual conversion. It can never be said in our lifetime that we have “arrived.” It is a process of growing in gratitude, trust, obedience, humility, compassion, service and joy. As we deepen our relationship with God, we begin to choose God’s ways and purposes as our own.<sup>11</sup>

Marjorie Thompson’s excellent grasp of spiritual formation and her clear and understandable writing helped focus my thinking in new ways.

### Renovation of the Heart

Another significant piece of literature on this subject is Dallas Willard’s book on the nature of spiritual transformation in the Christian life; *Renovation of the Heart, Putting on the Character of Christ*. This book is a major treatise on the importance and nature of spiritual transformation in the Christian life. Dallas Willard is a formidable intellect and he approaches spirituality with a very analytical and cerebral approach to formation. He does a marvelous job of explaining why and how transformation takes place in the life of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8.

the believer. Willard gives an excellent definition of spiritual formation early on in the book;

We can say, in a preliminary manner, that spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself... Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ. Obedience is an essential outcome of Christian spiritual formation (John 13:34-35; 14:21).<sup>12</sup>

While Willard acknowledges that spiritual formation involves far more than human effort and that in the end it is a gift of grace, he is wise enough to state that, “well informed human effort certainly is indispensable, for spiritual formation is no passive process.”<sup>13</sup>

Willard spends a great deal of time and energy discussing the renewing of the mind. He postulates that all sin begins in the mind and, if transformation is to take place, it must begin in the thought life of individuals. He acknowledges that long held ideas and images are difficult if not impossible to change and he advocates that in such circumstances nothing less than the divine intervention of God is able to root out old established thought patterns. Willard believes that only as people are able to think clearly and correctly about God will they be able to change sinful thought patterns; only those who think well will serve God well. Dallas Willard concludes the book with an excellent chapter on spiritual formation in the local congregation. He does a good job of diagnosing what is wrong in the current setting of many churches in North America. He goes beyond criticism and offers several important strategies for changing the emphasis in our churches. He acknowledges that in many of our churches people are distracted

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<sup>12</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart, Putting on the Character of Christ*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

from the main task of becoming apprentices of Jesus. Willard's advice is to divert the attention of Christians away from secondary issues of church life and concentrate fully on becoming "apprenticed" to Jesus. His plan involves a radical shift of thinking and practice in the local church.

#### Invitation to a Journey

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. has written a considerable work to assist people in their understanding and growth in spiritual formation. The book is titled, *Invitation to a Journey, A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. . Mulholland Jr. is a New Testament seminary professor at Asbury Theological Seminary and someone who has been shaped by Wesleyan-Arminian theology. Rather than viewing the spiritual life as something as static to be possessed, Mulholland Jr. sees spirituality as a journey toward wholeness;

When spirituality is viewed as a journey, however, the way to spiritual wholeness is seen to lie in an increasingly faithful response to the One whose purpose shapes our path, whose grace redeems our detours, whose power liberates us from crippling bondages of the prior journey and whose transforming presence meets us at each turn in the road. In other words, holistic spirituality is a pilgrimage of deepening responsiveness to God's control of our life and being.<sup>14</sup>

Mulholland Jr. explains with clarity the need to be conformed to the image of Christ. He spends a great deal of time talking about the sinful human nature which resists giving up control to anyone or anything. The author makes it quite clear that our spiritual formation really only occurs when we learn to yield ourselves to God and discover where he will take us. While the world is trying to squeeze people into its mold, the Holy Spirit is actively involved in the process of conforming people to the image of Christ. Mulholland Jr. writes:

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<sup>14</sup> M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 12.



We are created to be compassionate persons whose relationships are characterized by love and forgiveness, persons whose lives are a healing, liberating, transforming touch of God's grace upon their world. When all of us are perfectly conformed to the image Christ, we will not be a group of clones. In fact, we find our unique individuality only to the extent that we are fully conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The book is well laid out and progresses very logically toward the conclusion. He includes a chapter on personality type and relies on the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. There is a section in the book dealing with the classic spiritual disciplines which is quite helpful. He talks about the classic stages of the spiritual journey that are generally understood as, awakening, purgation, illumination and union. This is a common approach to spirituality which acknowledges a developmental model moving toward wholeness in Christ. The section in the book on *Lectio Divina* is especially helpful. He concludes the book with a section on corporate spirituality. This part of the book discusses the importance of Christians journeying together as the body of Christ. There is no true transformation in the believer's life apart from walking in relationship with other Christians. It is only in these earthly imperfect relationships that people are confronted with their sinful patterns of relating and the need for change. In fact Mulholland Jr. rightly quotes the Old Testament prophets who continually reminded God's people that true corporate worship of God is incompatible with social, economic or political injustice.<sup>16</sup>

This book helped to challenge my thinking in the early stages of this project. Mulholland Jr. explained the ongoing nature of this transformation in a solid biblical fashion. His

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 160.

chapter describing how personality differences affect our approach to spirituality sparked my thinking and caused me to do further research on this subject. His practical approach to the spiritual disciplines shaped my own teaching and preaching on this subject.

### Listening to God

John Ackerman's work particularly helped inform this thesis project. Of his three books, the most recent, *Listening to God, Spiritual Formation in Congregations* was especially helpful. A pastor for forty years, he has been a spiritual director for twenty years and he has been teaching pastors in the Doctor of Ministry program for the past ten years. His wealth of experience in ministry as well as in the classroom where he admittedly learns a great deal from his students is invaluable. Ackerman is a breath of fresh air in that he brings his emphasis on spirituality to every part of church life. The ideas in this book are not simply theory, for he has implemented each concept into the life of the church he currently leads.

Ackerman believes that as Christians we often pay only lip service to the idea of being led by God. Ackerman acknowledged that he tried many different ways to bring about spiritual formation in his congregation but, most of the things he tried failed. Even the spiritual formation small groups were disappointing. Instead the leaders of church intentionally decided to listen to God in their corporate worship, at committee meetings and in every ministry. They drastically flattened the hierarchy of the church and operate on the premise that God can speak to the congregation through lay persons as well as clergy. Each meeting is designed to leave room for prayer and listening to God and trying

to discern what God might be saying to the congregation. Instead of making plans and asking God to bless their plans the congregation is directly seeking God for guidance and direction. Ackerman writes:

We need to pay attention. This attending needs to start with the pastor and the leadership. Learning how to listen to God happens in worship and in committees and on occasions of helping people reflect on their experience. Corporately listening means becoming a learning community. Instead of following the lead of a great strategist at the top, everyone at every level learns and contributes. In the church it means that all members must learn how to listen to themselves, to others, and to the Holy Spirit, who animates all structures.<sup>17</sup>

Another contribution Ackerman makes in this discussion is his attention to the differences in personality types in congregations. In the past he spent a great deal of time studying and teaching the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to assist members of his congregation in finding out why they prefer a certain type of spirituality. In this current book he relies heavily on the work of Corrine Ware and her, “Four Types of Spirituality.” Ackerman adapts and simplifies the work of Ware to help people discover which type of spirituality they prefer. The four types are, Thinking Spirituality, Feeling Spirituality, Being Spirituality and Doing Spirituality. This is part of the inspiration for the chapter of this thesis dealing with Personality Development and Spirituality.

### Discover Your Spiritual Type

After discussing the work of John Ackerman it is natural to turn to the work of Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth*. This book, published by the Alban Institute in 1995, adds much to the discussion of personality development and spirituality. Rather than relying on the Myers-Briggs

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<sup>17</sup> John Ackerman, *Listening to God Spiritual Formation in Congregations*, (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2001), 6.

Personality Type Indicator, Ware draws from the work of Urban T. Holmes, who developed something he called the Typology of Spirituality. Ware attempts to simplify Holmes' language that is rather inaccessible to the common reader. It is worth noting that Ware spends as much time talking about the spiritual types of congregations as she does the spiritual type of persons. While the idea that each congregation has a specific spiritual type is a very worthwhile study it is not part of the focus of this project. She discusses the four types of spirituality found in Urban T. Holmes' "Circle of Sensibility." Here she includes a diagram of a circle divided into four quadrants showing the four types of spirituality. Each type has its own dangerous aberration or excesses to watch out for and to try and avoid. She interprets the four types of spirituality as Intellectual, Imaging, Heartfelt and, Mystery. The four excesses that coincide with these types are; Head-trip, Emotionalism, Reclusivity, and Moralism. Left to themselves each type will gravitate toward one of these excesses. Urban T. Holmes believed that the Christian Church needed a balance of all four types in order to be healthy. Corinne Ware writes a chapter in her book to suggest that Jesus himself demonstrated the best attributes of all four types. In her discussion of *Lectio Divina*, Ware claims the four components of the Benedictine model of *Lectio* parallels Holmes' four spiritual types:

Our object is to "open up" a scripture text by calling forth our ability to experience it in different modes. The Benedictine model suggests four activities: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and "contemplation." These Latin terms mean: read, meditate, pray, and contemplate. This four-mode pattern parallels Holmes' four spiritual types.<sup>18</sup>

Ware compares Holmes four spiritual types with the four basic psychological functions of Jung and Myers-Briggs; sensing, thinking, feeling, and intuition. Because she took a

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<sup>18</sup> Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1995), 101.

different approach from other authors and spent a great deal of time talking about personality and spirituality, I was helped in understanding how to implement some of the spiritual disciplines in a congregational setting. It is useful to begin to understand the personality of my congregation as distinct from another.

### Soul Types

In exploring personality development and spirituality, a major piece of literature is the work of Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise, *Soul Types Finding the Spiritual Path That is Right for You*. This book is imminently accessible and practical for clergy and lay people alike. Krebs-Hirsh and Kise have taught Jungian theory and the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator for years. After hundreds of seminars and interviews they began to realize there is a relationship between personality type and spirituality. They concluded that; “Each psychological type has a unique slant on spirituality. Some are drawn to traditional forms of spirituality. Others feel detached from the standards of their tradition or the norms of their culture.”<sup>19</sup> Krebs-Hirsh and Kise do an excellent job helping people understand psychological type.

The book tries to guide people in discovering their type and find out why they prefer certain ways of relating to the world. They proceed to offer one chapter for each of the sixteen personality types with tips on developing certain spiritual disciplines and practices which might be better suited to each particular personality type. Rather than trying to “pigeon-hole” people, the authors point out certain pitfalls of each personality

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<sup>19</sup> Sandra Krebs Hirsh, & Jane A. G. Kise, *Soul Types Finding the Spiritual Path That is Right For You*, (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 1-2.

type and remind the reader that no matter what their type, each must grow and change. In fact the authors suggest that in the second half of life people should try and develop more in their least preferred style of relating. Like many of the authors who write on this subject, Krebs-Hirsh and Kise focus a great deal on the importance of becoming spiritually whole. They do not advocate throwing out tradition and charting only one distinct path for spiritual growth which they claim may be a path to stagnation. They promote a well rounded spirituality which is accepting of other personality types and other approaches to spirituality. In fact they challenge people to welcome, accept and learn from those whose experiences are different from their own.

The work of Krebs-Hirsh and Kise is quite well balanced. Readers should appreciate the fact that they concede the following observations:

“Psychological type is not prescriptive. It does not try to pigeonhole people, realizing that human beings are much too complex for that. Psychological type is not deterministic, there is room for free will and growth. Psychological type is influenced by skills, competency, abilities and knowledge. Psychological type should never be used as an excuse for certain types of behavior. It is not about putting barriers in the way of your personal or spiritual growth.<sup>20</sup>

This book was invaluable in the development of this project. I was able to incorporate some of the practical suggestions for spirituality based on personality types. Their expertise in Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator informed the project by showing how different personality types approach spirituality. This helped my understanding and allowed me to offer instruction on personality type to the congregation.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 26, 27.

### From Image to Likeness

An excellent book contributing to this whole discussion of spiritual formation is the book, *From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey*. The authors, W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas E. Clarke are Roman Catholics who spent many years conducting retreat/workshops helping people understand the Gospel better through the Jungian personality types. In this book they have done a great job of using scripture, Jungian psychology, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to encourage people toward positive Christian growth. The central motif of this book is that Christians should grow more and more into the image and likeness of Christ. Jung taught that the God-image and the self-image could not be clinically differentiated for he believed that the goal of individuation was the disclosure, and liberation of the self. Though Jung believed that the Christ-image was only a symbol of the self; Grant, Magdala, and Clarke are able to make the spiritual distinction between God and self. They claim, however, that to become more like Christ is indeed to become a more whole version of one's self.

The authors of the book offer an interesting definition of what it means to be human. In their model each person has the potential to grow in three basic dimensions. Each person has the dimension of solitude which speaks of a relationship with self. But persons are also in relationship with others – hence the dimension of friendship symbolically contained in the male/female relationship. Finally, persons in relationship with other persons act and interact with the world of nature and out of it create the world of society which in turn tends to shape them as persons and in their relationships.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas E. Clarke, *From Image to Likeness A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 6.

In the first chapter of the book the authors give a solid biblical and theological primer for growth in God-likeness or, Christ-likeness. They discuss the fact that, although humans were created in the image of God this image was damaged by the fall of human kind into sin. By citing many different scriptural references the book provides several biblical images which underscore the need for growth in Christ-likeness. The authors talk about the call to holiness (Lev. 11:45), and the scriptural command to be perfect (Matt. 5:48, Eph. 4:13). Another New Testament word describes being filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19; Col. 1:19; Col. 2:9). Finally the authors refer to the word glory. This word is found in the Old Testament in words like *kabod* and *shekinah* which describe the brightness of the manifest presence of God. In the New Testament Jesus is the embodiment of the glory of God (John 1:14). Christian believers are being transformed to reveal more and more of the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:18). All of this transformation in people is made possible only through the finished work of Christ;

This has been accomplished by God's own Word and Son, who is the image of the unseen God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). The manner of this re-creation is wonderful beyond the power of words to express. It has taken place by the "marvelous exchange" (*admirabile commercium*). The sinless One takes on the form or image of our enslaved humanity in order to give us a share in his own perfect reflection of the beauty of God (Phil. 2:7; see 2 Cor. 5:21). The glory of God shining on the face of Christ Jesus becomes, as we Christians gaze upon it, the source of our imaging of that glory on our own faces, in our own lives (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). This takes place not only by our conscious imitation of the example of Jesus in our lives, but especially by the transfiguring action of the Holy Spirit who has been poured forth into our hearts by the risen Lord Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 4:4).<sup>22</sup>

After giving this biblical/theological background the authors discuss Jung's development of the personality type theory. In his clinical work Jung began to notice that there was a

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 8.



certain psychic energy flowing as people related with one another. Out of this work Jung began to notice people had spontaneous preferences in dealing with relationships and life in general. From this he developed his theory of personality type. The basic preferences are; Extraversion/Introversion, Sensing/Intuiting and, Thinking/Feeling. Later, Katherine Myers and Isabel Briggs-Myers added a fourth function of personality, the Perceiving/Judging function. The authors proceed to write a chapter on the Sensing, Thinking, Feeling and Intuitive functions of personality. Each chapter describes the preferred way of relating to the world and offers some practical guidance for spirituality and growth.

Another major contribution of this book is a theory of human development. The authors describe in some detail a theory of developmental typology. This is a method for helping people accept the call to grow and change. Even in describing personality preferences the authors make the case for growth. In other words, even though people have preferred ways of relating to the world, people are capable of relating in each of the various functions of personality. For instance, an introverted person is capable of acting in an extraverted fashion. A person who prefers the thinking function can operate in her/his least preferred function of feeling and, so on. While using the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) the authors describe the development of personality in early life, and in puberty, young-adulthood, midlife, and, the golden years. Their approach to the need for growth in each of these stages is quite fascinating in suggesting the need to grow and develop in the various seasons of life. The concluding chapter of the book explains the

culmination of this developmental psychology/spirituality which is “fullness of love.”

This is best described in the words of the authors of the book:

Where Jung spoke of individuation, Jesus spoke of love. Both were thinking of the fullness of living to which we are all called. Both saw this vocation in terms of likeness to God. For Christians, to be like God is to love, for God is love (1 John 4:8). The journey from image to likeness is consummated in love. The transforming vision of God, in which we see God as God truly is, as unlimited love, is what brings the created and redeemed image of God into its full flowering in love (1 John 3:2). As in other chapters of this book, Jung can help us here to understand the Gospel more fully, and the Gospel in turn can throw a unique light on the journey toward the integration of personality.<sup>23</sup>

In an attempt to give an example of someone who experienced such a full flowering of this love in her personality the authors turn to St. Thérèse of Lisieux who writes, “Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my love... my vocation, at last I have found it... My vocation is love!”<sup>24</sup>

This book is very thorough and helpful and the authors have an excellent grasp of scripture, a good command of the Gospel and, a thorough understanding of Jungian personality theory.

While reading the various authors and their differing perspectives on spirituality it is interesting that a synthesis of ideas began to take shape in my mind. I am grateful to those whose perspectives have challenged me to think in new ways about spirituality in general and spiritual disciplines in particular.

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<sup>23</sup> Harold Grant, et al., *From Image to Likeness*, 179, 180.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 178,179.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

#### Introduction

Spiritual Formation is a subject that is receiving a great deal of attention in Christian circles today. There appears to be a resurgent interest in spirituality among people in western culture. Researching the source of spiritual hunger will inform the need for an emphasis on spiritual formation in the church. This chapter will explore the theological and biblical rationale for a formation model of ministry in the church. In exploring this model we will engage a number of authors who have discussed the need for change that begins on the inside and affects the overall character of the Christian. This concept is found in the Old Testament and the New Testament and will be surveyed briefly in the following pages. The thesis will emphasize the teaching of the Apostle Paul who wrote extensively about the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. It is hoped that if people are intentional about opening themselves up to the transforming work of the Spirit they will grow to maturity in Christ. While there are many faith groups which place an emphasis on formation this thesis will concern itself entirely with Christian spiritual formation.

## Spirituality is a Hot Topic

There is a rising tide of interest in spirituality in Canada today. In this new century the increase of interest in spirituality among secular people is being noted by those who study current trends. In 2002, the significant evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz, who was then at Carey Hall, wrote:

We live in a "spiritual" era. In a manner unprecedented in the late modern era, contemporary North Americans appear to be open to the spiritual dimension of life. Hence, the word "spirituality," which seemed to have been banned from the vocabularies of people living in a scientific culture, is now not only common parlance but even fashionable. This is the case even among those who eschew organized religion.<sup>25</sup>

This interest in spirituality is present in many sectors of the post-modern milieu. Canadian sociologist, Reginald Bibby has researched and written extensively on religious beliefs in Canada. He maintains that just over 80% of Canadians still believe in God. He notes that there is only a slight increase in atheists to around 8% of the population. In fact, Bibby makes the claim that, while people are less interested in organized religion they have a strong belief in God.

And, unlike the case with organized religion, God's popularity is not diminishing. At a time when only 26% of Canadians are saying that religion is 'very important' to them, about 90% maintain that God either continues to be 'important' or is becoming 'more important.' Make no mistake about it: God is doing well in the polls.<sup>26</sup>

The current form of spirituality in the culture sometimes has little to do with Christianity. Sociologists and Theologians alike are attempting to find reasons for the resurgence of

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<sup>25</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Christian Spirituality and the Quest for identity: Toward a Spiritual-Theological Understanding of Life in Christ*, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=7&hid=22&sid=43a1ab58-e3e0-4cb4-ac0f-27fd1d907c74%40sessionmgr2>, Baptist History and Heritage 37 no 2 Spr 2002, Viewed November 28, 2008, p 87.

<sup>26</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Unknown Gods The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1993), 129.

interest in spirituality. In his article, *Christian Spirituality and the Quest for identity: Toward a Spiritual-Theological Understanding of Life in Christ*, Stanley Grenz offers his explanation.

Indeed, we might say that the current interest in spirituality is, at least in part, a quest for the self. The search for the spiritual is born out of the attempt to discover some semblance of personal identity in the form of a unified sense of selfhood. Viewing the matter from this perspective suggests why spirituality so readily becomes a watchword in the postmodern context, for one crucial characteristic of the postmodern condition is the loss of the centered self.<sup>27</sup>

Whether it is a search for personal identity or an attempt to recover a unified sense of selfhood people are searching for inner harmony.

Others have noted that people in the present culture are on some kind of spiritual quest.

Thomas N. Finger reaches a similar conclusion:

For several decades now, a great interest in, even a hunger for, spiritual reality has been spreading through our society. Even as science explains more and more of our behavior biologically, even as technology more and more configures our daily vocations and communications, it is becoming increasingly acceptable to believe in, and report experience of, all manner of realities transcending these spheres. The shelves of our mega-bookstores keep expanding to accommodate Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Native American, Shamanist, Occult and New Age writings, and eclectic combinations of all of the above.<sup>28</sup>

In a technological age which is focused on the superficial, people are searching for deeper meaning. Marjorie Thompson in *Soul Feast* evaluates this dilemma.

There is a hunger abroad in our time, haunting lives and hearts. Like an empty stomach aching beneath the sleek coat of a seemingly well fed creature, it reveals that something is missing from the diet of our rational, secular, and affluent

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<sup>27</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Christian Spirituality and the Quest for identity: Toward a Spiritual-Theological Understanding of Life in Christ*, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas N. Finger, *Sources for Contemporary Spirituality, Anabaptist and Pietist Contributions*, Brethren Life and Thought 51 no 1-2 Wint-Spr 2006, p 28-53., <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001555434&site=ehost-live> Viewed, July 31, 2008. 28.

culture. Both within and beyond traditional faith communities, a hunger for spiritual depth and integrity is gaining momentum... We know there is a vacuum inside us that will suck up an infinite supply of thrills, goods, and successes without satisfying the human heart. We are aware of needing a transcendent compass. Suffering has opened us to questions for which we have no easy answers – perhaps no answers at all. We have come to believe that only a power beyond this life can give meaning to our choices and circumstances.<sup>29</sup>

Whether it is in secular society or the Christian church the mantra many people struggle under is, “try harder and do more!”

Many people are waking up to the condition of being spiritually bankrupt and looking for something which will add meaning to life and provide a still point in a rapidly turning world. Ruth Haley Barton comments, “Our longing for a way of life that works is most often met with an invitation to more activity, which unfortunately plays right into our compulsions and the driven-ness of Western culture.”<sup>30</sup> There are many factors which contribute to the sense of weariness and emptiness. Marjorie Thompson attempts to give some underlying reasons for the unrest and the rising tide of spiritual ferment in our time. She suggests several cultural factors, beginning with the influence of rationalism on western culture and its suspicion of anything that could not be measured or quantified. Under scientific rationalism there occurred a loss of the sacredness of life which people now seem to want to recover.

She then turns to the technological advances in our time and the incredibly rapid rate of change. This has contributed to tremendous social dislocation and stress in the culture. The current cultural values have been very superficial and people are beginning to starve

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<sup>29</sup> Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Barton, Ruth Haley, *Sacred Rhythms Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, 10.

for values of enduring substance. As society moves away from the enlightenment period into a post-modern age a new appreciation for mystery and spiritual experience is emerging. Finally, she references the pervading fear which is having a paralyzing affect on society. Fear of terrorism, war, drugs, violent crime, the effects of global warming, and the increasing pessimism in the culture have all contributed to unrest and a desire for something lasting and secure.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Mulholland Jr. gives an excellent summary explaining why spiritual formation is becoming a major movement.

In the face of a radical loss of meaning, value and purpose engendered by a largely materialistic, hedonistic, consumer society, human hearts are hungering for deeper realities in which their fragmented lives can find some measure of wholeness and integrity, deeper experiences with God through which their troubled lives can find meaning, value, purpose and identity.<sup>32</sup>

Whether people fully understand it or not the restlessness and the hunger for meaning and the desire for wholeness in life is a powerful force motivating them to seek something more.

Thompson also notes that at a personal level there are three more reasons why people have this restless spiritual hunger today. First, she notes that suffering and tragedy are powerful motivators as people seek answers to life's pain. She describes how people seek to know how God can relate to them in their pain. Suffering points people toward questions of meaning and purpose in life. The second personal motivator is that many people are dissatisfied with the church as they have experienced it. They have faithfully

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<sup>31</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, 11.

attended church and participated in the liturgy and worship but do not experience the reality of the presence of God in their daily lives. As a result many people are drifting away from organized religion and seeking spiritual meaning in life elsewhere. Finally, she claims there are people who have had a dynamic experience with God in their lives but find no place to share that experience in the traditional church. Since these people often receive little guidance they sometimes end up disillusioned.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond these cultural and personal reasons for the spiritual hunger is the Christian belief that humans are inherently spiritual beings. This is the deeper more significant reason for these desires. Marjorie Thompson draws attention to this human condition.

Beneath these specific cultural and personal factors lies a deeper reason for the spiritual hunger of our day. Human beings are innately religious. We harbor a bedrock desire of a transcendent wellspring of meaning and purpose in life. While sociologists may attribute the universal human religious impulse to psycho-social need, people of faith believe that we are made for relationship with God. Therefore until that relationship is sought and found, there will always be an existential emptiness at the core of our being. Centuries ago Saint Augustine confessed to God, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>34</sup>

This deep restlessness is the ultimate reason for frustration and the deep spiritual hunger being expressed in western culture. It is precisely this restless hunger for God that is driving the spiritual formation movement today. Tired of frantic, meaningless activity and shallow Christianity, some Christians find themselves in the same condition as the crowds Jesus addressed during his earthly ministry. Jesus’ response to the harried multitude is equally valid today: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a

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<sup>33</sup> Thompson, Marjorie, *Soul Feast*, 3, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message Bible). It is in learning the unforced rhythms of grace and by keeping company with Jesus that people will learn to live freely and lightly and recover life as Jesus intended it.

In order to speak into the developing cultural spiritual interest, it is imperative to develop a theological framework for understanding spiritual formation. In many ways those who promote spiritual formation are issuing a call to change that is similar to what earlier generations referred to as "radical discipleship."

A good place to begin the discussion of the belief in an ongoing journey of transformation in the lives of Christian people in congregations is Dallas Willard. He has spoken with a prophetic voice in giving a critique of the current climate of North American Christianity and has written extensively and brilliantly on the need for Christians to focus on Spiritual Formation. Willard writes in his book, *Renovation of the Heart* that:

The revolution of Jesus is in the first place and continuously a revolution of the human heart or spirit. It did not and does not proceed by means of the formation of social institutions and laws, the outer forms of our existence, intending that these would then impose a good order of life upon people who come under their power. Rather, his is a revolution of character, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations. It penetrates the deepest layers of their soul. External, social arrangements may be useful to this end, but they are not the end, nor are they a fundamental part of the means.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

Willard believes this quest for the inner spiritual transformation is as old as humanity itself. His argument is that the need for goodness is rooted deeply in the human mind and spirit. In, *Renovation of the Heart*, he calls upon Christians to move away from superficial Christianity to a journey of inner transformation. Willard uses the plea of St. Paul to the Galatians; “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Galatians 4:19a NIV). This approach to Christianity presupposes a life-long process of becoming more like Christ.

In his article, *Growing Christlike Together*, Jeff Nikkel expresses it in the following way.

We believe that Scripture essentially defines a disciple of Jesus as one who trusts Christ with his or her whole life by actively and joyfully loving God and loving others in Christ’s name (Luke 10:25-37; 5:27; Matt. 13:44-46). We also believe that as we trust Jesus with our whole lives in relationship with him God graciously transforms our entire person: our thoughts, our emotions, our attitudes, our desires, and our actions. We become more like Christ; that is, we actually are transformed to take on more of Christ’s character: honesty, generosity, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control etc.<sup>36</sup>

It is this deep desire to take on more of Christ’s character that is at the heart of the concept of spiritual formation.

Professors Dan R. Stiver and Daniel O. Aleshire write an excellent primer on spiritual formation. Along with a group of professors at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, they concluded: “Christian spirituality involves transforming responsiveness of the whole person individually and corporately to God...”<sup>37</sup> In order to keep the

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<sup>36</sup> Jeff Nikkel, *Growing Christlike Together*, Direction 35 no 1 Spr 2006, p 176-182., <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001513255&site=ehost-live>, viewed July 29, 2008, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Bill J. Leonard, editor, *Becoming Christian Dimensions of Spiritual Formation*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 20.

theology of spiritual formation clearly rooted in the evangelical Christian tradition, Stiver and Aleshire contend that:

- (1) the center of spirituality is relationship with God;
- (2) God is the source and goal of spirituality;
- (3) there are multiple ways in which people respond to God;
- (4) spirituality is linked to transformation; and finally
- (5) spiritual disciplines have an important role in the practice of spirituality.<sup>38</sup>

Spiritual formation is not so much concerned about separating the spiritual from the secular but is about a way of living in the world. Those who understand and promote spiritual formation promote a way of life in which every aspect of a person's existence is affected by Christian spirituality. "Spirituality cannot be regarded simply as an aspect of the Christian life; it is the Christian life. Such an inclusive characterization creates the need to find a center."<sup>39</sup> The center of all spirituality is a relationship involving a deep sense of communion with God.

Others have referred to this formation process as sanctification which is a good biblical word. Millard Erickson discusses the nature of salvation as an ongoing work. Erickson notes that God is at work restoring people to the likeness to Him for which they were intended. Erickson describes this ongoing work as sanctification.

Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy. By "holy" here is meant "bearing an actual likeness to God." Sanctification is a process by which one's moral condition is brought into conformity with one's legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 21.

within the believer. In particular, sanctification is the Holy Spirit's applying to the life of the believer the work done by Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Erickson makes much of the deepening relationship with Christ which moves from superficial to a deep friendship. He notes the passage in John 15: 15, where Jesus says to the disciples, "I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends." Citing John chapter fifteen, Erickson likens this deepening relationship to union with Christ where Christ likens himself to the vine and his disciples to the branches. Jesus commanded his followers to "abide in him."<sup>41</sup> Erickson believes that union with Christ is the key to the Christian life.

In attempting to understand the theological significance of spiritual formation for our times it is necessary to understand something of the cultural shift that is happening in society. Many authors in the religious and secular world have chronicled the demise of rationalism and the enlightenment period. We have entered the Post-Modern era of uncertainty and a renewed emphasis on mystery which suggests there is much that science and technology cannot explain. We live in a time when even the experts are displaying more humility about what can and cannot be known. In such a milieu a renewed emphasis on the spiritual formation of the Christian pilgrim is arising. The idea of being on a spiritual journey is a more appealing metaphor than mastering the content of the Christian faith. In an excellent article in the *Expository Times*, Peter Neilson quotes Leonard Sweet who describes spirituality for our times as "EPIC – experiential,

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<sup>40</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 967-968.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 974-975.

participatory, image-based, communal and connected.”<sup>42</sup> Neilson went on to explain that in the Post-Modern culture the model has moved from left-brain dominance to right-brain dominance.

In the old order, rationality, organization, and order were the dominant factors controlling society. In this current climate intuition, feeling, and subjectivity are the motivating factors. He writes; “People are looking for a spirituality of participation that makes a difference – de-stressing the individual, offering various kinds of healing or transforming society.”<sup>43</sup> Neilson points to the words of Jesus to his disciples and claims the words “follow me” suggest the notion of a journey marked by movement and change. The early followers of Jesus experienced tremendous internal change as they followed Jesus Christ. Christian leaders should expect people to change as long as leaders remember that it is a slow process of transformation. There will sometimes be a crisis in the life of a believer that precipitates a re-evaluation. Also there are stages in life when people are more vulnerable and open to change. Mid-life, for instance, is often a time for re-evaluation and for considering change. Neilson offers the insights of Hagberg and Guelich from their book, *The Critical Journey*. Their research shows that we move through distinct phases of spiritual exploration. These seven phases are insightful;

1. Discovery – we find God on the path we have decided to travel.
2. Belonging – we throw in our lot with this particular group.
3. Working – we commit to furthering the cause.
4. Questioning - we begin to wonder what we are doing and why?
5. The wall - we face an impasse when nothing makes sense any more.

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<sup>42</sup> Peter, Neilson, *Christian Spirituality: Changes in the Inner Landscape*, Expository Times 117 no 7 Ap <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001550542&site=ehost-live>, 2006, p 277-281. Viewed, July 30, 2008, 279.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 279.

6. Living with Uncertainties - we live with deeper confidence that God is God while other things may seem more provisional.
7. Living love - living for God and others.<sup>44</sup>

While it is wrong to be a slave to the idea of well defined phases it is important to note that many authors and Christians down through the centuries have put forward a developmental model of spiritual formation.

Various protestant denominations seeking to come to grips with the surge of interest in spirituality and spiritual formation are attempting to understand the historical roots of spirituality in their various traditions.<sup>45</sup> Gerald Ediger wrote an article, *A Sketch of Early Mennonite Brethren Spirituality* in which he seeks to relate Mennonite Brethren piety to the concept of spiritual formation. Ediger gives an outline of what he believes is true Christian Spirituality. This description is helpful for those wishing to understand spiritual formation:

Christian Spirituality denotes commitments and practices that enable and animate the mutual engagement of individuals and their communities with God as this engagement is manifested in God's presence and action in their daily experience. Such commitments and practices are the grace filled means by which humans lend their consent and cooperation to God's presence and action within and among themselves and the world. These commitments and practices are grounded in and shaped by the example of Jesus, the testimony of the Christian scriptures, and the wisdom of the greater church. The end of such mutual engagement is the formation of persons and communities in the likeness of Christ and the fulfillment of God's purposes in the world and in creation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>45</sup> In chapter four on pages 96-103 of this thesis you will find a brief discussion of various spiritual movements in the history of the Christian church. This will include Roman Catholic and Protestant movements which emphasized certain aspects of piety and spirituality. It is not an exhaustive study but a brief introduction to the subject.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald Ediger, *A Sketch of Early Mennonite Brethren Spirituality*, Direction 34 no 1 Spr 2005, p 15-28. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=29&hid=14&sid=f1df9ca4-855d-4c41-8c01-75ca0e695a53%40sessionmgr103> Viewed, March 30, 2008, 16.

It is extremely important that Christians who wish to take the journey of formation ground their practices in the life and teachings of Jesus and the wider teaching of the scriptures. As Ediger and others have found it is possible to honor and adapt the spiritual practices and traditions of many protestant denominations to embrace a spirituality which is meaningful to present seekers.

Drawing from the theology of Carl Rahner, Jurgen Moltmann and Carl Barth, Eric Stoddard wrote an article to show that people ought to express their spirituality in every realm of life. He uses the imagery of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to describe how each of us has moments when we acknowledge the true nature of our being. He specifically refers to the occasion when the prodigal sitting in the pigsty in utter despair experiences a moment of “coming to himself” (Luke 15:17). Stoddard claims this “coming to oneself” is only possible because of the grace of God. Stoddard says, “It is truly a “coming to oneself” because it is a coming to realize one’s nature as graciously created by God.” In fact Stoddard claims; “Our being human is a gift of grace and being human is to be spiritual.”<sup>47</sup>

In concluding this segment on the theology of spiritual formation there is a need to say a few words about how important it is to live and experience truth. If one has only an intellectual understanding of the Christian faith without the corresponding lifestyle it could be argued that one’s knowledge is rather impotent. Spiritual formation is a call to

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<sup>47</sup> Eric Stoddard, *Spirituality and Citizenship: Sacramentality in a Parable*, Theological Studies 68 no 4 D 2007, p 761-779. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0> , viewed July 31, 2008, 763-764.

first-hand, lived experience of the transforming grace of God in a person's life. This is illustrated well in an article by Anthony Frendo who talks about the Hebrew and near Eastern tradition of "received wisdom." He uses two Gospel narratives to explain his point. He begins with the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). When the woman goes back to her home town and passes on her knowledge of Jesus to her fellow townspeople an interesting thing happens. She said to her people, "come and see." The people went out to meet Jesus and after spending two days with him they told the Samaritan woman; "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know this man really is the Savior of the world (John 4:42). For Frendo, it was first-hand experience of the presence and life of Jesus that made all the difference.

In this sense, an existential approach to received wisdom entails that each individual beckons to the call to 'come and see' (John 4:29). The second Gospel narrative is the occasion when John the Baptist's disciples asked, "where are you staying?" Jesus replied, "come and see" (John 1:38-39). "Jesus' reply, 'come and see' echoes the Ancient Hebrew usage of the verb 'to see' in the sense of 'to see for oneself,' 'to understand,' and hence to understand by experiencing for oneself (Brown *et al.*, 1951). Near eastern custom exhorts people to experience received wisdom for oneself."<sup>48</sup>

In other words it is hoped that each person experience first-hand the transforming power of the grace of God in spiritual formation.

This spiritual transformation that takes place was never meant to happen in isolation.

Twentieth century North American individualism has certainly influenced the Church.

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<sup>48</sup> Anthony J. Frendo, *Come and See: An Existential Approach to Received Wisdom* International Journal of Children's Spirituality 12 no 1 Ap 2007, p 9-16.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001595247&site=ehost-live> , viewed July 31, 2008. 10, 13-14.



Yet, in almost every Christian tradition there is an emphasis on a shared or, communal spirituality which leads to transformation and Christ likeness. This is true in the Baptist understanding of the Christian life as well. Stanley Grenz acknowledges that a number of Baptist authors have paid homage to the idea that Christianity is best lived out in community with others. In fact he quotes Canadian Baptist author Bruce Milne who stated: "The Christian life is inescapably corporate."<sup>49</sup> In other words spiritual transformation happens as people relate to God as Trinity and to one another as the community we call the church. Stanley Grenz maintains that Baptists have always held this view.

God wills that the church be a people who in the midst of the fallenness of the present show what God is like. God desires that in and by our relationships with each other we reflect God's own character and thus shine as the *imago dei*. Effecting the *imago dei* among us is the Spirit's work. The attempt to understand this dynamic takes us back to the previous discussion of the trinitarian framework of "life in Christ." The Spirit brings us, as God's children, to share in the relationship the Son enjoys with the Father. In this manner, we participate in the love that lies at the heart of the triune God. Participation in God's eternal love, however, is not ours as individuals in isolation; it is a privilege we share. The Spirit's goal, in fact, is to mould us together into one people who participate jointly in the love of God and who by our loving relationships show God's great love to all.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, Grenz would suggest that the Trinity is the primary example of loving relationship. It should serve as the model for human relationships among God's children in the church. If the Trinity is the model and the community of faith the place of spiritual formation, what does Scripture teach us about the nature of spiritual formation?

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<sup>49</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Christian Spirituality and the Quest for identity*: 101.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

### Old Testament Rationale:

Spiritual formation is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and must be seen as a cooperative relationship between God and the community of faith if Christians are going to grow in the spiritual life. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah's experience is important in explaining key components of "Spiritual Formation." In the eighteenth chapter of the book of Jeremiah it is stated that, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words. So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.<sup>51</sup>

The clay is being formed into a vessel on the potter's wheel. The clay is good and useful but there is a problem. There is an imperfection in the clay, a flaw which causes the vessel to keep breaking down and prevents the potter from completing a work of art. But, the Potter doesn't throw the clay out and start with new materials. Rather, the Potter reworks the clay, removes the imperfections and creates a beautiful and useful vessel from the same lump of clay. A discerning reader of the prophet Jeremiah would understand that God is the potter and the nation of Israel is the lump of clay being reworked. The editors of the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* write:

God is busy molding, forming, pushing, and pulling Israel into shape, just as the potter shapes clay. God is not passive, but actively forming the community in unseen and unacknowledged but powerful ways.<sup>52</sup>

Christian believers today are like the "lump of clay", inherently good but nevertheless flawed, incomplete vessels on the potter's wheel. One notes as well that it is the nation of Israel being formed by God. Spiritual formation is never accomplished in isolation,

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<sup>51</sup> Richard, Foster, Ed., *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, 1111.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1111.

rather it is a community event and God uses the interaction of relationships in the refining process to shape individual Christian lives.

It is significant to understand that the clay doesn't perfect itself. The clay has no ability to remove its own imperfections. Rather, the clay is reworked, formed, pushed, pulled and molded by the master potter, God. All of this is to say that though Christians are on a journey of formation they are inherently unable to "form" themselves. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is actively yet secretly at work shaping and reworking the Christian and the Christian community into a beautiful vessel in the likeness of the creator God. While it is true the clay doesn't transform itself, it is equally true the clay must be cooperative and be receptive to the gentle yet powerful work of the Spirit. This is accomplished by developing spiritual disciplines which place the Christian in a posture of openness and attentiveness to the presence of God and learning to live in loving relationships with one another.

In her book, *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton gives incredibly helpful advice on spiritual disciplines for the Christian. The sub-title of her book is, "*Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.*" Spiritual disciplines themselves do not create change, rather they merely help the Christian believer arrange life in a way in which transformation and change can take place. Barton writes:

I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 12.

Richard Foster in his important work, *The Celebration of Discipline*, concurs when he writes, “We must always remember that the path does not produce the change; it only puts us in the place where the change can occur.”<sup>54</sup>

In order for spiritual formation to take place two attitudes must be evident in a person’s life. There must be an acknowledgement that the human heart stubbornly resists the kind of spiritual transformation the Trinity desires to effect in a person’s life. The same Old Testament prophet has a good grasp of human nature when he states the obvious; “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)? For this reason the Psalmist prayed; “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV). Furthermore, the Christian person must be willing, like the clay, to be in the vulnerable position of relinquishing control. This thought of allowing God free reign in addressing sinful patterns of living can be a frightful proposition.

In his book, *Invitation to a Journey*, Robert Mulholland Jr. addresses this very issue:

“Being conformed” goes totally, radically against the ingrained objectification perspective of our culture. Graspers powerfully resist being grasped by God. Manipulators strongly reject being shaped by God. Controllers are inherently incapable of yielding control to God. Spiritual formation is the great reversal: from being the subject who controls all other things to being a person who is shaped by the presence, purpose and power of God in all things. We are also an informational-functional culture. We seek to possess information, whether in the form of knowledge or in the form of techniques, in order that we might function more effectively to bring about the results we desire in the circumstances of our lives.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, 27.

Mulholland Jr. also intimates that much of the compulsive work-a-holism of our lives is an attempt to validate and authenticate ourselves as persons; to prove that we have value and meaning.<sup>56</sup> Spiritual formation involves relinquishing control and allowing God to shape and rework a life into a beautiful, grace filled, love filled vessel. While the concept of being formed by God is not so difficult to comprehend, the practice of letting God form us is incredibly hard when people place such high value on busyness and pragmatism. The great Henry Nouwen addresses this very thought: “Someone who is filled with ideas, concepts, opinions and convictions cannot be a good host. There is no inner place to listen, no openness to discover the gift of other... The more mature we become, the more we will be able to give up our inclination to grasp, catch and comprehend the fullness of life and the more we will be ready to let life enter into us...”<sup>57</sup> In many ways, spiritual formation is allowing the life of God to enter us.

In speaking to exiled Israel through the prophet Ezekiel the Lord promised to do a formative work in the exiles.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:25-28).

Jeremiah picks up on this same theme when he talked about a future time when God would make a new covenant with the house of Israel. Jeremiah claimed this new covenant would be very different from the old covenant. He writes:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Ford, ed., *The Dance of Life, Spiritual Direction with Henri Nouwen*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2005), 102.

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

God is in the business of reclaiming broken people and replacing stony hearts with soft pliable hearts that respond to the gracious working of His Spirit.

The spiritual life in the Old Testament may also be depicted as a journey. When God called Abraham he left Haran and journeyed to Canaan (Genesis 12:1-20). Abraham’s relationship with God developed on the journey even with its occasional detour. It seemed like Jacob met God whenever he was on a pilgrimage. After he stole his brother’s birthright and had to flee Jacob encountered God on the way. He stopped for the night and had an amazing dream. God came to him in the dream and promised to make him a great nation. Jacob set up a memorial and called the place Bethel. In Genesis we read, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven’” (Genesis 28:16-17). One of the most famous journey themes in the Old Testament is that of the people of Israel leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness prior to entering the Promised Land (See the book of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

Alister McGrath notes that throughout history Christians have identified with the journey motif in describing spirituality. McGrath cites such heavy weights as Jonathan Edwards and C. S. Lewis, he also mentions the *Divine Comedy* of Dante Aligheri (125-1321) and

*Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan (1628-1688).<sup>58</sup> McGrath describes why the image of a journey is so helpful to Christian pilgrims.

1. People on a journey should have a map. The “map” in question is the shared experience of many Christians who have undertaken the journey before us and passed down to us their wisdom, knowledge, and encouragement. Engaging with others – whether by reading books, or by spending time with others trying to live out the Christian life, is one of the most helpful ways of leading the Christian life.
2. One of the best ways of gaining encouragement on a long journey is to anticipate one’s arrival. This means picturing one’s final destination, anticipating the joy of arrival, and picturing those who will be present. Many of the greatest works of Christian spirituality aim to encourage those on the journey by offering them a vision of the New Jerusalem, so that they will long to be there and savor its delights.
3. For most Christian writers, the journey of faith is not to be seen as an individual pilgrimage, but as a corporate achievement, in which those who are weak help the strong. The Christian journey is, and is meant to be, a corporate and supportive matter. This points to the importance of fellowship and mutual support in the Christian life.<sup>59</sup>

The journey motif is not exclusive to the Old Testament, it is found in the New Testament as well.

The New Testament is very clear on what the Spirit of God is up to in this transforming work. It is the subversive and persistent goal of the Holy Spirit to change people into the likeness of Christ. Many scriptures bear witness to this fact. When Paul wrote to the Galatian Church he marveled at how quickly they had left the simplicity of the Gospel and had fallen into legalistic religion. He writes; “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Galatians 4:19 NIV) Paul’s passion and longing for these believers was that they reflect Christ’s nature in their lifestyle. This is one of the themes of the New Testament epistles. In the eighth chapter

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<sup>58</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 90-92.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93

of the letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul makes it quite clear that God's purpose in our lives is to bring about deep and lasting transformation. Paul writes,

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed** to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.” (Romans 8:28-29 NIV)

Believers are to become like Christ. It is God's heart desire that Christians reflect more and more the nature, the attitude, the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. Paul writes to the Philippians; “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...” (Philippians 2:5 NIV). In fact, Paul writes, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2 NIV). In writing to the Corinthians Paul states the express purpose of the Holy Spirit is to transform believers; “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit”(2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

At this point it may be helpful to take a more in-depth look at the twelfth chapter of Romans. While I am not sure if the Apostle Paul had a model for spiritual formation in mind when he wrote this part of the chapter it certainly lends itself to such an interpretation. Paul begins the chapter with an impassioned exhortation to the Christians in Rome. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true worship” (Romans 12:1 TNIV). The Greek word παρακαλέω used in this instance can refer to a very emotional appeal.<sup>60</sup> Paul's urgency is all predicated on the greatness of the mercy of

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<sup>60</sup> Michael H. Burer, *Towards a Biblical Definition of Spiritual Formation: Romans 12:1-2*, [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=4816](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=4816), viewed October 17, 2008, 3.



God that has embraced the Gentiles at the expense of the Jews who rejected the Gospel. The Gentiles are “Johnny come lately’s” if you will as Paul describes them as branches grafted in.

In light of this incredible mercy of God, Paul urges the Roman Christians to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (vs. 1) as a spiritual act of worship to God. Notice Paul challenges these Christians to “present” themselves to God. Believers who in obedience present themselves to God are granting God permission to do a work shaping and transforming their minds and hearts. The idea of a “living sacrifice” is quite unique and very different from the idea of an animal sacrifice which must die in the process of becoming an offering. A living sacrifice is not a onetime offering. The concept of a living sacrifice suggests the idea of variability, change, and growth. A living sacrifice is not static, rather it is involved in a process that is ongoing, seasonal (intermittent), and lifelong. It is no small thing to “present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God...” (Romans 12:1b NIV). Yet, Paul claims this is a reasonable thing to do. Paul calls this worship. Today many people somehow confuse worship with the concept of music. True Christian worship is less about liturgy and more about a way of life.

Presenting our bodies as “living sacrifices” is an offering of worship to God. The phrase “this is your spiritual act of worship” in the New International Version could be translated, “this is your perfectly reasonable and intelligent service to God.” Dr. Michael H. Burer notes the adjectival modifier “reasonable” from the Greek word λογικός is a

very rare word. An appropriate meaning in this context is “possessed of reason, intellectual.” Burer defines this word, “being carefully thought through.” Burer concludes; “It is eminently reasonable that the believer offer this service to the Lord, namely, that he give himself to God for his use.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, it is completely sane and practical to offer oneself to God in daily service. The noun *λατρεία* (*latreia*) means service or worship. Barclay claims the noun is from the verb *λατρεύειν-latreuein* which originally meant to work for hire or pay.<sup>62</sup> In this context it would seem that Paul is saying that worship is a daily offering of ourselves to God in service. It doesn’t seem like a stretch to say that a large part of that service is being open to the shaping, molding work of the Holy Spirit in transforming and renewing our minds. This may be the essence of spiritual formation. William Barclay captures it well:

Here we have a most significant thing. True worship is the offering to God one’s body, and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however noble, and a ritual, however magnificent. *Real worship is the offering of everyday life to him*, not something transacted in a church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God.<sup>63</sup>

Paul understood that worship involves presenting ourselves in service to God with all of the imperfection and ambiguity which comes with being human ‘sinner-saints’. The Christian life becomes a lifelong process of surrendering to the transforming work of the Spirit.

In verse two Paul gives two imperatives to the Christians at Rome which describe the depth and breadth of spiritual formation. First, Paul addresses a struggle that all believers

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series, The Letter to the Romans*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 156.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 157.

have with the subtle influence of worldliness. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2 NIV). Dr. C. E. B. Cranfield discusses the grammatical use of the second person plural passive present imperatives in which the first verb is preceded by a negative article. Due to this construction, Cranfield renders the verse in the following manner; “Stop allowing yourselves to be conformed to this age, but continue to let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”<sup>64</sup> Dr. Cranfield’s rendering of the Greek indicates a constant pressure to conform to the pattern of the world. Christians need to make daily decisions to break free of the insidious temptation to conform to the culture.

In modern context, Dr. Jonathan Wilson discusses worship as the particular work of the church and shows why it takes instruction and hard work to break free of the mold imposed on us by the world.

Our society begins very early to shape the ways that we worship and what we worship. Just because we don’t have wooden or stone statues in our homes, we think that we are not idolaters. Be we are. We organize our lives around affluence, success, comfort, security, health and entertainment. We worship these idols in the cathedrals of today: shopping malls, gymnasiums, hospitals, cineplexes, auto showrooms, and health spas. It takes work, strenuous work, to unlearn these habits of false worship and learn to worship the God of Jesus Christ. We must learn to discern the false gods for which we live and the practices by which we pursue them. One of the mistakes we make is thinking that worship of God comes naturally and can be learned “spontaneously,” without instruction.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans A Shorter Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 295,296.

<sup>65</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, *Why Church Matters; Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 26.

Christians should be biblically literate and have a Christian world-view in order to critique the spirit of the age and break free from false worship. Returning to the words of Dr. Cranfield:

And this command is something which he (the Christian) needs to hear again and again. It must ever be a great part of the content of Christian exhortation, so long as the Church is ‘militant here in earth’. For the pressures to conformity are always present, and always strong and insidious – so that the Christian often yields quite unconsciously. And the implication of the present tense (that what is being forbidden is something which is actually happening) is always true... Instead of going on contentedly and complacently allowing himself to be stamped afresh and moulded by the fashion of this world, he is now to yield himself to a different pressure, to the direction of the Spirit of God.<sup>66</sup>

By admonishing Christians to ‘not conform’ to the pattern of this world Paul is reminding them they do not have to be slaves to worldly thinking or living.

Paul comes to the crux of the issue when he commands the Christians to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” The word for “transformation” used here is the same word used in the Gospels to refer to the transfiguration of Jesus.<sup>67</sup> This word is full of meaning and bears further discussion. The verb used here is derived from the verb μεταμορφώω (metamorphoō ) The imperative, “be transformed” is a passive, present imperative and suggests the Christian is experiencing the ongoing prompting of the Holy Spirit toward the renewal of the mind. Dr. C. E. B. Cranfield makes an important contribution to the discussion:

He is to allow himself to be transformed continually, remoulded, remade, so that his life here and now may more and more clearly exhibit signs and tokens of the coming order of God, that order which has already come – in Christ. And it is by the renewing of your mind that this transformation is effected. It is as the Holy Spirit renews the fallen mind, loosening the bonds of its egocentricity so that it

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<sup>66</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans a Shorter Commentary*, 296.

<sup>67</sup> Michael H. Burer, *Towards a Biblical Definition of Spiritual Formation*, 6.

begins to think truly objectively instead of egocentrically, that a man's whole life is transformed.<sup>68</sup>

Apparently there is a correlation between transformation and knowing and doing the will of God. Paul concludes verse two, "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2b NIV). Paul claims that only as people resist the formative pressures of the spirit of the age and participate in the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will they be able to fully know and enjoy the will of God. It should be noted that as people respond more and more to the prompting and creative work of the Holy Spirit through the renewing of their minds they will experience freedom. This freedom allows the person to become more like Christ and in essence more fully human.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul connects the concept of freedom with transformation and the New Covenant. In 2 Corinthians we read; "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17-18 NIV). First, it must be noted that this work of the Spirit is only for the person who has turned to Christ (vs. 16) and has entered the New Covenant through the redemptive work of Christ. Rather than keep the letter of the Old Testament law the believer is free to follow the spirit of the law as discovered in the New Covenant. The work of the Holy Spirit is a life-long continual ministry in the Christian's life. Paul says that believers who reflect the glory of the Lord "are being transformed into his likeness" (2 Cor. 3:18). The word "reflect" could be

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 297.

translated “contemplate” or, “gaze” and presupposes that believers will spend time with the Lord contemplating or gazing at the glory of the Lord. Philip Hughes captures the significance of this in his commentary.

To gaze by faith into the gospel is to behold Christ, who in this same passage is described as the “image of God” (4:4) and “the effulgence of the Father’s glory and the impress of His substance” (Heb. 1:3). To see him is to see the Father, and to behold his glory is to behold the glory as of the only begotten from the Father (Jn. 14:9; 1:14). And to contemplate Him who is the Father’s image is progressively to be transformed into that image. The effect of continuous beholding is that we are continuously being transformed “into the same image”, that is into the likeness of Christ – and increasingly so: “from glory to glory”.<sup>69</sup>

The spiritual discipline of “gazing” is a prerequisite for spiritual transformation. By using the present participle verb form we get the sense of formation or process which takes place as Christian believers spend time in the presence of the Lord.<sup>70</sup> “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are *being transformed* into his likeness with *ever-increasing* glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 NIV). In fact Hughes believes this transformation is “none other than the restoration of the image of God which was marred through the fall of man.”<sup>71</sup>

He notes this transformation into the image of Christ will finally be complete when “we shall see Him even as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Until that time Christians “gaze” into the face of Christ by faith. This spiritual exercise is imperfect and the transformation is incomplete

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<sup>69</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 117, 118.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 117-118 Hughes comments on the present participle κατοπτριζόμενοι (“beholding as in a mirror”) shows that the beholding is continuous and free from interruption. He goes on to comment on the present tense use of Μεταμορφούμεθα (are being transformed) is the same verb used to describe the transfiguration of Christ on the Mount (Mk. 9:2; Mt. 17:2). In citing A. M. Ramsey and Lightfoot, Hughes points out that the transformation taking place in believers is not merely in outward appearance but suggests it is an inward change in the essential nature of a person. Attention is brought to Romans 12:2 which Ramsay translates; “be not outwardly fashioned according to this world; but be ye changed in real being by the renewing of your mind.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 119.

but as the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Cor. 13:12 NIV).<sup>72</sup>

Earlier in this chapter Dallas Willard was quoted in his discussion of how Christian people must undergo character transformation. A ‘face lift’ will not do. Willard, like the Apostle Paul sees this transformation as an inner work of grace in which Christians through the practice of spiritual disciplines open themselves up to the sanctifying work of the Spirit.<sup>73</sup>

We must remember this transforming is taking place with people who are in relationship with one another in the community of faith. The question remains, is it possible to behold the face of Christ in one another? Bishop N. T. Wright believes this idea to be a reasonable interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3:18.

The relation between the two verbs is therefore straightforward, even though the meaning is striking: it is as we behold the glory in one another that we are being changed into the same image. The parallel with Moses is that, just as Moses gazes at the Lord, with the result that his face is changed, so Christians gaze (as in a mirror) at the Lord, the Spirit - in one another: and so they are changed, as the Spirit writes the ‘letter’, the new covenant, on their hearts.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>73</sup> This is a reference to a quote on page 33 by Dallas Willard in, *Renovation of the Heart*, Willard makes the following claim; “Rather, his is a revolution of character, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations. It penetrates the deepest layers of their soul. External, social arrangements may be useful to this end, but they are not the end, nor are they a fundamental part of the means.” Willard makes much of the renewal of the mind and inner transformation.

<sup>74</sup> L. D. Hurst & N. T. Wright Eds., *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament, Studies in Christology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 146.

Formation into the likeness of Christ is not a solitary act but an ongoing relationship with Christ and with other believers in the body of Christ. Unlike Moses and the old covenant, Christians have ‘unveiled’ faces reflecting the glory of the Lord as they learn to live and work together for the Kingdom of God.

A further study of the twelfth chapter of Romans reveals that Paul does not leave the Roman believers in the dark concerning the will of God. Christians who have offered their bodies to God as living sacrifices are called to service. In verses three to eight Christians are admonished to use their gifts in service to the Lord. Paul begins this section by asking the believers to honestly assess themselves. “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Romans 12:3 NIV). This assessment is enhanced and sharpened as people experience the transformation that comes through the “renewing of their minds.” John Stott seems to capture this idea well:

Our renewed mind, which is capable of discerning and approving God’s will, must also be active in evaluating ourselves, our identity and our gifts. For we need to know who we are, and to have an accurate, balanced and above all sober self-image. A renewed mind is a humble mind like Christ’s.<sup>75</sup>

Once again everything the Christian does is grounded in “God’s mercy” (Romans 12:1a). It is only through the grace and mercy of God that people experience saving faith in Christ and are able to arrive at a “sober judgment” of their own gifts and abilities.

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<sup>75</sup> John Stott, *Romans, God’s Good News For the World*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 325.



It is also helpful to note that Christian faith is to be lived out in the church, the body of Christ. “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5 NIV). Christian people who take Paul’s exhortation seriously will begin to think more clearly about their gifts and their responsibility to the Church. People whose minds are being renewed will humbly and selflessly serve their fellow members of the body (the church) with whatever gifts God has given them. Here we see the diversity of people called to the body of Christ; “many members, and these members do not all have the same function” (Romans 12:4b). Yet we see the inclusiveness and mutuality of the Christian faith when we read that; “each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5b).

In “matter of fact” tones, Paul challenges the Christians at Rome to use their gifts to serve Christ and to serve one another. He acknowledges that believers have different gifts given by God and, in verses six through eight offers a sample list of gifts to be employed for the Lord’s service. He mentions prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership and, showing mercy. Each person has a part to play in the body of Christ and no one person has all the gifts, we need each other.

The gifts listed in this section are only a sampling and not meant to be an exhaustive list. Spiritual gifts are listed in several other New Testament passages. Paul is emphasizing that not all Christians are the same; diversity in the body of Christ is a necessary thing. Christians are not meant to serve Christ in a uniform “cookie cutter” fashion. People with

different gifts must serve Christ and the body of Christ in different ways. If that is so it might be possible to infer that people with different personalities are called to pray and practice spiritual disciplines in a way consistent with the personality God has given. I believe it is entirely consistent with Paul's admonition to "think of yourself with sober judgment." Too many people have languished under the guilt of trying to be "spiritual." The "one size fits all" approach to spirituality does not work well. The subject of personality development and spirituality will be explored more fully in chapter four of this thesis.

In the concluding section of Romans twelve (verses 9-21) Paul lays out a pattern for relationships in the body of Christ. It is a pattern based completely on love. Relationships in the body of Christ begin with love, and are sustained by love. As Christians offer themselves as living sacrifices will they be able to love like this. Only as Christian people continue to reject the pressures of the selfish spirit of the world and experience the transforming work of the Spirit through the renewing of their minds will they be able to love like this. Paul writes, "Love must be sincere" (Romans 12:9a), and then proceeds to clearly outline what sincere love looks like.

Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:9-21NIV).

Paul's description of a loving Christian life sounds reminiscent of the life and teachings of Jesus. To love like this is to love like Christ. John Stott gives an excellent summary of this passage.

What a comprehensive picture of Christian love Paul gives us! Love is sincere, discerning, affectionate and respectful. It is both enthusiastic and patient, both generous and hospitable, both benevolent and sympathetic. It is marked by both harmony and humility. Christian churches would be happier communities if we all loved one another like that.<sup>76</sup>

Romans chapter twelve follows a simple outline which very much suits a pattern of spiritual formation consistent with this thesis. Notice the simple outline of the chapter:

1. Surrendering our bodies to God for transformation. (An ongoing exercise)
2. Serving the body of Christ with our God given gifts. (An ongoing assessment)
3. Loving all people sincerely in practical ways. (An ongoing responsibility)

If Christians would sincerely and honestly practice these things transformation would occur not only in individual lives but in churches as well.

The following statement written by the Spiritual Formation Committee of Central Baptist Theological Seminary is another way of expressing this idea. "Spiritual Formation for the Christian is growth of the total person toward maturity in loving relationship to God, to self, to other persons in the community, and the whole of God's created world."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 333

<sup>77</sup> Frank Bateman Stanger, *Spiritual formation in the Local Church*, (San Francisco, Harper Collins Publishers, 1989), 15.

Dallas Willard has written much as a modern day prophet to evangelical Christians. He makes it very plain in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*:

My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing – by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.<sup>78</sup>

It must be stated that to become like Christ is not to lose one's identity or become like a puppet or clone of Jesus. As Jesus said, it is only in giving up a person's life that he or she really finds life. Or, as Robert Mulholland Jr. writes:

We are created to be compassionate persons whose relationships are characterized by love and forgiveness, persons whose lives are a healing, liberating, transforming touch of God's grace upon their world. When all of us are perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, we will not be a group of clones. In fact, we find our unique individuality only to the extent that we are fully conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>79</sup>

Becoming like Christ is not easy, nor is it the natural inclination of people. The tendency of human nature is to stubbornly cling to selfish and self-centered patterns of living. The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to train the Christian to become attentive to God and open to the stirrings of the Spirit. Donald Whitney gives an excellent illustration of this from the world of professional football. "Tom Landry, coach of the Dallas Cowboys football team for most of three decades, said, 'The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be.' In much the same way, Christians are called to make themselves do something they would

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<sup>78</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), ix.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Mulholland Jr., 33.

not naturally do – pursue the spiritual disciplines – in order to become what they’ve always wanted to be, that is, like Jesus Christ.<sup>80</sup>

This transformation is an ongoing work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. In one sense there never will be a “finished product.” The concept of change in the Christian’s life is like the parable Jesus told about the Kingdom of God. He said, “The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough” (Matthew 13:33 NIV). This is very analogous of spiritual formation. Just as the yeast works its magic in a slow, imperceptible, hidden way; so it is with the activity of God in the Christian’s life. The Holy Spirit is alive and active in the deep places of a person’s life slowly working the God kind-of-life into every fiber of the person’s life and being. As we shall see it is an ongoing work.

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<sup>80</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1991), 20.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

#### INTRODUCTION

Christian spiritual disciplines have developed over many centuries and are deeply rooted in the spirituality of the Jewish community of the Old Testament, the life and ministry of Jesus, the observance of the early church and the practice of Christians throughout its history. There are different types of spirituality and different spiritual disciplines that have developed in the various traditions of the Christian church. In speaking of “Christian Spirituality,” Alister McGrath writes.

There are many types of Christianity, thus leading to different types of spiritualities. There is no difficulty in speaking of “catholic spirituality,” “Orthodox spirituality,” “Lutheran spirituality,” “evangelical spirituality,” or “charismatic spirituality.” All of these are types of Christian spirituality, whose differences partly reflect prior differences between the types of Christianity in question.<sup>81</sup>

In examining spiritual disciplines it is helpful to look briefly at the history of the development of Christian spirituality to put the present project in context.

In the Old Testament the most common form of spirituality practiced by the Israelites was communal in nature. Worship as witnessed in the Old Testament is generally

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<sup>81</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 13.

expressed corporately through liturgy. A great number of the Psalms and prayers are corporate in nature.<sup>82</sup> At the same time there were individuals in the Old Testament who expressed their spirituality through prayer and communion with God. Some examples are Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and Jeremiah to name a few. This spirituality is generally expressed through intercessory prayer (Gen. 20:7), visions and dreams (Ex. 33:11; Isaiah 6:1-5), arguing and complaint against God (Ex. 32:11-12; Job 23:1-10), songs of praise (Ps. 139; Ps. 146), and prayers of penitence (Ps. 38; Ps. 51).

In the New Testament the spirituality of Jesus as expressed in the Gospels is rooted in Old Testament scripture and practice. Jesus was well versed in scripture and made it his habit to attend Jewish worship in the synagogue (Lk. 4:14-16). The Gospel writers record many examples of Jesus praying alone and in company of others. It is interesting to note the rhythm of Jesus' spiritual life. He appeared to spend a great deal of time with the crowds teaching, preaching and healing but withdrew from the crowds to be alone in solitary prayer. The authors of *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, take note of this rhythm in the life of Jesus.

Luke may begin his gospel in the spiritual atmosphere of the temple, but Mark starts his with a whirlwind of activity. After a few verses of introduction, we quickly cover John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism and temptation. Then, in a frantic burst of ministry, Jesus calls the first disciples, teaches in the synagogue, casts out an unclean spirit, heals Peter's mother-in-law, and cures all the sick and possessed in the area! There follows a very important little verse: "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). This gives us a clue to Jesus' own rhythm of prayer and activity.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds., *The Study of Spirituality*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 48.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality Two Thousand Years From East to West*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 22-23.

Jesus taught this principle of ministry to his disciples. When the disciples returned from a successful mission of preaching, healing and casting out demons Jesus said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31).

Luke records Jesus’ life of prayer more than any of the Gospel writers. Jesus prayed at each significant point of his ministry (Luke 3:21; 5:15-16; 6:12-13; 9:18; 9:28-29; 11:1). When the disciples observed his prayer life and requested teaching on prayer, Luke records Jesus response in Luke 11:1-13. The primary passage in which Jesus taught his disciples about prayer, fasting, and alms giving is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-18). Both Matthew and Luke record “the Lord’s Prayer” as part of this teaching. Jesus is seen at prayer throughout his ministry and, “He dies as he lived, with a simple prayer of commitment, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’ (Luke 23:46) which is taken from a psalm often used in Jewish night prayer (Psalm 31:5).”<sup>84</sup>

The early church took its cue from the ministry of Jesus and from Jewish synagogue worship. In the book of Acts the church often prayed and fasted together (Acts 1:14; 13:1-5; 16:25; 21:5, 23-27; 22:17). Paul and the other Apostles attended synagogue worship where there were prayers, scripture reading, proclamation and discussion of the scriptures (Acts 9:20; 13:1-5, 14-43; 17:1-3; 18:4). In the epistles the Christians are admonished to follow orderly worship (1 Cor. 12-14), sing hymns and Psalms together (Colossians 3:15-17), pray and offer petitions (Ephesians 6:18-20; Philippians 4:4-9), read the scriptures (1 Timothy 4:13), give praise and thanksgiving to God (Colossians 3:15-17; Philippians 4:4-9), live together in love and harmony (Romans 12:1-21), avoid

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 21.



the sins of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26), and pray for one another to be healed (James 5:13-18). There is deep spirituality in the writings of the Apostle Paul and his recorded prayers are inspirational and instructional to Christian believers (Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21).

The first one thousand years of the Christian church gave rise to a particularly ascetic form of spirituality. During the first two hundred years the early theologians came to the fore, mainly bishops of ancient Christian communities. These leaders defended the faith in an age of severe persecution from without and doctrinal controversy from within the church. This period in church history is known as the “patristic” period or, the age of the early church fathers.<sup>85</sup>

Some historians believe that Origen, one of the early leaders is the ‘father of Christian mysticism’ since his writings greatly influenced the rise of the desert fathers and mothers. In his writings Origen argued that humans could only rise to the presence of God if they were able to bring the desires of body and mind under severe discipline and study. The following observation is made in the *Story of Christian Spirituality*.

His writings were highly influential in the century following him, when the movement of ascetics that soon came to be called ‘monasticism’ began. This movement was discernible in the earliest days of the church, and was particularly influential in Syria, where celibacy and ascetical forms of life were expected as a normal part of Christian activity from the newly baptized. By the fourth century the movement had developed in the Syrian countryside and the semi-desert lands around the Nile in Egypt. Christians were leaving the towns searching out places of solitude. The quest for solitary asceticism led to the new name of monk (monachus) or ‘solitary person.’<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 32, 34.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 57.

The monastic life gained popularity and emphasized communal living, celibate lifestyle, disciplined daily routine organized around times of prayer, recitation of psalms, and manual labour. Christianity spread to Britain and maintained a strong monastic element while at the same time developing its own unique Celtic character. In Celtic monasteries, prayer, study and manual labour were cultivated with deep devotion. Study of the scriptures was paramount and the psalms were given great prominence. “The whole spirituality was deeply scriptural.”<sup>87</sup>

The spirituality of the Middle Ages was influenced by a number of reform movements within the Church. In the twelfth century there was an expansion of monastic spirituality, this spirituality became the norm for devout Christians and especially the clergy.

Underlying the various new orders was a movement which reaffirmed the ancient tradition of hermit life as a valid expression of monastic spirituality. This impulse was widespread and characterized by the desire for a simple, solitary life without many of the structures of established monastic houses and their involvement with society. Poverty, solitude, silence, fasting, manual work characterized these new ventures; their inspiration was the literature surviving from fourth-century monasticism, interpreted according to the outlook of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This movement took two forms: there were many hermits, living alone in individual solitude; there were, secondly, groups of monks living together in corporate solitude. These groups overlapped and produced the new orders of the twelfth century.<sup>88</sup>

Prayer life in the Middle Ages may be described as an attempt to completely detach from the world and progress toward unity with God. “The idea of a whole life of prayer lived towards God includes the notion of union with God as transfiguring the whole of creation, giving people a new perspective towards this world.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cheslyn Jones, et al., eds., *The Study of Spirituality*, 219.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-286.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

Such spiritual giants as Anselm (1033-1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090-1153), Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1328), Julian of Norwich (1342-1417), Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), and Catherine of Siena (1472-1517) left their mark on the spirituality of the Middle Ages.

With the rise of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, there came a different emphasis in spirituality. The decisive theme of the Reformation was “justification through faith alone.”<sup>90</sup> In commenting on the Reformers, James Atkinson writes:

The Reformers held that the believer came into direct relation and union with Christ, as the one, only and all-sufficient source of grace. His grace is available to the penitent believer by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Word of God. This did away with the need for the Virgin as mediator, the clergy as priests, and the departed saints as intercessors.<sup>91</sup>

The Reformers emphasized the importance of public and private scripture reading. By moving the pulpit to a more central part of the church building they gave preeminence to reading and proclaiming the Bible. The Reformers emphasized knowledge and with the rise of printed literature stressed the value of reading spiritual literature as well as the Bible. They also stressed the importance of the scriptures being read and taught at home and at school. For this reason, since the sixteenth century Protestants have practiced scripture reading and prayer around family meals in the home.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon Mursell, editor, *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 166.

<sup>91</sup> Tim Dowley, ed. Et al., *Eerdman's Handbook to The History of Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 364. Atkinson claims the Reformers were not really innovative as they had been accused. Rather they held to all the orthodox doctrines stated in the creeds of the early church.

<sup>92</sup> Gordon Mursell, 166-170.

Protestant spirituality gave rise to the Puritan piety and present day Protestant denominations have been influenced in large measure by its influence. This is a piety marked by a Calvinistic appreciation for Predestination, a rejection of dead forms of religion and an emphasis on a heartfelt ongoing relationship with God. It is worth noting that the Baptist scholar E. Glenn Hinson sees the influence of Monastic catholic spirituality on Puritan authors. He particularly notes it in the Baptist pastor/author, John Bunyan who wrote a classic book on spirituality, *Pilgrim's Progress*. While Hinson sees definite differences between Bunyan and the contemplative tradition he identifies several similarities. Bunyan believed that prayer should be sincere and from the heart, he argued that prayer at times is expressed as an overflow of the heart. Bunyan also felt prayer should be fervently engaged and at times is very hard work. To Bunyan prayer was pouring out one's heart to God by the assistance and power of the Holy Spirit. There is such an emphasis on the Spirit that today he might be called charismatic. While Bunyan rejected written prayers he relied upon the scriptures very heavily in his praying. Hinson concludes, "Prayer is, after all, as both Bunyan and the early monks taught, essentially an affair of the heart."<sup>93</sup>

Alister McGrath identifies James I. Packer as a twentieth century theologian who had a deep appreciation for the spirituality of the Puritans. Packer is known for writing in the tradition of the Puritans and is best known for his book *Knowing God*. In making his argument McGrath quotes from Packer's book.

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it – the fact that *he knows me*. I am

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<sup>93</sup> Gary A. Furr & Curtis W. Freeman, eds., *Ties That Bind, Life Together in the Baptist Vision*, (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1994), 80.

graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him, because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.<sup>94</sup>

Packer's confidence in God is indicative of a spirituality based on the all-encompassing grace of God and the knowledge that God always takes the initiative and is much more interested in a relationship with humans than we are with him.

Each Christian denomination has a rich heritage of spirituality and has been shaped by those who have gone before. While it is imperative to acknowledge this heritage and honour those who have built a solid foundation, Christian people today are willing to explore the broad spirituality of other Christian traditions. In discussing current trends in spirituality Alister McGrath writes:

It should, however, be noted that these differences are not as rigidly defined as they might have been a century ago, and there is considerable evidence that a process of erosion of denominational distinctiveness is under way within western Christianity. In part, this erosion reflects growing contacts between the denomination, and a concern to defend shared Christian beliefs against what is often seen as an increasingly secular society.<sup>95</sup>

It is possible to remain true to our own heritage while embracing the best of other traditions. In developing this thesis I have attempted to be broad minded in reflecting on various Christian approaches to spirituality. It is important to encourage people to find ways to practice spiritual disciplines which resonate and honors their tradition.

This chapter will deal with several spiritual disciplines intended to assist people in their daily walk with God. Spiritual disciplines are simply practices that help Christians

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<sup>94</sup> Alister McGrath, 172.

<sup>95</sup> Alister McGrath, 14.

position themselves to encounter the presence of God and experience the transforming work of the Spirit. The disciplines have no power to change the person. Rather, they are tools to be found in the spiritual tool-box to help Christians become more attentive to God. This is not an exhaustive list and is in no way meant to discourage people who might find other disciplines more helpful. There are many other spiritual disciplines designed to assist people in their spiritual journey. The practices found in this chapter serve only as an introduction to the spiritual disciplines. It is hoped this initiation might spark someone's desire to develop other meaningful personal spiritual disciplines.

#### Spiritual Disciplines for Today

As Christians practice spiritual disciplines these disciplines become the avenue or conduit through which God does a transforming work. It is wise to note once again that people are not changed by dogged determination and hard work. The disciplines give Christian people a way to offer themselves in relationship to God. Robert Mulholland Jr. wisely comments on this;

But we must realize that it is God, not we ourselves, who is the source of the transformation of our being into wholeness in the image of Christ. Our part is to offer ourselves to God in ways that enable God to do that transforming work of grace. This is inherent in Jesus' response to his temptation, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Our relationship with God, not our doing, is the source of our being.<sup>96</sup>

There is a long list of spiritual disciplines which have been practiced down through the centuries. For the purpose of this project and to keep people from being overwhelmed only a few spiritual disciplines will be examined. This is in no way meant to diminish the value of the many disciplines not considered here. The abbreviated discussion of spiritual

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<sup>96</sup> Mulholland Jr., 30.

disciplines should give interested persons a place to begin to explore a deepening relationship with God. The following spiritual disciplines will be discussed; prayer, *Lectio Divina*, solitude and service. It must be stated that in the truest sense each of these spiritual disciplines is a form of prayer and an expression of the Christian person's relationship with God.

#### Prayer:

There are many forms of prayer and it is impossible to give an exhaustive treatment of the subject of prayer here. For many people, prayer is primarily about getting things from God. Certainly petitions are one aspect of the life of prayer and are completely acceptable, even welcomed by God. It was Jesus who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Yet, if God is seen as merely a powerful being somewhere off in heaven who exists to meet the needs of people, prayer will become unbalanced. It was comedian Flip Wilson who said; "I'm gonna pray now, anyone want anything?"<sup>97</sup> Prayer is so much more than asking God for things. Prayer is first and foremost about developing a relationship with God. This relationship is like any loving relationship; it involves talking, listening, intimacy, silence, sharing, closeness and times of withdrawal or, times of being alone. Marjorie Thompson claims that prayer is the essential expression of our relationship with God. According to Thompson prayer parallels significant relationships with other people. In a relationship any form of intimacy and growth of the relationship only occurs as time is spent in each other's presence. Thompson concludes this time spent together is; "time simply to explore and enjoy the

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<sup>97</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, 34.

gift of companionship.”<sup>98</sup> To be in a relationship with God and to pray is an invitation to become like God. When two people are happily married and living in an intimate relationship they change over time. In this intimate relationship the individuals eventually begin to take on some of the characteristics of their mate. This is inevitable. Richard Foster, in talking about prayer helps Christians to understand the true nature of prayer when he says; “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.”<sup>99</sup>

Society is a noisy, busy place filled with words, images, and a constant bombardment of information. The kind of prayer being discussed here is unhurried, including time for listening. In this type of prayer the person is content simply to “be” in the presence of God.

For new believers prayer is a novelty and quick answers from God seem to be the norm. Ruth Haley Barton reminds Christians that in many ways it is only the young in Christ who seem to know how to pray. As Christians grow in this relationship with God there comes a time when prayer doesn’t work as well. As the relationship with God matures dissatisfaction with prayer, dryness and barrenness will bring disappointment to the sincere believer. Barton notes this is likely a sign of God wanting to draw people into a deeper more intimate relationship of prayer. This can be a disconcerting time since the Christian believer may have to let go of former habits in prayer that are no longer

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>99</sup>Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 30.



working.<sup>100</sup> There is a great need in this “Attention Deficit” world in which we live for people to buck the trend and learn to be “present” in the presence of a God who is always present with us. Being “present” with God could also be called ‘contemplative prayer.’ Author Brennan Manning comments on this type of praying; “As Woody Allen says: ‘Ninety percent of life is showing up.’ Why? Because simply showing up is a kind of loving. The readiness to conscientiously waste time with a friend is a silent affirmation of their importance in our lives.”<sup>101</sup> Manning gives further insight into the nature of contemplative prayer:

Contemplative prayer is simply experiencing what we already possess... During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was asked Thomas Merton: “How can we best help people to attain union with God?” His answer was very clear: “We must tell them that they are already united with God.” “Contemplative prayer is nothing other than coming into the consciousness of what is already there.” The task of contemplative prayer is to help me achieve the conscious awareness of the unconditionally loving God dwelling within me. “What this means, in very practical terms, is that I don’t have to worry about ‘getting anywhere’ in prayer, because I am already there.”<sup>102</sup>

Ruth Haley Barton approaches this type of prayer from a slightly different angle, “We come to him with empty hands and empty heart, having no agenda. Half the time we don’t even know what we need; we just come with a sense of our own poverty. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Emptiness is *the prerequisite for receiving*.<sup>103</sup> If Christian believers are not careful prayer can become burdensome, just one more activity to cross off on a very long ‘to do’ list. Henry Nouwen speaks eloquently to this when he says; “How can we possibly expect anyone to

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<sup>100</sup> Barton, 65.

<sup>101</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Signature of Jesus* (Sisters; Multnomah Books, 1996), 220.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>103</sup> Barton, 68-69.

find real nurture, comfort and consolation from a prayer life that taxes the mind beyond its limits and adds one more exhausting activity to the many already scheduled ones?”<sup>104</sup>

There are many methods designed to help persons of prayer become quiet and centered in the presence of God and listen for the “still small voice.” The following advice is given for Christians pursuing this type of prayer. Here the reader will find some practical steps to be taken in order to spend unhurried time in God’s presence waiting and listening. First, there should be a place for prayer. Richard Foster says; “Find a place that is quiet and free from interruption.”<sup>105</sup> This is generally true and in the early stages of learning this kind of prayer is quite critical. With practice it is possible to enter this contemplative kind of prayer even in busy noisy places like driving in the car on the highway or sitting in a busy, noisy restaurant. This requires some discipline in centering and tuning out the noisy distractions. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun gives an excellent description of centering prayer:

This prayer may seem mysterious to some because it depends so little on words. We do not give God information about all our needs, projects, ideas, programs, plans and agendas. We don’t suggest things we would like him to do. We sit in the presence of God and give him our undivided attention. Generally, the only words that are spoken in centering prayer are the prayer words like Jesus, love, peace, Father, or a phrase from scripture that encapsulates the intent of the heart to be with God. With this word we linger with God and open ourselves to his presence.<sup>106</sup>

This is a good reminder that salvation is in God alone, neither in the agencies nor the spiritual disciplines. As the prophet Isaiah said, “Surely **God** is my salvation; I will trust

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>105</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 21.

<sup>106</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook; Practices That Transform Us*, (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2005), 208.

and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. (Isaiah 12:2 NIV)

The posture of prayer should be one that is comfortable and which provides the least distraction. The following steps for centering prayer are gleaned from a number of sources and should be adapted to suit the personality of the person praying.

*CENTERING PRAYER:*

1. Take a few moments to relax your body and quiet your spirit. Sit quietly with your hands on your knees, palms up. Breathe slowly and deeply and imagine the presence of God in your breathing, in your body and all around you.<sup>107</sup>
2. Choose a single word or phrase to repeat which helps you focus your attention on God. It may be Jesus, Abba, Peace or, God. Another possibility is to say the 'Jesus Prayer.' The Jesus prayer is the prayer of the tax collector taken from Luke 18:13, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." The long form of the prayer is, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The short form is, "Lord, have mercy." Some have found it helpful to say; "Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy." There are many other short 'breath' prayer's that may help you be attentive to God's presence. In her book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun gives a number of examples of 'breath prayer's' that could be very helpful:
  - Breathe in "Abba," breathe out "I belong to you."
  - Breathe in "Healer," breathe out "speak the word and I shall be healed."
  - Breathe in "Shepherd," breathe out "bring home my lost son"(daughter).
  - Breathe in "Holy One," breathe out "keep me true."
  - Breathe in "Lord," breathe out "here I am."
  - Breathe in "Jesus," breathe out "have mercy on me."<sup>108</sup>
3. When distractions come as they always do, simply return to your sacred word or phrase and begin to relax in the presence of God again. When distractions or pressing responsibilities crowd the mind it might be good to write these things down as a 'to do' list and tell yourself, "I will attend to these things later."
4. Imagine Jesus himself sitting or standing near you and open your heart to him. Conclude with the following prayer: "*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and*

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<sup>107</sup> Manning, 218.

<sup>108</sup> Adele, Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook Practices that Transform*, 206.

*to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!”*

Solitude:

For the purposes of this project little distinction will be made between silence and solitude. It might be possible to make the case that it is only in solitude that a person is able to be silent before the Lord. It is also important to remember that in our developed world it is almost impossible to find a place completely free of noise in which to experience silence and solitude. For this reason it is necessary to remember that silence and solitude must be cultivated as inner disciplines of the heart. Richard Foster understands this concept well and writes about how silence and solitude are closely connected; “We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is not first a place but a state of mind and heart.”<sup>109</sup> Beneath the surface of busy, fast-paced, driven lifestyles people have deep spiritual longings that are often unfulfilled. In order to understand these spiritual longings it is critical to step back and address the compulsions that drive people. In the present culture many people have an aversion to being alone and quiet. In a wonderful book addressing some of these very issues Gerald May discusses this:

On the one hand, we long for space; in the midst of overactive lives we yearn for peace, stillness, and freedom. We look forward to vacations, and we yearn for our minds to be free of preoccupation. On the other hand, we are liable to become very uncomfortable when such spaces do open up. We do not seem to know what to do with them. We fill up our vacations with activities and compulsions; we fill up our minds with worries and obsessions... We are addicted to fulfillment, to the eradication of all emptiness.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 84.

<sup>110</sup> Gerald May, *The Awakened Heart* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 94;100.

Gerald May, who is a psychotherapist writes that in his practice so many people came to talk with him about a lack of fulfillment. Others spoke of deep restlessness and a feeling of emptiness in the midst of otherwise successful lives. Gerald May's thoughts on this condition quite frankly offer a great rationale for pursuing solitude and silence:

... again I kept thinking to myself that all experience is imperfect. And I kept wanting to say, "What's wrong with feeling unfulfilled and restless? Isn't there something basically right about it?" With both of these people, and with so many others who have confided in me, the real problem was believing that their sense of inner restlessness and lack of fulfillment indicated psychological disorder. They had swallowed the cultural myth that says, "If you are well adjusted, and if you are living your life properly, you will feel fulfilled, satisfied, content, and serene." Stated conversely, the myth says, "If you are not satisfied and fulfilled, there is something wrong with you."... Emptiness, yearning, incompleteness: these unpleasant words hold a hope for incomprehensible beauty. It is precisely in these seemingly abhorrent qualities of ourselves – qualities that we spend most of our time trying to fix or deny – that the very thing we most long for can be found: hope for the human spirit, freedom for love... to befriend our yearning instead of avoiding it, to live into our longing rather than trying to resolve it, to enter the spaciousness of our emptiness instead of trying to fill it up... "To turn one's innermost being into a vast empty plain, so that something of God can enter you, and something of love too."<sup>111</sup>

Surely this is the great purpose and benefit of solitude; "to befriend our yearning, to live into our longings instead of trying to fill them up, to turn one's innermost being into a vast empty plain so that something of God can enter us." Ruth Haley Barton talks about how in her first experience of intentional solitude she became aware of the incredible over stimulation and exhaustion she felt. She also noted that she had been laboring under unrealistic self-expectations in her Christian vocation and her role as a mother. Barton concludes; "How had I gotten this far in the spiritual life without anyone ever having told me that it was ok to stop talking and stop doing and just be in God's presence?"<sup>112</sup> According to Barton, a longing for solitude is a longing for God. But, a longing for

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

<sup>112</sup> Barton, 31.

solitude is also a longing to find ourselves. Another problem with modern culture is that we are too accessible and available to people. Cell phones, email, text-messaging, voice-mail and most of the wonderful technological advances mean that people are able to be accessed anytime, anywhere. Many are unable to set boundaries that allow for being alone for extended periods of time. Ruth Barton says, “Solitude is an opportunity to interrupt this cycle by turning off the noise and stimulation of our lives so that we can hear our loneliness and our longing calling us deeper into the only relationship that can satisfy our longing.”<sup>113</sup> Adele Calhoun notes, that solitude is a formative place where God’s Spirit is given time and space to work in the Christian’s life. It is often in this time of solitude and being alone that God is able to expose the deepest motives of the heart and people can be completely honest with God. Calhoun gives the example of Jesus forty day time of solitude in the wilderness at the beginning of his earthly ministry (Luke 4:1-13). It was not only a time of prayer and intimacy with God, it was a time of great temptation and facing the “self” Satan offered him. Calhoun writes:

“But we need solitude if we intend to unmask the false self and its important-looking image. Alone, without distractions, we put ourselves in a place where God can reveal things to us that we might not notice in the normal preoccupations of life. Solitude opens a space where we can bring our empty and compulsive selves to God.”<sup>114</sup>

Solitude is such an important break from the ordinary busyness and routines of life. In its essence it is a time to recover the meaning of what it means “to be,” instead of “to do.” The present culture is in danger of creating “human doings” instead of “human beings.” Solitude offers the person an opportunity to be with God and to be with self in a way which promotes true soul recovery. The wonderful thing is that in this place of solitude

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>114</sup> Calhoun, 112-113.

nothing has to be accomplished. It may be that the person who has finally found solitude will find sleep or simple stillness which may be the greatest blessing in an extended time of solitude. The following exercises are meant as suggestions to help people develop the discipline of solitude:

#### Discipline of Solitude:

1. Take advantage of the daily opportunities for solitude. Take at least fifteen minutes a day for silence or quietness. Whether it is in the shower, over the first cup of coffee, staring at a flower or a bird etc. Be aware of your body, be aware of inner anxieties, be aware of the presence of God with you and be aware of creation around you. It is not a time of prayer or meditation. It is simply time to be.
2. Once a month schedule a morning or an afternoon to slip away to a place of solitude to be with God and to be with your soul. It may be a beach with the sound of the surf, it may be hiking on a nature trail, it may be a walk in the park as long as it is a place in which you can totally relax and be free of normal distractions. Take only a Bible or, some spiritual reading and possibly a journal for writing. Read and reflect on a short passage of scripture or spiritual writings. Some people benefit from taking a thermos of tea and a piece of fruit or a granola bar to keep away the distraction of hunger.
3. In times of solitude write your prayers in a prayer journal. It is often helpful to write out your longings, your worries, and struggles in life as prayers to God. You may record your thoughts, your ideas and some impressions. It may be as simple as recording the sighting of a beautiful bird or some other phenomenon of nature. As one learns to be quiet and listen for the whispers of the Spirit of God it is good to write out those impressions or words from God. It may be that you will record a song or draw a picture or write a poem, these times allow the soul to express itself in creative ways.
4. In time of solitude, “sit with what comes into your awareness, becoming conscious of God’s presence with you in that awareness. Don’t try and do anything with what you are knowing except to be with it. Feel the difference between doing something to fix it and just being with it. Feel the difference between doing something with it and resting with it... What does it mean for you to be still and let God fight (or work) for you in this particular area?”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Barton, 43-44.

5. Go on an extended retreat of 5-8 days. This should be a silent retreat possibly with spiritual direction. It is best to go to a retreat center or some place completely away from the daily routines of life.

#### Lectio Divina – Contemplative Bible Reading:

Many Protestant, evangelical Christians carry Bibles to church every Sunday and spend time daily reading and studying the scriptures in personal devotional time. Much of the scripture reading and study is designed to understand the text, gain information and find practical advice for living godly lives. It is easy to reduce the Bible to a giant “how to” manual on living the good life. People read the Bible to become better parents, better spouses, better employees/employers, better tithers, better church members, etc. The focus is on helping people become generally better at life. There is much benefit in this type of scripture reading and study yet, it is not the only way to read the scriptures. There is a prayerful, listening way of reading the Bible that is not primarily focused on gaining information or finding practical tips for Christian living. In a recent article, Richard Foster talked about the importance of reading the scriptures for transformation:

Sometimes we study the Bible for information alone in order to prove that we are right and others are wrong in particular doctrines or beliefs or practices. At other times we study the Bible to find some formula to solve the pressing need of the moment. But both approaches to the Bible leave the soul untouched. No, we need to study the Bible with a view to the transformation of our whole person and of our whole life into Christlikeness. We come to the Bible to receive the life “with God” that is portrayed in the Bible. To do this we must not control what comes out of the Bible. We must be prepared to have our dearest and most fundamental assumptions about ourselves and our associations called into question. We must read humbly and in a constant attitude of repentance. Only in this way can we gain a thorough and practical grasp of the spiritual riches that God has made available to all humanity in his written Word.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Richard Foster, *RENOVARÉ Pastoral Letter*, <http://www.theooze.com/articles/article.cfm?id=744> , April, 2, 2007, 3.



As Marjorie Thompson reminds us, in reading the scriptures our intention is to sink into the words and open ourselves to their meaning in our lives.<sup>117</sup> Ruth Haley Barton talks about reading the Bible for relationship:

When we engage the Scriptures for spiritual transformation, on the other hand, we engage not only our mind but also our heart, our emotions, our body, our curiosity, our imagination and our will. We open ourselves to a deeper level of understanding and insight that grows out of and leads us deeper into our personal relationship with the one behind the text. And it is in the context of relational intimacy that real life change takes place... When we engage the scriptures for spiritual transformation, we make it our top priority to listen to God relationally rather than seeking only to learn more about God cognitively.<sup>118</sup>

Robert Mulholland Jr. sheds wonderful insight into what it means to read the Bible in a contemplative way:

“Instead of coming to the text with our agenda, we come in a posture of openness to God’s agenda. We read attentively, seeking not to cover as much as possible as quickly as possible but to plumb the depths of the text so that the text may plumb the depths of our being and doing. Rather than an analytical approach, we take a contemplative posture that is open to ambiguity and mystery. The final goal of spiritual reading is to be mastered by God for the fulfillment of God’s purposes in us and through us.”<sup>119</sup>

Lectio Divina is reading for relationship. It is designed to help the Christian listen for the “still small voice” of God in the present moment of reading. It is a deliberately slower, reflective, prayerful way of reading the scriptures which allows for the intervention of the Holy Spirit and the response of the individual reader (sometimes done corporately).

An exercise in *lectio divina*:

1. Silence – The person begins with a time of quiet centering. Sit with palms up becoming aware of his/her breathing. It is an exercise in relaxing in the presence of God.

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<sup>117</sup> Thompson, 24.

<sup>118</sup> Barton, 50.

<sup>119</sup> Mulholland Jr., 111, 112.

2. *Lectio* – Read the passage the first time listening for a word or a phrase that stands out or strikes you. The word may create a sense of peace, excitement or even resistance. This is followed by a brief silence while you sit with the word you have been given.
3. Meditation – The person reads the passage a second time and begins to reflect on the way your life has been touched by this word or phrase. The question may be asked, “What is it in my life that needed to hear this word today?” The question might also be asked, “Where am I in this text?” or, “What do I experience as I allow myself to be in this story?” Again there is a brief period of silence where you stay present with God in whatever comes to you.
4. Respond – The third movement is to respond. Read the passage a third time. Is there an invitation or a challenge for you to respond to? What is your response to God’s invitation? The response may be a confession of sin. It may be a deep sense of gratitude for God’s overwhelming love for you. It may be shock or surprise that God is calling you to some new action or vocation. The response is concluded with a brief time of silence.
5. Contemplation – When you are ready, read the passage one last time. This is the invitation to contemplation – to rest in God. Here you rest with God and enjoy his presence. Know that it is God who will enable you to live out what you have heard. “... Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6 NIV)
6. Incarnation – Resolve to take this word from God and live it out in your daily life. You become like Christ when you incarnate His word in your every day lives.

There is another simple way to name the movements in Lectio Divina:

- **Read** (*Lectio*)
- **Reflect** (*Meditatio*)
- **Respond** (*Oratio*)
- **Rest** (*Contemplatio*)
- **Resolve** (*Incarnatio*)<sup>120</sup>

Service:

In his chapter on Service, Richard Foster quotes Bernard of Clairvaux, “Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a sceptre but a hoe.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Barton, (Most of these exercises are borrowed and adapted from Ruth Barton’s suggestions in her book), 59-61.

<sup>121</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 113.

When dealing with the spiritual disciplines it is so important that they be grounded in action in the real world. Too often Christians have created a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular world. All of life is spiritual and the spiritual disciplines of prayer, contemplative Bible Reading, and solitude should lead to corresponding action in the world. As strange as it sounds it is possible for the contemplative and the activist to be one and the same person. Jesus modelled this incredibly well as he lived out the rhythm of doing ministry (being with people), and solitude (slipping away from the crowds to pray, Luke 6:12), as well as living with other believers in community. By being willing to serve others through mundane unheralded acts Christian believers grow in Christlikeness. Richard Foster shares, “Of all the classical spiritual disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility. When we set out on a consciously chosen course of action that accents the good of others and is for the most part a hidden work, a deep change occurs in our spirit.”<sup>122</sup> The argument that started among the disciples showed the self-centered nature of the human heart. The question arose as to which of them would be the greatest? Jesus addressed the disciples and spoke in very strong terms to their attempts to position themselves for position and power. “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (Matthew 20:25-28 NIV). Taking the opportunity to serve others in small ways is a great spiritual discipline to keep the Christian from becoming convinced of his/her own importance. The truth is, most people would rather

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 113.

be served than to serve but Jesus called people to follow his example and he clearly demonstrated by his life that he came, “not to be served, but to serve.” This attitude of serving others rather than looking to be served requires a great deal of intentional effort.

Dallas Willard speaks of the “acts” of service necessary for spiritual growth:

The path of spiritual growth in the riches of Christ is not a passive one. Grace is not opposed to effort. It is opposed to earning. Effort is action. Earning is attitude. You have never seen people more active than those who have been set on fire by the grace of God. Paul, who perhaps understood grace better than any other mere human being, looked back at what had happened to him and said: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (I Cor. 15:10)<sup>123</sup>

It is a sign of humility and servanthood when Christians offer the gift of common kindness, to be courteous, to offer hospitality, to listen, to offer assistance to another person. Donald Whitney shares some wisdom from J. I. Packer; “The most significant gifts in the church’s life in every era are ordinary natural abilities sanctified.”<sup>124</sup> Marjorie Thompson talks about the ministry of hospitality for which the early Church was known. She writes, “Hospitality means receiving the other, from the heart, into my own dwelling place. It entails providing for the need, comfort, and delight of the other with all the openness, respect, freedom, tenderness, and joy that love itself embodies.”<sup>125</sup> Thompson claims that hospitality in the early Christian movement was directed primarily to “strangers and enemies.” Thompson goes on to ask the obvious question, “who are the strangers and enemies” that need the special gift of hospitality in our day. Some suggestions might be the people with AIDS, people who differ from us in ethnic origin, the poor and marginalized of society. It may be the adolescents and young who at times

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<sup>123</sup> Dallas Willard, *Live Life to the Full*, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=5>, viewed, April 13, 2007.

<sup>124</sup> Donald Whitney, 124.

<sup>125</sup> Thompson, 128.

feel like complete strangers to adults. In speaking about the Christians in the first century she writes; “There must have been a quality of mutual respect and love in those early Christian communities that created hospitable space for very different kinds of people to enter and find a spiritual home.”<sup>126</sup> In the end, any spirituality that does not lead Christian people to meaningful service and hospitality toward the disenfranchised is not really “Christian spirituality.” In his book, *Ancient Future Faith*, Robert Webber writes;

We must learn, then, not to have a spirituality, something that we turn on at a particular place or time, but to be spiritual, as a habit of life, a continuous state of being. It is to this end that we seek after God in the stillness and hubbub of life, but always and everywhere in and through the church, where Christ is made present to us and, through us, to the world. It is this kind of spirituality that will challenge and motivate the people of the postmodern world. It is mystical yet reasonable, inner yet outer, ecclesial yet personal. Therefore, it is a point of contact for a culture already immersed in various kinds of spirituality.

Christian believers who are deeply committed to serving the world and offering true hospitality have taken the words of Jesus to heart:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:34b-36 NIV).

It is difficult, if not impossible to describe a correct course of action for Christian people to take. The service to be rendered is as different as the needs that present themselves and as different as the special talents, gifts and abilities people have to offer. The most important thing is to be moved by the compassion of Christ to welcome the strangers and enemies among us.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 127.

### Conclusion:

This chapter is meant to be an introduction to the subject of spiritual formation. It is not possible in the context to encompass the broad range of ideas and practices around Christian spiritual formation. Others have written extensively on the subject and have dealt with a more complete scope of spiritual disciplines. While this has been an introduction to the spiritual disciplines it is important to note the limitations of this study. Some other classic disciplines are; “self-examination and confession,” “fasting,” “study,” and, “celebration.” Even this is not a complete list of practices handed down to us from earlier Christians. Ultimately it shows that Christian spiritual transformation is not optional, nor is it a list of practices that we do, but rather, a longing to be more like Christ and to reflect his character in our way of living.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUALITY**

While it may be true that all people are spiritual it is also true that not all people will approach the spiritual life in the same way. Since the early days of Christianity, different groups have tried to develop structures to assist people in living holy lives. Francis of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia and, Ignatius Loyola developed a rule of life to aid Christian monks in their spiritual journey. The Puritans, the Pietists, the Moravians, and John and Charles Wesley all developed an approach to spirituality designed to assist people to live more holy lives and to become more Christ-like. Their systems are often a uniform approach and much of the frustration of good Christian people is due to trying faithfully to make certain spiritual disciplines and approaches to the Christian life work for them.

If one takes the time to understand the wonderful diversity of personalities God has created, it is easier to comprehend the notion that “one size does not fit all” when it comes to developing spiritually in order to be the person God created us to be. This chapter will focus on understanding basic differences in the preferences of personality types and offer some suggestions to assist people on their spiritual journey.

Since 1975, when the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was first published, there has been a tremendous rise of interest in personality types. This is especially evident in

the business realm where consultants are sought to slot people into a more natural fit by matching personality type, life skills and interests in order to help people find the correct fit within a given work place. If this is true in the work place it is also true in the spiritual life and therefore care should be taken to help people identify their personal spiritual style.

It may be helpful at the outset to state some basic presuppositions which will be underpinning the chapter. Spirituality covers an incredibly wide range of practices and beliefs, whenever spirituality is referred to in this chapter it will be from a Christian perspective. This is with the full knowledge that even within the Christian heritage there is a broad spectrum and various approaches to Spirituality. In fact, one premise of this chapter will be to celebrate and encourage exploration of the full spectrum of Christian Spiritual practices. The chapter will also begin with the assumption that all people are inherently spiritual and are created uniquely by God to reflect His nature and character in and through their own distinctive, God-given personalities.

While there are a number of personality type indicators which could be used, the primary indicator in this project will be the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. For this reason it will be important to share some of the history leading to the development of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI). We will look briefly at the life of C. G. Jung whose work laid the foundation for Myers-Briggs. Consideration will be given to Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs-Myers who studied the work of Jung and formulated it and expanded it until they developed a tool to help people



understand their basic personality type. This leads to a brief overview of the personality preferences as described by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator with some cautions offered to those who only focus on their preferred method of relating to the world. This in turn leads to a discussion of various approaches to spirituality and the importance of personality types.

Some historic spiritual practices will be explored including one model proposed by Corinne Ware in her book, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, which looks at four basic types of spirituality. Ware relies heavily on the work of Urban T. Holmes and his writing on something he calls, Spirituality Typology.<sup>127</sup>

This project assumes that as people attain fuller self-knowledge, they are able to find a more meaningful way to express their spirituality. Understanding personality type may help people move toward wholeness in Christ. The aim is to help people discover and practice spiritual disciplines that will feel right and be compatible with their God given personality so they might mature in their relationship with God and with others.

#### Spirituality and the Human Psyche.

While people are inherently spiritual, there is a type of “soul hunger” in each person that yearns for something more. Many people fail to ever fully understand the longing and subsequently attempt to fill the emptiness with a myriad of activities and pursuits. Much of the discussion around this theme in the twentieth century was centered on the ideas of

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<sup>127</sup> Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1995), xiii.

Carl Jung. According to John P. Dourley, Carl Jung believed that people were inherently spiritual.

Jung argued with equal conviction that humanity cannot escape religious experience, religions, or their secular equivalents in the form of the 'isms.' The endurance of religion is assured by the nature of the Psyche whose archetypal energies drive to complete themselves in consciousness. The incarnate experience of the archetypal by finite consciousness is the psychodynamic process that creates religion universally<sup>128</sup>.

Dourley believes the "endurance of religion" is merely the natural by-product of the Psyche. In fact, Dourley does not attribute the ultimate source of the "psychic" energy to be from God for he argues that Jung did not believe in a God apart from the human psyche. Dourley interprets Jung as believing the human psyche creates deity and creates the need for religion.<sup>129</sup> In an article written as a response to Dourley, Harold Coward rebuts the claim that Jung did not believe in a transcendental reality that exists apart from the psyche. According to Coward, Jung's view of God is Kantian and he argued that Jung believed in a Divine transcendental being. While Jung may have believed that it was not possible to know God; at least he had the humility to say, "We must leave these questions open."<sup>130</sup> In contrast, a Christian worldview holds to the belief that God created people in his image and that this universal longing for God is stamped on the human DNA. St. Augustine said it best, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord"<sup>131</sup> Caroline Jones puts a contemporary spin in bringing Jung's understanding to bear on the Christian understanding.

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<sup>128</sup> John P. Dourley, *The Religious Significance of Jung's Psychology*, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 5(2) 1995, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=13&hid=113&sid=ade299e6-a536-473f-bc89-c008c36a38db%40sessionmgr107> Viewed March 27, 2008. 74.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Harold Coward, *Response to John Dourley's "The Religious Significance of Jung's Psychology"* *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 5 no 2 1995,

<sup>131</sup> St. Augustine, Excerpt from Confessions, found at, <http://www.wf-f.org/StAugustine.html> Viewed March 30, 2008.

For me, the word 'spiritual' acts as a question or an exploration rather than referring to a particular experience or belief. I think the word 'spiritual' has something to do with love, and the psyche's natural inclination towards wholeness. The Jungian typology offers us a way to reflect on our journey to wholeness, to God. Each function can be a source of wisdom, a channel of grace.<sup>132</sup>

In their excellent book, *Soul Types*, Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise define spirituality as;

1. Believing that the spiritual (incorporeal or unseen) is part of reality;
2. Aligning the soul with heart, mind, and body to fulfill one's divine purpose; and
3. Finding a relationship with God.<sup>133</sup>

This is a broad definition of what it means to be spiritual and is a good place to begin this chapter.

Finding a relationship with God is crucial; it is at the heart of the Christian Gospel. The concept put forward here is that everyone should be on a journey toward wholeness and maturity as a human being created in the image of God. In a delightful book called, *From Image to likeness A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey*, authors Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson and, Thomas Clarke write:

... The very first chapter of the Bible epitomizes what it means to be human by having God say, "Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves" (Gen. 1:26). With some of the Fathers of the Church, we have been struck with the dynamic and developmental aspect of God's human creation. Going beyond the literal sense of this key text, they saw "image" as expressing the potential of the human for becoming, in a sense, divine; "likeness" stood for fulfillment, the actualization of that potential, the term of growth. In this sense,

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<sup>132</sup> Caroline Jones, *Type And Spirituality* <http://mbtitoday.org/articles/article07.html>  
Viewed March 7, 2007 1.

<sup>133</sup> Sandra Krebs Hirsh, & Jane A. G. Kise, *Soul Types Finding the Spiritual Path That is Right For You*, (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 8.

then, human development is a journey from the image of God toward likeness to God.<sup>134</sup>

The authors here suggest a model for development in Christ-likeness. They argue that some of the early church Fathers designed a hermeneutic to describe the human journey that delineated between the “image” of God and the “likeness” of God to describe the need for transformation. It might be better to say the early Church Fathers were addressing the disfiguration of the “image” of God which took place through the fall when humans rebelled against God and attempted to live independently. The Genesis passage is used by Grant, Thompson and Clarke, to describe both the potential for growth and the actualization or, the maturation of humanity. This is all made possible by what Christ has done. “The sinless One takes on the form or image of our enslaved humanity in order to give us a share in his own perfect reflection of the beauty of God (Phil. 2:7; see 2 Cor. 5:21). The glory of God shining on the face of Christ Jesus becomes, as we Christians gaze upon it, the source of our imaging of that glory on our own faces, in our own lives (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6).”<sup>135</sup>

Jung’s Concept of Personality Type.

It is with this idea of “the image of God” being expressed in human personality that we turn now to discuss the life and work of Carl Gustav Jung. Many Christians have benefited from Jung’s concept of typology which he based on the flow of psychic energy. George Boeree, in his *Introduction to C. G. Jung*, writes, “Jung developed a personality typology that has become so popular that some people don't realize he did anything else!

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<sup>134</sup> W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, & Thomas E. Clarke, *From Image to Likeness, A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>135</sup> W. Harold Grant, et al., 8.

It begins with the distinction between introversion and extroversion.”<sup>136</sup> Jung began with a basic idea of psychic energy. Grant, Thompson, and Clarke comment:

As a material organism or giant industrial complex depends essentially on the flow of physical energy among its diverse components, so the human system is shaped by the character and quality of its psychic energy. Jung was not the first or the only major thinker to grasp this metaphor in our age.<sup>137</sup>

Grant, Thompson, and Clarke argue that to understand Jung is to acknowledge that, whether at the conscious level or the unconscious level, when people relate to one another in person to person relationships and in society at large, psychic energies are constantly flowing.<sup>138</sup> Jung became convinced that individuals organized their lives in accordance with the flow of “psychic” energy. This led to his development of the concept of Extraversion and Introversion.

In describing Jung and his work, Robert E. Stiefel writes about the development of this notion:

On the basis of many years of experience as a practicing medical doctor, Jung developed an integrated theory of typology in human beings. That is to say, even though each individual is in some sense unique, each person also gives evidence of "the organization and delimitation of psychic processes that can be shown to be typical," just as is true of physical processes.[2] These processes show themselves at work in a person's key preferences (or tendencies or characteristics) as regards one's focus of energy towards the world (extraversion and introversion), one's way of taking in information (sensing and intuition), and one's way of making decisions (thinking, that is, systematic and deductive reasoning, and feeling, that is, relational and evaluative reasoning). Extraversion and introversion are thought of as attitudes; sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling are considered the four functions. Jung was far from the first to trace such patterns and he examines the history of the problem of type from various perspectives in *Psychological Types*.

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<sup>136</sup> George Boeree, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=13&sid=ade299e6-a536-473f-bc89-c008c36a38db%40sessionmgr10>, Viewed, March 27, 2008, 1.

<sup>137</sup> W. Harold Grant, et al, *Image to Likeness A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey*, 15.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Indeed, typological models of a fourfold character go back at least as far as the four faculties of the soul set forth in Plato's Republic.<sup>139</sup>

Jung appears to have been influenced by his own bias that conscious reason alone is not a satisfactory explanation for human existence, nor does it explain the observable patterns of personality. Jung offered the early development of his theory in a series of lectures delivered in 1897.

The vital principle [the soul] is more or less equivalent to the "life force" of the ancient physiologists. It governs all bodily functions, including those of the brain, and hence also governs consciousness to the degree that consciousness is determined by the functions of the cerebral cortex... Thus, we see that animal and vegetative functions are embraced in a common root, the actual subject. Let us boldly assign to this transcendental subject the name "soul." What do we mean by "soul"? The soul is an intelligence independent of space and time. [pars. 95, 96; Jung's emphasis]<sup>140</sup>

Jung continued to develop the idea of an intelligent soul that functioned at an unconscious level. In his theory of the flow of energy there is something else to consider. Each person's preference for extraversion or introversion is based on the direction of the flow of energy. When a person who is naturally extraverted spends time in solitude working on a project that same person will find it quite draining. Yet an introverted person who spends a great deal of time with people will find her/his energy level depleted. An introverted person may seem to be very outgoing, talkative and friendly yet, energy is restored through pulling back and spending time in the inner world of reflection and ideas. In other words, people are able to function in their non-preferred personality

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<sup>139</sup> Robert E. Stiefel, *Preaching to all the people : the use of Jungian typology and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Anglican Theological Review, 00033286, March 1, 1992, Vol. 74, Issue 2, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=5&hid=13&sid=ade299e6-a536-473f-bc89-c008c36a38db%40sessionmgr107> Viewed March 27, 2008, 1.

<sup>140</sup> Cited in, Richard M. Capobianco, *Re-thinking the Germinative Point of Jung's Work*, *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, 11:4 (1993), 45-53. [http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=853&Itemid=40](http://www.cgjungpage.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=853&Itemid=40) Viewed March 28, 2008, 1.

style but will find their energy quickly drained.<sup>141</sup> It is basically out of this notion of the flow of energy that Jung hypothesizes people are born with preferences for extraversion or introversion. Malcolm Goldsmith offers this cogent explanation of Jung's theory:

Jung believed that we are born with innate preferences, and that these affect the ways in which we perceive the world around us, take in information from the world, process it, and develop our responses to it, our actions and behavior. He believed that we operate on the level of our preferences in an unconscious way, and that these preferences become so well developed that we rely on them to enable us to live and cope in a complex world. There are other responses that we could make, and that we sometimes do make, and other processes and functions that operate in our personality, but we find these more difficult, we are less adept at handling them, and we use or prefer them less.<sup>142</sup>

When Katharine Briggs discovered the work of Carl Jung and shared it with her daughter it became the center of a life time of study and work on personality type.

Introducing Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers.

When in 1923, Jung's book, *Psychological Types* was translated into English for the first time a mother and daughter team, Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers, read the book. Katharine Briggs had already put forward her own theory of personality type but basically abandoned it when she read Jung's. Lynn Baab indicates that it was likely Isabel Myers' home-schooling by her mother which fostered a kind of "can-do" attitude in Isabel. Baab suggests this was an indispensable factor in the development of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. They continued to work on their theory in the 1920's and the 1930's but it was during World War II when they became disturbed at the kinds of work their friends were choosing that the two really began to take this effort on personality type seriously. They believed that if people could only understand their

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<sup>141</sup> Lynne M. Baab, *Personality Types in Congregations* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1998), 3.

<sup>142</sup> Malcolm Goldsmith, *Knowing Me Knowing God, Exploring Your Spirituality With Meyers-Briggs* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 22-23.

personality more fully, they would make better career choices. Isabel Briggs-Myers philosophy may be summed up in her own motto for life:

To be part of the solution, not part of the problem. To love the human beings that mean the most to me, and contribute to their lives if I can to avoid mistakes that make me regret the past or fear the future. To incorporate the things, people and ideas that happen to me into a coherent concept of the world. To work at what interests me most, with minimum expenditure of time and energy on non-essentials.<sup>143</sup>

Using Jung's personality theory, Isabel Myers began creating a series of questions that would help people identify their personality type. This development continued to be refined over the next two decades until the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was born. Though it was slow to gain acceptance in the psychological realm, it eventually became the most widely used psychological instrument in the world.<sup>144</sup>

When discussing the work of the mother and daughter team, it is encouraging to note that in many ways the impetus for their work seems to be the growth of human beings toward maturity and wholeness. Isabel Myers dreamed of using the knowledge of personality type to help people understand one another and be more tolerant (accepting) thus bringing greater harmony in relationships. She wrote:

When people differ, a knowledge of type lessens friction and eases strain. In addition, it reveals the value of differences. No one has to be good at everything. By developing individual strengths of the other types, life will be more amusing, more interesting, and more of a daily adventure that it could possibly be if everyone were alike.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Mary McCauley, *The Story of Isabel Briggs Myers*, <http://www.capt.org/mbti-assessment/isabel-myers.htm>, viewed March 28, 2008. The article by Mary McCauley gave helpful information on the development of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator. One of the things that motivated Isabel Briggs-Myers was the immense difference in personality type between herself and her husband. This was one of the factors in driving her to pursue this with such vigor.

<sup>144</sup> Lynne Baab, *Personality Type in Congregations*, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Malcolm Goldsmith, *Knowing Me Knowing God*, 26.



While Jung, through his medical practice, was preoccupied with people who deviated from the norm, Isabel Myers and her mother were much more interested in what was normal. Malcolm Goldsmith writes that Katharine and Isabel were concerned with human growth and development.

They wanted to help people to grow and develop and to be able to fulfill their potential rather than being stuck as square pegs in the many round holes of life. It is their positive approach to human differences and their valuing of people as unique individuals which makes their indicator such a useful and appropriate instrument through which to explore spirituality. Our experience of God, and our longings for God are different and unique to ourselves even though they may sometimes be shared by some other people, but not by all other people.<sup>146</sup>

It is also important to note that Katharine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers took Jung's classifications of people as extraverted and introverted, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, and added another component to the mix. In writing about this additional element in classifying personality type; Lynn Baab states, "Katharine and Isabel added the fourth dichotomy of psychological type – judging and perceiving – to indicate whether we prefer taking in information (perceiving) or making decisions about information (judging) when we function in the outer world."<sup>147</sup> The work of Isabel Briggs-Myers in particular has been extremely helpful for people wishing to understand themselves and to understand others better. Building on the foundation of this good work many Christian authors are using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to help people discover their own God given preferences in developing a relationship with God.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>147</sup> Baab, 2.

## An Overview of the Myers-Briggs Personality Types.

Tests like the Myers-Briggs Personality Test suggest people have a preference for a personality type in the same way people are born with a preference for being either left handed or right handed. The Myers-Briggs Personality Type indicator helps people understand their natural preferences. These preferences describe the natural bent or inclination of individuals. While Isabel Briggs-Myers discovered different personality types she claimed no one type is better than another. She noted people are simply different. While people may have some traits that point to another type, they have a default position or, a natural preference.

In the MBTI there are basically sixteen personality types found through combinations of the following eight preferences:

- How people are energized. (Extroversion or Introversion);
- How people perceive the world around them. (Sensing or Intuition (N));
- How people make decisions. (Thinking or Feeling); and
- How people choose to live their outer lives. (Judging or Perceiving)<sup>148</sup>

The following explanation should help clarify the different preferences. First, an explanation of the differences between extraverts and introverts:

**Extraverts** are energized through contact with other people or through engaging in activities.

**Introverts** are energized through the inner world of ideas, pulling back from activities to allow time for thought and reflection.

The next two, explain how people perceive the world around them:

**Sensing** types pay attention to what they perceive through their five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.

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<sup>148</sup> Sandra Krebs Hirsh, et al, *Soul Types* 15.

**Intuitive (N)** types pay attention to what might be described as their sixth sense – the unseen world of meanings, inferences, hunches, insights, and connections.

The third set show how people make decisions:

**Thinking** types base their decisions on impartial criteria – cause-effect reasoning, constant principles or truths, and logical analysis.

**Feeling** types consider the impact of their decisions on people – their needs and those of others, the values to be served, and circumstantial or community variables.

The final group examines how people choose to live their outer lives:

**Judging** types like to order their lives – plan ahead, wrap things up, and accomplish set goals.

**Perceiving** types like to live life as it unfolds – keep their options open and enjoy what comes along.<sup>149</sup>

A more detailed breakdown of these preferences will be shown on the next two pages by way of contrasting lists. These lists have been gleaned from several sources in order to further clarify differences in personality.

### **Extraversion**

- People and things
- Try, then consider
- Action
- Breadth; different subjects
- Outer energy
- Interruptions are stimulating
- Focus outside
- Say what they are thinking
- Discuss to process ideas
- Offer suggestions freely

### **Introversion**

- Thoughts and ideas
- Consider then try
- Reflection
- Depth on one subject
- Inner energy
- Interruptions are distracting
- Focus inside
- Keep thoughts to themselves
- Introspect to process ideas
- Hold suggestions until clear

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<sup>149</sup> Hirsh, et al, *Soul Types*, 14-24.

**Sensing**

- Five senses
- Common sense
- Accuracy
- Past experience
- Real world
- Current reality
- Immediacy, concreteness
- Master, then apply skills
- Simplicity, clarity
- What experience offers people

**Intuition (N)**

- Sixth sense
- Insight
- Creativity
- Inspiration
- Unseen world
- Future potential
- Anticipation
- Learn new skills, then innovate
- Complexity
- What possibilities offer people

**Thinking**

- Easily sort ideas about data and things
- Acknowledge differences
- Critique
- Logical, analytical
- Reasons
- Head knowledge
- Fair but firm
- Analyze
- Content of message
- Convince through impartiality

**Feeling**

- Easily sort ideas about people
- Acknowledge common ground
- Appreciate
- Harmonious, personal
- Values
- Heart knowledge
- Empathize, make exceptions
- Sympathize
- Impact of message
- Convince through personal meaning.

**Judging**

- Planned events
- Work before play
- Stress reduced by planning ahead
- Enjoy making the decision
- Goal-oriented
- Tasks in order
- Settled and decided
- Choose one option, then explore
- Select the best experience
- Settled, orderly

**Perceiving**

- Serendipitous events
- Work and play coexist
- Stress reduced by identifying contingencies
- Enjoy gathering information
- Discovery oriented
- Several tasks at random
- Open to late-breaking information
- Explore many options, then choose
- Experience as much as possible
- In the moment<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Sandra Krebs Hirsh, et al, 14-27. Material for this was also accessed from John Ackerman, *Finding Your Way, Personalized Practices for Spiritual Growth*, (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1992), 4.

There are at least sixteen ways to combine the four preferences of each person. For instance if a person was extroverted, sensing, thinking, and judging, that person would be an ESTJ personality type. There are many sources and ways to take an MBTI test; there is even a free online version of the test available for people who wish to know their personality type. (<http://similar minds.com/jung.html>)

#### The Relationship Between Personality Type and Spirituality.

The question arises, is there a need to talk about personality type and spirituality? People have been exploring spirituality for thousands of years, why should this be an issue now? While it is true that personality type indicators have become widely accepted in the Psychological and counseling world, the question remains, are there different spirituality types based on personality? First, a warning; people should not put personality type on par with the Gospel or turn it into the latest cult fad. For centuries Christians have been discovering spiritual pathways to deepen their relationship with God without studying personality type. On the other hand there have been students of self-knowledge and personality type for many centuries. There is a personality assessment tool called the Enneagram which, some writers think may be traced to ancient Sufi monks. Contemporary catholic author Richard Rohr claims the root of this ancient personality descriptor is actually Christian. Rohr says the study of the Enneagram goes back at least as far as the Desert Fathers.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Richard Rohr, and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram A Christian Perspective* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), XI.

Some contemporary authors describe their relief and help through coming to terms with their natural preferences and having a better understanding of their personality type. This may be accomplished by taking a personality type indicator test by Myers-Briggs or some other tool. Dr. Charles Keating writes:

Knowing myself better helped me to understand why I found some kinds of prayer attractive and other kinds uninteresting. I began to suspect a relationship between personality type and a way of spirituality. When our spiritual way is out of “sync” with our personality we do not hear God’s call as clearly as we need to. It is like living in a land with those whose language and culture we are not comfortable. Of course, God can break through such communication barriers, but usually he does not. He waits for us, and it is difficult to dispose ourselves if we do not know who we are disposing.<sup>152</sup>

Corinne Ware follows the same line of reasoning in her book, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, when she writes; “have you ever been in a worship service where you felt you did not “fit”? Those around you were nice enough; they appeared sincere, but something was lacking; you left feeling your spiritual needs had not been met.”<sup>153</sup> In the prologue of his book, *Knowing Me, Knowing God, Exploring Your Spirituality With Myers-Briggs*, Malcolm Goldsmith talks about his frustration with his own prayer life. Goldsmith is an ordained clergy-person who tried many different experiments with prayer only to be deeply dissatisfied and disappointed. He rarely shared this with others due to his embarrassment. It was through discovering his personality type that Goldsmith found relief and discovered a way to express his own spirituality.<sup>154</sup>

God has distributed amazing variety and diversity in all areas of creation. There should be no surprise that he has created people with a range of personality traits through which

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<sup>152</sup> Charles Keating, *Who We Are Is How We Pray, Matching Personality and Spirituality*, (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004), 2.

<sup>153</sup> Corinne Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1995), 1.

<sup>154</sup> Malcolm Goldsmith, *Knowing Me Knowing God*, 11-12.

they are able to express their spirituality. If people relate to one another in different ways certainly they should be able to express their spirituality by relating to God in different ways. Reginald Johnson affirms this in his book, *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life*;

By discovering our own soul print or personality type, we can appreciate our God-given attributes, identify some of our special areas of vulnerability and weakness, and discover the kinds of resources which might be most conducive for nurturing our relationship with Christ.<sup>155</sup>

Having a better understanding of a person's personality type will be conducive to a growing relationship with God. Once again Corinne Ware provides helpful guidance;

From the early Church Fathers through the medieval mystics to modern spiritual writers, advice is plentiful on how to advance in the spiritual life. Since this advice differs, it is enormously helpful to find our personal style of growing and the ways in which we most clearly hear God. If you are the sort of person who "hears in the silence," you can seek silence without apology. If, like Brother Lawrence, you learn and grow when your hands are busy serving another's need, then you can cultivate the active moments and experiencing being through the sacrament of doing. If you are most moved toward God in the presence of music, you can furnish yourself a rich musical opportunity for worship. If your spirit is stirred by vivid language and new thoughts, you can expose yourself to great writers and to those who convey truth through the spoken word.<sup>156</sup>

People could be helped in their Christian journey if they were better able to understand both their personality type and their preferred spirituality type. Many frustrated people may simply be practicing spiritual disciplines not suited to their personality type. A great deal of spiritual writing has been done by introverted intuitive type personalities. Introverted intuitive types will benefit greatly from such writings but extraverted sensing types will be deeply disappointed by this approach. It is time to help people see find spiritual practices that fit their personalities.

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<sup>155</sup> Reginald Johnson, *Your Personality and the Spiritual Life*, (Gainesville: Center for Applications of Psychological Type, Inc., 1999), 20.

<sup>156</sup> Corrine Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*, 5.

In their book *Soul Types*, Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise argue that different psychological types approach spirituality differently. In their research they discussed this with literally hundreds of people and found their suspicions to be confirmed. They concluded that: “Each psychological type has a unique slant on spirituality.”<sup>157</sup> It appears much of what has been taught in the church in North America appeals to one or two personality types. Pastor Larry Osborne grew frustrated with this approach. In a rather provocative book, *A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God, Spirituality for the Rest of Us*: Osborne states; “I got the distinct impression that God was somehow partial to reflective types with high IQ’s, impressive vocabularies, and lots of self-discipline. And that left a lot of us on the outside looking in.”<sup>158</sup> Present unrest among Christians is good news in that it is producing a renewed interest in exploring a variety of Christian spiritual disciplines and practices.

It is in the same spirit of renewal and creativity that this chapter begins to explore a number of different types of spirituality. Several authors have attempted to classify different types of spirituality. It is good to explore these types and try to discern if people with different personality types might also find a meaningful spiritual type. The first specific example is Corinne Ware who adopted and adapted the work of Urban T. Holmes and his theory of Four Spirituality Types. Ware commends this model since it provides a tool to help people better conceptualize and name their own spiritual experience. Though it is not really within the scope of this paper, she also uses this tool

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<sup>157</sup> Hirsh, et al, 1.

<sup>158</sup> Larry Osborne, *A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God, Spirituality for the Rest of Us*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2007), 23.



to test congregations to discover the spiritual type of the local faith community. The background for Ware's work in this area is found in the somewhat dated work, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, by Urban T. Holmes who was dean of the School of Theology at the University of the South in Sewane, Tennessee. Holmes placed two intersecting lines within a circle. This divided the circle into four quadrants and to each quadrant he gave a descriptive term. Holmes used rather dated obscure words to describe his four types of spirituality. He called them Kataphatic, Affective, Apophatic and Speculative.

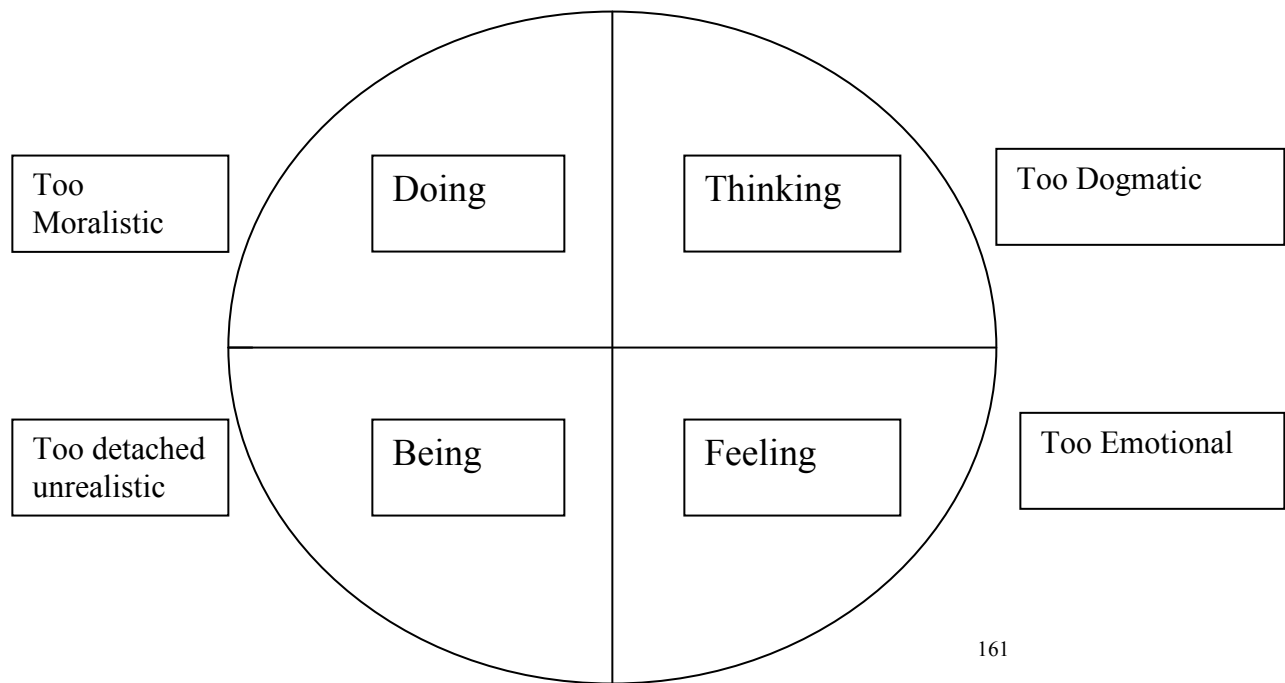
Corinne Ware adapted this using descriptive words to offset the unfamiliar language of Holmes. In Ware's diagram she replaces Holmes descriptors with the words; Imaging, Heartfelt, Mystery and, Intellectual. The circle represents the entire scope of spirituality and Holmes argued that all four types are needed if religious experience was going to be healthy.<sup>159</sup> In John Ackerman's recent book, *Listening to God*, he received permission to adapt this model even further to make it more accessible to ordinary people. On the next page a diagram illustrates how Ackerman has further adapted Holmes' Circle of Sensibility. Each of the types of spirituality has an inherent weakness which is shown in the diagram. It is interesting to note that Holmes indicates that in order for a person to grow she/he needs to learn to function and develop in the opposite quadrant. Holmes believed that, carried to excess and without the corrective tension of the other parts, people in any of the four types could fall outside the safety of the circle. Each quadrant has its own aberration, its own extreme, which can damage and restrict growth, both

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<sup>159</sup> Corinne Ware, 7, 8, 9.

personally and in the community.<sup>160</sup> The following diagram is an adaptation of the original work of Holmes.

#### **FOUR TYPES OF SPIRITUALITY:**



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Ware describes the first type, thinking spirituality as a, “Head Spirituality” and says it is an intellectual spirituality which favors what it can see, touch, and vividly imagine. She talks about the concreteness of theological concepts. The unique contribution of this group is in theological education, orthodoxy, theology and written publications. The danger for this group, says Ware, is the over intellectualizing of faith, a loss of feeling and being too dogmatic.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>161</sup> John Ackerman, *Listening to God Spiritual Formation in Congregations* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2001), 46.

She labels the next type, “Heart Spirituality.” Here a clear understanding of God and a strong belief in scripture is still important. Spirituality for this group is all about the heart and wanting to have an intimate relationship with God. They seek transformation and personal renewal. This group’s contribution is warmth of feeling, energy, and freedom in expression. The danger for this group is that it may be seen as too emotional. They may be too idealistic and need permission to acknowledge disappointment and negative emotions.

The third type of spirituality Ware calls, “Mystic Spirituality.” For this group of people the inner world of introspection and intuition is as real as the exterior one. They are naturally contemplative and content to listen to God rather than speak. Many in this group write and publish and challenge the status quo. These people need permission to retreat and seek solitude. The danger for people in this group is that they may pull back so much and not engage with people.

Ware labels the final type “Kingdom Spirituality.” These people tend to be visionaries who are single minded. They are crusaders who are not all that concerned with organized religion. Theirs is a kind of courageous idealism and a passion for changing the world. They lead others to tackle difficult issues and make a difference. They may have trouble knowing God is in control and need to learn to be less driven. They are in danger of having tunnel vision.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ware, 37-44.

Other authors have attempted to document the various forms of spirituality which have surfaced in the church. Ben Campbell Johnson writes about it in his book on *Pastoral Spirituality*. Johnson suggests there have been several different forms of piety emerge in the long history of the Church. For the sake of this project “piety” and “spirituality” are seen as synonymous. His point is that different personality types are attracted to the form of spirituality that suits the preference of the particular type. He mentions the following; evangelical piety, charismatic piety, sacramental piety, activist piety, academic piety, ascetic piety, and Eastern piety.<sup>163</sup> The following descriptions are brief and incomplete but represent the views of Ben Campbell Johnson as he understands the different schools of thought in Christian spirituality.

Johnson equates Evangelical Piety with a puritan or revivalist tradition. Evangelicals are deeply committed to telling the Good News of the Gospel and witnessing. People primarily encounter God through the scriptures. This group believes that reading the Bible, accepting its authority, discerning the will of God and living a life of obedience to the revealed will of God is the true way to experience God’s presence. In the doing of these things people experience God’s presence. It may include emphases on private reading, prayer, fasting and, meditating on the scriptures as a daily discipline. Johnson sees it’s weakness as the tendency toward legalism and a judgmental spirit.

Charismatic Piety is like evangelical piety in its emphasis on evangelism and scripture. It is associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit who is present and active in the life of the

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<sup>163</sup> Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality, A Focus For Ministry*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 68.

Church. God's presence is associated with an immediate experience of the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in the demonstration of the gifts of the Spirit. Speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy etc., are common expressions among charismatic groups. This group appeals to the feeling types and its strength is found in its immediate experience of the presence of God. Like evangelical piety, charismatics place an emphasis on witnessing, prayer, scripture and meditation. Its weakness is found in its aversion to the rational, intellectual side of faith. It can become other-worldly and lack the self-awareness needed for painful growth and change.

Johnson describes Sacramental Piety as being found primarily in the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Anglican traditions. In this form of piety, people experience the presence of God in the sacraments and the liturgy. For them, the real presence of Christ is experienced in the Eucharistic act. Sacramental piety follows the celebrations, seasons and liturgy of the Christian calendar. Such piety is strengthened through public worship as well as private prayer and spiritual reading. Johnson claims sacramental piety appeals to sensing personalities who are concerned with here and now. There is strength in the objectivity of this group and its emphasis on structure and order. The danger is a dependence upon ritual that can become empty. There is also a danger of neglecting the private spiritual practices and radical discipleship.

Johnson claims Activist Piety is found in greater numbers in more liberal mainline denominations. This group is deeply concerned and actively involved in issues of social and political justice. Such activists meet God not so much in the church or in religious

practices but in joining God in the activity of setting things right. This piety expresses itself in joining causes committed to social transformation. They care about making a difference. The strength is found in the unwillingness to accept the status quo and their dedication to making real change. There is a danger of losing the awareness of God through a lack of emphasis on prayer and private spiritual disciplines. Johnson also believes there is a danger of disillusion, cynicism and burnout.

Johnson sees Academic Piety as the opposite of activist piety. This form of piety is quite concerned with systematizing thoughts and beliefs about God. It consists of the research and reflection of scholars, theologians and teachers. It is expressed in a life of study and analysis of religious truth and issues. Its strength is in its relentless pursuit of truth, the publication of religious literature and its aversion to the superficial. Its weakness is seen in that it can be viewed as sterile, impersonal having a lack of reverence for the holy.

In his penultimate division, Johnson describes Ascetic Piety. He suggests it is found mainly in the religious orders which he calls, "world-denying holiness movements." For the ascetic, God is found in the daily office, spiritual literature, and mental prayer. This life is a life of self-denial and contemplation. He claims it appeals to the introverted, sensate types. This type of piety demands a simple disciplined life of concentration on God. Its weakness is the danger of escaping from the world. There is also a danger of the loss of meaning due to the repetition of the formal order.

Johnson concludes with a description of Eastern Piety. He claims this is particularly found in Buddhists groups seeking union with God. It would appear that to get in touch with the self is to get in touch with God. The goal is inner peace, the loss of self and the termination of desire. There is an emphasis on disciplined meditation, withdrawal, solitude, and fasting. The strength of this type is found in its disciplined lifestyle and control over the body and its appetites. It offers welcome relief to busy and harried people. For the Christian its lack of a center in Jesus Christ is a problem. Another weakness might be found in its lack of interest in history, and its lack of involvement with the world.<sup>164</sup>

While his categories of spirituality are helpful, Johnson has a tendency to be simplistic and at times his descriptions sound stereotypical. He has done a service by trying to classify the different expressions of spirituality but there is significant overlap between the types. In addition, for the purposes of this project, he fails to show how different personality types are attracted to the various expressions of spirituality.

Another useful approach is the work of Richard Foster in his book describing six great movements in Church History representing a diversity of spiritual traditions or, types. Foster identifies the following six movements; The Contemplative Tradition, the Holiness Tradition, the Charismatic Tradition, the Social Justice Tradition, the Evangelical Tradition, and the Incarnational Tradition. Foster states; “In reality these

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 68-73.

different Traditions describe various dimensions of the spiritual life.”<sup>165</sup> He claims that the life of Jesus Christ models all of the different dimensions of the spiritual life.

The Contemplative Life is a prayer filled life of loving attention to God. The Holiness Tradition is discovering the virtuous life which focuses on the inward re-formation of the heart and the development of “holy habits.”<sup>166</sup> The Charismatic Tradition focuses on the empowering gifts of the Spirit and the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. He states; “This Spirit empowered way of living addresses the deep yearning for the immediacy of God’s presence among his people.”<sup>167</sup> The Social Justice Tradition seeks to discover the compassionate life and stresses justice and shalom in all human relationships and social structures.<sup>168</sup> The Evangelical Tradition is known as the word-centered life because of its emphasis is on the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel. These people are enabled to take the Word of God into their hearts in such a transforming way that others seeing this want it for themselves and therefore, the primary focus is proclaiming and living the good news.<sup>169</sup>

The final group in Foster’s list is, The Incarnational Tradition where people discover the sacramental life which seems to take the components of all the other traditions and attempt to live them out in ordinary life. “The Incarnational Stream of Christian Life and faith focuses upon making present and visible the realm of the invisible spirit.”<sup>170</sup> While

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<sup>165</sup> Foster, Richard, *Streams of Living Water, Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), *XVI*.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.



Foster is interested in the convergence of these various streams of Christianity today he does not discuss the possibility that certain personality types are drawn to one stream or another. His categories are useful and reflect some similarities to Johnson's approach but he does not explore the relationship of individuals personal characteristics and their attraction to particular types of spirituality.

Others have taken a different approach to demonstrate how to express spirituality in a variety of ways depending on personality type. The various spiritual disciplines are examined by some Christian authors such as looking at different ways of praying based on temperament in an effort to help people find a meaningful prayer life. In an excellent book, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger borrow from the book, *Prayer and Temperament*, by Chester P. Michael and Marie Christian Norrisey who describe four types of prayer to explain how prayer and temperament are connected.

They have chosen persons from 400CE to 1600CE as exponents of the types of prayer. First, is Augustinian prayer, which makes use of the imagination. People attracted to this form see God's Word as a personal love letter addressed to them. They are constantly trying to discover the hidden meaning behind the written Word. They use intuition to search for meaning in every relationship and event. Intuitive Feelers utilize this form of prayer. The second category is Ignatian Prayer, as put forward by St. Ignatius of Loyola. It is based on remembering an event of salvation history. It is depicted as a carefully organized routine of striving toward a relationship with God. Sensing Judging types are

drawn by this form of prayer. The third type of prayer is the Thomistic Prayer. It is best described as an orderly progression of thought from cause to effect. It involves study and reflection and seeking the truth. Some types see this as very un-prayer-like. This group is usually made up of Intuitive Thinking types. The final type mentioned is, Franciscan Prayer, which is explained by an attitude of openness to the directives of the Spirit. The words free-flowing, spontaneous and informal describe this group's response to the presence of God. This group often allows their good works to be their prayer and are primarily Sensing Perceivers.<sup>171</sup>

Another approach to the personality/spirituality type model is the book, *Who We Are is How We Pray, Matching Personality and Spirituality*, by Charles J. Keating who outlines four types of spirituality as well. He first discusses Ignatian Spirituality as found in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Keating then talks about Salesian Spirituality as put forward by Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva. In describing Teresian Spirituality, he talks about spiritual marriage and the rapture of the soul as expressed by St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Finally, the author explains the Chardinian Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a geologist and Jesuit priest.<sup>172</sup>

In each case Keating describes the method of spirituality and tries to determine which personality type fits according to Myers-Briggs. Regardless of how different authors attempt to identify various spirituality types it must be noted there is wide acceptance for the relationship between personality types and spiritual preferences for Christian

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<sup>171</sup> Oswald, Roy, M., and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, (New York: The Alban Institute, 1988), 90-95.

<sup>172</sup> Charles Keating, *Who We Are is How We Pray*, 21-29.

maturation. It seems to be a unique time in history afforded by post-modern openness for Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox Christians to rejoice in and enjoy the rich and varied texture of Christian spirituality.

All of the previous authors seem to be saying that spirituality is as varied as the many different personality types and styles of functioning in this world. This would suggest that it would be overly simplistic to have only one approach to practicing the spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. There is clear evidence that an approach to the spiritual life based on personality preferences will assist people in finding a meaningful way forward toward spiritual maturity. This opens the way for some practical suggestions for spiritual practices based on the Myers-Briggs Personality types.

Suggestions for Personality Types and Spiritual Practices:

Rather than trying to be exhaustive and outline specific spiritual disciplines for all sixteen personality types, we will give some general suggestions for the eight basic personality preferences. These are not meant to be exhaustive or to box people in; rather they are hints or, helps to encourage creativity in spiritual disciplines. The categories merely suggest some ways of understanding personality types and how the spiritual disciplines fit different types of people.

Extraverts experience God with others. This group must have time to talk about spiritual matters. Group study, group prayer and discussion of the spiritual life are very important. They enjoy sharing faith in evangelism. If they go on retreat it should include some

interactive time and not all solitude. They enjoy a variety of spiritual experiences. They engage others in worship experiences through singing, acting and, dancing.

Introverts experience God through ideas. These people like to study and read about matters of the soul. They like to use contemplation as a means to explore faith. This group enjoys one-on-one discussions about spiritual things. If you are one of these people you will love to spend time reading, journaling, and writing to bolster one's faith and the faith of others. They enjoy silent retreats, preferably alone. They will practice private prayer and meditation.

Sensing people experience God through the concrete. This group likes regular, sequential study of scripture. They find proof of God in nature. They enjoy step by step methods for spiritual growth. They are very methodical in their spiritual disciplines. These people live the spiritual life in the here and now. They like following traditional rituals and orderly patterns of worship.

Intuitive people experience God through paradox and mystery. They enjoy poetic writing and creative imagery to explore sacred themes. They must have room for the imagination in their spiritual journey. This group uses sacred symbols and even nature to inspire and find spiritual themes and patterns. They like designing new rituals or patterns of worship.

Thinking people experience God intellectually. They take an intellectual approach to faith. They look for universal principles to guide one's faith. This group searches for

truth through systematic study of scripture. They believe skepticism precedes conviction. This group loves debate and dialogue about the faith. They inquire using learning through exploration of logical questions. They will work to establish truth and standards of accountability.

Feeling people experience God wholeheartedly. They take a personal approach to faith. These people get in touch with personal values to guide their faith. Relationships are very important. They learn through the motivation, inspiration and examples of others. This group needs to find ways to be involved in helping people. Spiritual practices will be personal and relational for these people.

Judging people experience God through discipline. They love the beauty of the spiritual disciplines. These people will practice a daily spiritual ritual at set times. They find resources that help one organize one's spiritual journey. They will serve by caring for the needs of others. For judging types knowledge comes through structured learning experiences. Judgers enjoy knowing what comes next and what is to be expected.

Perceiving people experience God in the moment. They enjoy the beauty of spiritual experiences. They become bored with sameness and routine spiritual practices. They will use available resources as need arises to support a spontaneous spiritual journey. They enjoy occasional surprises or departures from what is customary in spiritual practices.

For these people spirituality grows through an increased awareness of the presence of God.<sup>173</sup>

With these observations in mind and with the clear diversity of personality types it is imperative that people find a path forward consistent with their personality style. One might even suggest that it is unproductive and even harmful to blindly follow a spiritual path which is not consistent with one's natural and God-given inclinations. This offers Christian believers a wonderful freedom to discover the presence of God in a way that makes them feel alive and congruent with how they are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The Psalmist understood his own unique worth in the eyes of God. We read in Psalm 139:13-18:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

As people discover the wonder of their uniqueness in Christ they will be able to celebrate the personality preferences that are God given.

After taking most of the chapter to promote a spirituality that fits with a person's personality type it is important to offer one brief caveat. In order to become a mature human being balance must be achieved. If people focus only on their personality preferences and never develop in other areas they may become stunted in their growth.

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<sup>173</sup> Hirsh, et al, 14-27. The paper has also utilized the work of John Ackerman, *Finding Your Way, Personalized Practices for Spiritual Growth*, 5-9.

As people approach middle age, they should note their least preferred way of functioning and begin to grow in this area in order to reach maturity. In their book, *From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey*, the authors explore a developmental theory which suggests that, in order to reach wholeness, people need to develop in all four functions of the personality. The same authors claim that in the second half of life a transition is required. “One finally comes to the stage when the call of God inscribed in the processes of the psyche bids us to allow the least preferred of all the functions, the one in sharpest tension with the dominant one, to find its place in our conscious investment in life.”<sup>174</sup> A brief look at this theory will help us understand that social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual maturity is complex and multi-faceted.

#### Personality Type, Growth and Development.

Some experts believe that while it is important to develop spiritual disciplines and practices consistent with personality preferences, more is required. In order to experience spiritual growth and move toward wholeness a person must also develop in the less preferred functions. The spiritual journey is a journey of transformation. A mature faith in Jesus Christ is one through which people confront the shadow side of personality to become more like Christ. In his book, *Listening to God*, John Ackerman says it well:

Forming is the beginning, and transforming is the goal – the goal is that Christ, and not our egos, be at the center of our lives. Christian spirituality takes the form of the cross: a surrender to Christ, who has laid down his life for us. Christians who seek to grow spiritually listen to the risen Christ in scripture and in life, and obey the call of God. Spirituality is not designed to enhance our egos. The focus is on God.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> W. Harold Grant, et al., 19, 23.

<sup>175</sup> John Ackerman, *Listening to God*, 19.

Although it is important to understand one's personality type and work with one's natural preferences to integrate meaningful spiritual practices, it is also important to know one's inherent weaknesses and to develop the underused personality functions. Caroline Jones makes a good case for this in her article:

The Jungian typology offers us a way to reflect on our journey to wholeness, to God. Each function can be a source of wisdom, a channel of grace. Because of our innate tendency to prefer and be more comfortable with some functions more than others, we over-use some sources of wisdom and neglect others. Reflecting on each of the eight functions orients us to where we are and suggests what we need to give our attention to right now. The typology helps us to own our uniqueness and offer our gifts, but it also helps us to acknowledge and work with our weaknesses and our unrealized potentials. It can assist us in coming home to our individuality and our interconnectedness with all life.<sup>176</sup>

Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise wisely address the need to help people understand their own personality preferences and find a coherent spiritual path. "You've identified your favorite atmosphere for soulwork, but enrichment and fulfillment are to be found by visiting the natural climates of other types."<sup>177</sup> Each person has a dominant function in their personality which usually develops in the early years of life. Along with the dominant function each person has an auxiliary function which, if permitted to develop provides some balance to the dominant function. There is a third function that should start to develop especially in the second half of life. For instance, the author of this project is an INFP with F or Feeling as the dominant function. The N or Intuitive is the auxiliary function for this person and the third function is Sensing, the gift of seeing *what is*. The authors of *Soul Types* write: "For these types, developing their third function of Sensing can help them back up their intuitive insights with the necessary

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<sup>176</sup> Caroline Jones, 1.

<sup>177</sup> Hirsh, et al, 28.



details.”<sup>178</sup> For each personality there is a fourth or, inferior function. This fourth function is the least preferred way relating for a given personality type. A number of authors have suggested that it is important for people to develop in this inferior function in the second half of life. Some would suggest that for a number of people the deepest growth is fed by this inferior function.

In a very insightful book on Spiritual Formation, M. Robert Mulholland Jr. discusses this in a chapter on *Holistic Spirituality*. In nurturing his non-preferred personality functions Mulholland Jr. writes; “For me, these become spiritual disciplines, because they are not activities that I would eagerly or naturally fall into... If I do not nurture my less preferred side that will cause problems with my whole spiritual pilgrimage.”<sup>179</sup> The authors of, *From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey*, the authors attempt to challenge the various personality types to develop their inferior function in the middle years of life. An example would be the path for someone who is a dominant feeler:

Whether in the process of changing ministry or in some other way, dominant feelers will typically be invited in a distinctive way into the mystery of the cross about mid-life... Dominant feelers come to the middle thirties with the ingrained assumption that the heart, intimacy, the cherishing of values, is what life is all about. They will have ordinarily developed habits and skills enabling them to deal with life, particularly with relationships, from this inner core of their strength. But now all this may begin to be called into question, not only by life outside of themselves, which refuses to be reduced to an affair of the heart, but by a secret voice from within, a side of their own personality to which they would rather not listen... The wholeness and holiness which they seek can be found only in the mystery of the cross, in the letting go of strength and acceptance of weakness. They are being called to a mystical experience of God by taking the risk of cultivating their shadow side. The exercise of thinking in the various forms which we have described is the peculiar form of foolishness, littleness, and powerlessness, to which Christ calls them. It puts the dominant feelers in touch with how much their good behavior has been motivated by the effort to please.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>179</sup> M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 64-65.

Growth in assertiveness will bring a purer intention and less dependence on whether people are pleased or not. Thus our willingness to be weak, that is, to let go of our preferred feeling so that our undeveloped thinking may have a chance to grow, will bring a new and clearly God-given strength.<sup>180</sup>

It is essential that people become aware of the danger of being overly dependent on the dominant function of personality. It would appear that the person who is mature in faith reaches a certain freedom despite human flaws. These people generally have been able to develop all four functions of their personality including their less preferred style depending upon a given life situation. “Making friends with our shadow, as Jungians suggest, is an affirmation that God writes straight with crooked lines. Even on the behavioral level we should not be too ready to dismiss the power of weakness, the wisdom of foolishness. Perhaps wholeness is a mosaic, fashioned out of fragments.”<sup>181</sup>

Apparently, growth in Christ-likeness will depend on a willingness to confront the shadow side of the personality. Only those who have the courage to explore the inferior function of their personality will find this level of maturity. Scott Peck comments on the courage required in living this honestly:

“The tendency to avoid challenge is so omnipresent in human beings that it can properly be considered a characteristic of human nature... Yet we teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural becomes itself second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural. Another characteristic of human nature – perhaps the one that makes us most human – is our capacity to do the unnatural, to transcend and hence to transform our own nature.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> W. Harold Grant, et al, 101-102.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>182</sup> M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1978), 53.

### Concluding Thoughts.

There is a growing plethora of written material to assist people in discovering their personality type and their own particular spiritual type. This will serve the Christian Church well as leaders desire to move people toward fullness and wholeness in Christ. Learning about personality type not only increases self-awareness and maturity it increases acceptance for those who do things differently or approach the spiritual life in a manner not consistent with one's own approach. No two people are alike and no two people approach spirituality in exactly the same way. This is even true of people who share the same personality type. Though all people are created in the image of God people are still different in many ways. This merely expresses the amazing creativity of God. In a very real way this emphasis on understanding personality type is part of a larger desire to urge people to become more fully human. The authors of the book, *From Image to Likeness*, suggest that this journey to wholeness in God leads to a greater expression of true humanity; "Individuation, integration, the spiraling ascent to wholeness does not annihilate the reality of that which becomes whole. At the deepest level, our divinization is a reconstitution, not an abdication, of our humanity."<sup>183</sup> As people come to a fuller understanding of themselves and their personality they will be better able to find their spiritual type. People who are able to live in a more congruent fashion will experience a maturity which leads them to become more fully human and free. This is what God intended all along.

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<sup>183</sup> W. Harold Grant, et al, 201.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**  
**AND INTERVIEWS**

Research Methodology

For several years I have had the privilege of being senior pastor of a loving, growing fellowship of believers known as Immanuel Baptist Church. I have always been concerned for the spiritual health and growth of the members of the church but it seemed as though there was not a clear method for assessing the current level of spirituality among the believers. In a congregation of several hundred people there are people with different cultural, religious, social, economic and spiritual diversity. It was my goal to evaluate the spirituality of a broad cross-section of people from the congregation. I chose a methodology for assessing the spiritual lives of the members of the congregation and consequentially planning a one-year ministry strategy which seemed realistic and had the potential for making a change in the lives of people.

One of the stages in congregational research was “qualitative research” or what researchers would call “the long interview.” Grant McCracken writes:

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily

experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves.<sup>184</sup>

Certainly this was my experience in this case. People opened up and shared deeply held beliefs and experiences. One of the surprises was the occasional emotional and very deeply felt response by the interviewee.

Those who teach qualitative research suggest the interview should be opened with a set of biographical questions that are designed simply to allow the person to share the descriptive details of his/her life. It is so important for the questionnaire be designed to allow the interviewees to “tell their own story in their own terms.”<sup>185</sup> The interviewer is required to keep a very low profile and be as nondirective as possible. The questions should be as open ended as possible to allow people freedom to share their own views and perceptions about the subject being discussed. One of the methods used in this current research that worked well was in asking the interviewee to share a specific experience of the presence of God. This prompted a variety of responses but helped people launch into describing very moving, life-changing experiences. This seems to be consistent with the current wisdom on qualitative research;

Another planned prompting strategy is to ask respondents to recall exceptional incidents in which the research topic was implicated... They also create new opportunities for the investigator. When the surface of social life is broken open by a “strange event,” cultural categories and relationships prove suddenly visible.<sup>186</sup>

Although some criticize this method as too subjective and question the use of interviews, Irving Seidman gives an excellent answer response in his book on qualitative research:

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<sup>184</sup> Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview*, (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 9.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. Every whole story, Aristotle tells us, has a beginning, a middle, and an end (Butcher, 1902). In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, a middle, and an end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience.<sup>187</sup>

In preparing a questionnaire I planned to discover something about the interviewee's relationship with God but, it must be noted that the interview itself was flexible and people were permitted to share whatever came to mind.

A series of ten interviews was conducted with various members of the congregation to assess the level of spiritual growth of a cross-section of the membership. The interviewer asked questions about people's experience of the presence of God, which spiritual disciplines they found to be meaningful, tried to identify weaknesses and frustrations, and take note of the differences in personality to see if people approach spiritual development differently. These interviews were in-depth and designed to help people open up and share very subjective information about their relationship with God. The results were more than simply instructive, they were revealing and contained a number of surprises.

#### Report on Congregational Interviews:

These interviews were conducted to gain insight into the personal spiritual lives of ordinary members of the congregation. The intent of the interview was to gain subjective information from the persons being interviewed about how they experienced and perceived their own relationship with God. The interview was designed to help discover

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<sup>187</sup> Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 7.

what particular spiritual practices aided people in their walk with God and to determine if different personalities indeed experienced God in different ways. The interview was conducted across a broad spectrum of people in the congregation. Males and females were interviewed and the age range included people eighty-three years old to people fourteen years old. People were interviewed with different educational backgrounds and different socio-economic profiles. The people were interviewed on an individual basis and the interviews were conducted privately and confidentially. Each person was asked a series of twelve questions during the interview. (See Appendix A)

Each interview focused on the person's experience of the presence of God. Although a specific question was not asked regarding how people experience the "absence" of God, such absence was addressed through other questions. The question, "What would you say gives you the most frustration in your walk with God?" gave the opportunity to express those times when God seemed to be distant. Some people expressed frustration about unanswered prayers or, an inability to trust or, a lack of intimacy. At some point in the interview many of the participants discussed a particular area of disappointment in their personal walk with God. In analyzing the responses it is possible to infer these points of "frustration" actually depict a sense of the "absence" of God for the individual.

There were notably different approaches to spirituality. For introverted thinking types the presence of God seemed to be associated very much with reading, memorizing and meditating on scripture. This may be described as a very cerebral approach to the spiritual journey. To these people God speaks clearly through scripture and even when

God uses other people it is through words that bring comfort and hope. These introverted, thinking types talked a great deal about spending time alone with God in prayer and Bible study.

There were others who expressed feeling closest to God while serving and doing practical ministry. One person felt close to God when he was able to mow the church lawns or as he served communion. Some people experienced the presence of God as an ethereal or, mystical experience. Still others experienced the presence of God through nature. These people tended to be more adept at experiencing God in the present moment and are most likely sensing type personalities.

Some people found it natural and easy to talk with God and hear God. Others found it very difficult to hear God. Some people found prayer like a one way conversation with the person doing all of the talking. It was interesting to note that the young people under twenty years of age responded quite differently to most of the questions. Without exception each of these young people found listening to music and participating in music to be the most important spiritual exercise and felt closer to God through their music. Some played music on an instrument or participated in singing on a regular basis. The classic spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture reading and meditation figured only minimally in this age group. Being with other young people of faith was extremely important with this group. Peer interaction helped one of these people feel she was not alone in her Christian faith. These young people tend to get involved in hands-on type of



ministry helping other people. They find this to be a rich and rewarding spiritual experience.

An interesting pattern emerged in the interviews which marked a difference between introverts and extroverts. Several of the introverted types expressed frustration about their lack of involvement with people and ministry. While frustrated may be too strong a word for some of these people, they believed their growing edge would be to take more risks and get more involved in ministry to and with the external world of people. They typically had a well-established devotional practice and were disciplined, consistent and very devotional in their practice of prayer, reading scripture and spiritual reading. These people generally experienced God intellectually and logically. They may have encountered the occasional serendipitous experience of the presence of God yet, this seemed to be infrequent and was usually connected to a written or spoken verse of scripture which brought hope or comfort. Over all, these people shared more frustration and dissatisfaction with the outer world of relationships and ministry to people than with their inner lives.

The more extroverted were typically frustrated with their prayer lives and their private spiritual practices. In fact some of these people felt they were too busy in their external world and wanted to find more quality time for quiet, reflection and prayer. These folks had no problem being busy in their external lives but felt a need for more private prayer. Typically these people volunteered in several different ministries and gave heavily of their time and talents. It was interesting to note that though these people believed prayer

was important they usually prayed short, specific and rapid prayers. In fact these folks seemed to do less compartmentalizing of prayer than the introverted types. In other words prayer for them was a continuous exercise that took place throughout the day whenever situations arose or the need to call upon God arose. One participant said, “I pray when I am walking down the hall way, in the shower, when I think of it or, when I am alone. It is just a conversation with a friend.” It appears as though the frustration some people experience over their lack of discipline in prayer could have more to do with certain expectations promoted in church than with their own shortcomings. While it is true these people need to learn to pull back from busyness and find time for solitude, it is also true they need to find spiritual exercises that better fit their personality type.

One interviewee shared that from childhood she has felt like somewhat of an outsider who does not always fit in. In her role as the spouse of a very busy pastor this feeling has only intensified over time. This person describes this experience as a general loneliness that has marked her life. One young person who was raised in a very sheltered Christian home and who has been in church since infancy has experienced tragedy in her family recently. This person struggles with trust issues since her idealistic view of God’s protection has been dashed.

One person related that because her earthly father was so distant and so stern she had trouble relating to God. In fact this person has struggled for many years, she knows intellectually that God loves her but her experience emotionally has been that God is distant and aloof. She seemed to have some performance anxiety as well, noting that

when she was consistent in her prayer life she felt closer to God but, when she was inconsistent she felt distant and felt like she was failing God. This would match her experience in her family and her inability to please her earthly father.

In spite of the struggles there were a number of positive emotions and experiences of the presence of God among the people interviewed. Each interviewee talked about times when God seemed to be close, these could be explained as times of “consolation.” Some people experienced these times as feeling a deep settled peace and assurance that God was with them and providing for them. Some people talked about God giving them comfort or hope during a difficult time. Another person described the presence of the Lord as a wonderful feeling of well being or, of being loved. Some found they experienced an intellectual quickening or revelation from God that illumined their way and brought clarity to their lives. Another interviewee described God’s presence as something introspective that brought a calming presence to his life. A teen-ager described it as a feeling of well being as if everything in the universe were aligned as it should be. Someone else described her relationship with the Lord as close and comfortable. This person seems to hear God regularly as he speaks to her in intuitive impressions that come to her mind. Another individual says that God’s presence stirs her emotions and she cries easily when she feels the presence of God. One young woman simply says that God’s presence is overwhelming. Another said the experience of God brings incredible clarity and she is able to see (intuit) things she is otherwise unable to know.

Most people also expressed some negative experiences and certain frustrations in their particular spiritual journey. One man described a life-long struggle with an independent or, individualistic spirit which keeps him from depending on other human beings or on God. One young person is struggling at a deep level with trust issues. This person is afraid that since God has permitted tragedy to touch her family she is no longer sure God will protect her. For some of the people interviewed, God seems silent or distant. These people have prayed to God for some really important things and yet it seems as though God has not answered their prayers. They generally view themselves as being responsible for the problem. At the same time one female participant was recently grieving and crying out to God because she and her husband are still unable to conceive a child. During a time of singing and worship a particular line from a song ministered to her and she found some consolation in God even though her circumstances had not changed.

A reasonably common experience was to feel the presence of God in nature. These people are clearly able to enjoy the moment. They have learned the art of stopping or, pausing to experience the beauty of God in creation. For some people this is an important spiritual discipline on par with scripture reading and prayer. It is important for sensing types to understand that finding God in nature or in simple acts of service is a wonderful spiritual discipline. Like Brother Lawrence, they should practice the presence of God while mowing the lawn, washing dishes, serving communion or being a church teller counting the weekly offering.

Another theme that emerged in the interviews was the spiritual discipline of community. Spending time with other Christians in a worshipping community is an extremely important discipline to strengthen and encourage the Christian disciple. This was very evident in all of the various age groups. Some of the young people under twenty years of age clearly depended on relationships with other Christians. Some of these young people patterned their lives after certain leaders who have acted as real mentors. One man who is fifty-three indicated that one of the important spiritual disciplines in his life is hanging out with other Christians. This person said, "One of the important disciplines is food, fun and fellowship with other Christians." Some of the participants expressed they experienced real growth in their spiritual life by leading or facilitating small groups of Christians. Another person spoke of the importance of her conversations and theological debates with her father. This is a mentoring relationship and expresses the importance of the community of faith. One woman regularly practices the gift of hospitality and invites widows and other marginalized people to her home to bless them with a meal and the gift of friendship. Christianity knows nothing of solitary faith and the people interviewed expressed their ongoing involvement in the lives of others who practice the faith.

The group of people interviewed for this study was only a sampling of people in the congregation. With such a small number of participants care must be taken not to generalize and project these results on everyone. No personality tests were performed on the participants although it was possible to make general assumptions about such things as introvert/extrovert, sensing/intuitive, feeling/thinking, and judging/perceiving preferences. The information gathered in these interviews is neither exhaustive nor

conclusive. Each person gave completely subjective answers to the questions asked in the interview. One of the surprises was the high value placed on music by young people. It is important to think of ways to incorporate music as a spiritual practice. Another surprise was how some individuals felt closer to God doing very mundane, menial tasks. One young man enjoys serving in the church. He loves doing the practical things like mowing the lawn, being a teller who counts money, and serving the communion as a deacon. When asked which spiritual discipline he finds most important replied; “The most meaningful practice is helping others and volunteering to serve.”

Some of the participants typically responded that their growing edge was to mature in their relationship and in their intimacy with God. There were a few surprises in this line of questioning as well. The two oldest participants had no spiritual goals. One of these persons was quite emphatic about her present condition. The following quote is taken from this interview; “She has no goals. She feels like she is nearing the end and is very much at peace with life and with the Lord. I am just going day by day trusting in the Lord to see me through. She knows that when life ends she will be in the presence of the Lord. She has a deep, abiding peace.” While it is not surprising for someone who is eighty-two years old to have no goals it is a little surprising that younger people had no goals for their own spiritual journey. One woman who is forty-eight claimed, “She doesn’t really have any goals for her journey.” Apparently this person does a great job of living in the present moment; she takes each day as it comes and enjoys the presence of the Lord on a regular basis. For this reason she doesn’t have long range spiritual goals. It would be interesting to explore this a little further. It could be the person is secure and

mature in her relationship with God. The only other option is to think she may be living in a state of denial. One young person who is eighteen years of age simply wants to continue on the relationship he has with the Lord; he seems very comfortable with his walk with God.

The interviewer was surprised when people revealed deep inner emotions. Important issues around loneliness, mistrust, independence, fear, control, disappointment, spiritual lethargy, and a number of other problems surfaced. It would be extremely helpful if these individuals could find a spiritual director (mentor) to share the journey and listen deeply. Another surprising result was the fact that most of the people interviewed were not familiar with the concept of Spiritual Formation. Some were able to guess that it had something to do with the ongoing work of God to form us and shape us as we become more like Christ. Others really had no understanding of Spiritual Formation.

It was amazing to note the differences in personality and approach to life in general. With thoughtfulness and a bit of hard work, it is possible to offer some basic education and options for the various personality types. The church has generally promoted one devotional style that focuses on scripture reading and private prayer. There is nothing wrong with this approach but it must be noted it is suited to certain personality types.

It is significant to note that external factors influence people in their walk with the Lord. This includes upbringing and parental influence which shape the spiritual experiences and practices of those who were interviewed. Conducting the interviews with a cross-section of people from the congregation further revealed the validity of the reading and

research on personality development and spirituality. The unique differences in personalities and approach to relationship with God only strengthened the premise of this thesis that a “one size fits all approach” to spirituality is woefully inadequate.



**CHAPTER SIX:**  
**PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**  
**IN THE CONGREGATION:**

Following the research it was time to develop practical steps to implement this spiritual formation emphasis in a local congregation. It is fine to talk about the need for a change of emphasis in the way we do church but it is quite another to actually execute the kind of change which brings an emphasis of spiritual transformation in the lives of people in the congregation. The people of Immanuel were willing participants and it was a great place to experiment with different ideas. The congregation was open to explore change and responded very graciously. There are two primary components to the project implemented at Immanuel Baptist Church. The first was a one day spiritual retreat designed to introduce busy people to the spiritual disciplines of listening, silence and solitude. The second component of the project was a series of sermons I preached on spiritual formation. With both components of the project I was very aware of different personality types and attempted to tailor the project to have maximum impact with a variety of personality types and learning styles.

An important part of the practical application of the research was in offering a one day spiritual retreat to members of the congregation. This retreat was not only meant to address issues of spiritual formation in the congregation but also was specifically designed with the thought that people with different personalities would experience the

retreat differently. For this reason the retreat balanced group time with alone time. It also included times for interaction and talking as well as specific time set aside for silence. The retreat was held in the church but a significant component was a two hour prayer walk in the park. Immanuel Church property borders on the one thousand acre Victoria Park. A two minute walk behind the church brought retreatants to a trail which leads into the park. The park boasts beautiful nature trails through mature woods. There is a lovely brook that winds through the park with two sets of water falls to enjoy. Hikers can climb “Jacob’s Ladder” or climb the trails high above the water falls for breath taking views. There is plenty of wildlife in the park including different birds, squirrels and deer. The gorgeous scenery and park setting definitely lent an atmosphere of retreat where people were able to enjoy God’s creation.

When sending people out to have personal prayer and spiritual reading time in the park allowances were made for different personality types. Notebooks were provided for those who wished to journal and write their prayers and responses to God. Colored pencils and paper was provided for those who wished to draw or sketch impressions received during the time of contemplation. Others with a creative writing flair were encouraged to write poetry or songs expressing this time of communion with God. The following pages give a rationale and an anatomy of the retreat held at Immanuel Baptist Church in September, 2007.

## A ONE DAY SPIRITUAL RETREAT FOR CONGREGATIONS

### *“To Find a Quiet Spot!”*

#### **RATIONALE:**

The following project was designed to assist busy people in congregations to get away on retreat for one day to spend time exploring solitude and a loving prayer relationship, listening for God’s voice. It is in paying attention to God and developing intimacy in the relationship that we put our selves in a place where real transformation can begin. It was the purpose of this one day retreat to introduce people to the concept of spiritual formation in general and to involve them in certain spiritual disciplines as a means of opening up to the Spirit of God. Life is incredibly busy and it is only when people give themselves permission and become intentional about escaping the “rat race” that they will find a place of solitude and rest. Jesus and his disciples experienced the stress of ministry work. They too found that even the work of proclaiming the good news, healing the sick and taking care of the poor could be emotionally draining. If people are always giving out and never stopping to “drink in” the presence of the Lord they will surely burn out. There is an incident in Mark’s Gospel that clearly speaks to this need:

Then Jesus said, “Let’s get away from the crowds for a while and rest.” There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat. They left by boat for a quieter spot.

Mark 6:31-32 NLT

Jesus knew that he and his disciples needed to be able to get away from the hectic pace of ministry and have time to rest or rather, to be “restored” before continuing to address the many needs of other people. Jesus life embodied a beautiful rhythm of being with people to give out of his rich abundance of life and; his ability to slip away quietly to be with his

heavenly Father to receive restoration and spiritual nourishment. In the evangelical protestant church we are often guilty of inviting people to one more seminar on how to live life. The “to do” list of spiritual practices becomes very long and people can become weary in well doing. It is the aim of this retreat to help people slow down, tune out the busyness of life and take time to listen to the voice of God. The goal of the retreat is to help lay people be present to the Presence who is always present with us. Jane E. Vennard, in her book, Be Still, Designing and Leading Spiritual Retreats, writes, “For me, a retreat is about God. A retreat opens the time and space so that we may hear God’s still, small voice. A retreat is about listening and waiting, receiving and being. A retreat is not about getting anything done... We go on retreat simply to be with God.”<sup>188</sup>

The retreat involves time for Bible reading designed for listening to the voice of God. Much of our Bible reading is for information or for understanding the text and its context. It is easy to forget to listen for the voice of God in scripture. This initial retreat was designed with a focus on lectio divina or, the contemplative reading of the Bible to allow people an opportunity to enjoy the biblical text and listen for the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit in the written Word. Using the same format it is possible to do any number of retreats and focus on a different spiritual discipline depending on the need of the congregation. The retreat allowed time for a leisurely walk in beautiful Victoria Park for solitude and reflection. People were strongly encouraged not to try and accomplish anything or make anything happen. Rather, emphasis was placed on resting in God and

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<sup>188</sup> Vennard, Jane E., *Be Still Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats*, (Alban Institute Inc., Bethesda, pg. X), 2000.

listening for the voice of love. Brennan Manning states it well, “Contemplative prayer is simply experiencing what we already possess.”<sup>189</sup>

The retreat was designed to encourage people to “enjoy being with God” and helping people realize that we don’t have to worry about getting anywhere in prayer, because we are already there. The goal of the retreat was to have people experience the presence of God in a meaningful way.

### **THE RETREAT:**

*“To Find a Quiet Spot”*

1. Welcome, Overview & Introductions.	9:00 am – 9:05am
2. Psalm of reflection. Psalm 42:1-2	9:05 am – 9:08am
3. Introduction & talk on <i>Lectio Divina</i>	9:08am – 9:30am
4. Practice exercise in <i>Lectio Divina</i>	9:30am – 9:50am
5. Short Break	9:50am – 10:05am
6. Individual Prayer Walk in Victoria Park	10:05am – 12:30pm
7. Soup and Sandwich Lunch	12:30pm – 1:30pm
8. Group sharing time	1:30pm – 2:30pm
9. Evaluation	2:30pm – 2:45pm
10. Farewell blessing and send off	2:45pm – 3:00pm

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<sup>189</sup> Manning, Brennan, *The Signature of Jesus*, 211.

## ANATOMY OF A RETREAT:

Some attention was paid to the atmosphere of the room in which the retreat was held. Soft lighting and lamps were used to give a comfortable feel to the room. Soft, contemplative Celtic hymns played in the background as people arrived. The chairs were arranged in a circle with a small table in the center. The table was covered with a white cloth simply decorated with a lit candle and a small cross as a focal point. The purpose was merely to set an atmosphere conducive to quietness and prayer.

### 1. Welcome, overview and introductions.

The initial welcome took approximately five minutes. There was a brief overview of the Retreat Agenda for the day. This included a time for people to greet one another and get to know one another's names. (Name tags were supplied) Instruction was given around times of silence. Talking was allowed up to the time of the mid-morning break. Following the break a time of silence was entered with no talking during the prayer walk, and during the lunch time. The silence is deliberately designed to give people a break from the constant bombardment of words and communication prevalent in society and allow time for reflection and listening to God. (Contemplative music played in the background during the lunch when there was no talking) Silence was broken after lunch at the beginning of the afternoon sharing session.

2. Psalm of Reflection. Psalm 42:1-2

In order to orient our thoughts toward God we read together these two verses which describe the absolutely parched nature of our souls. As retreatants we were reminded that even when we don't recognize it as such our souls are yearning and longing to meet with God. We were also reminded that God is yearning and longing to meet with us and that often in the state of silence and solitude we are finally able to hear the voice of God. Parker Palmer likens the soul to a wild animal which though tough and resilient is timid and easily spooked. He states wisely, "But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye – but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself."<sup>190</sup> Palmer wants us to understand our souls in a similar way.

3. Introduction and Talk on *Lectio Divina*.

There was a brief talk helping people to understand the difference between scripture study and contemplative reading. This reading of the text is not for information but for transformation. Many Christians have been taught to study the text, to understand something of the situation, the audience, the speaker, and the context. Generally the goal of such Bible Study is to interpret the meaning and apply the truth to our individual lives. *Lectio Divina* or, Contemplative Bible reading is not designed for information gathering. Rather, as Ruth Haley Barton

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<sup>190</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 58-59.

tells us, “It is reading for relationship.”<sup>191</sup> She would say this is about seeking to listen to God relationally instead of learning more about God cognitively. There is a place for both. In *Lectio* it is better to read a short passage of scripture of approximately six to eight verses. There are many sources which describe how to read the Bible in this contemplative way with a listening heart. The following instructions from Ruth Haley Barton’s book, *Sacred Rhythms* are instructive:

*Silence* – The retreatant begins with a time of quiet centering. Each person sits with palms up becoming aware of her/his breathing. It is an exercise in relaxing in the presence of God.

*Lectio* – Read the passage the first time listening for a word or a phrase that stands out or strikes us. The word may create a sense of peace, excitement or even resistance in us. This is followed by a brief silence while we sit with the word we have been given.

*Meditation* – We read the passage a second time and begin to reflect on the way our life has been touched by this word or phrase. The question may be asked, “What is it in my life that needed to hear this word today?” The question might also be asked, “Where am I in this text?” or, “What do I experience as I allow myself to be in this story?” Again there is a brief period of silence where we stay present with God in whatever comes to us.

*Respond* – The third movement is to respond. We read the passage a third time. Is there an invitation or a challenge for us to respond to? What is our response to God’s invitation? The response may be a confession of sin. It may be a deep

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<sup>191</sup> Barton, Ruth Haley, *Sacred Rhythms*, (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 50), 2006.



sense of gratitude for God’s overwhelming love for us. It may be shock or surprise that God is calling us to some new action or vocation. The response is concluded with a brief time of silence.

*Contemplation* – When we are ready, we read the passage one last time. This is the invitation to contemplation – to rest in God. Here we rest with God and enjoy his presence. We know that it is God who will enable us to live out what we have heard. “... Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6 NIV)

*Incarnation* – We resolve to take this word from God and live it out in our daily lives. We become like Christ when we incarnate His word in our every day lives.

There is another simple way to name the movements in *Lectio Divina*:

- Read (*Lectio*)
- Reflect (*Meditatio*)
- Respond (*Oratio*)
- Rest (*Contemplatio*)
- Resolve (*Incarnatio*)

#### 4. Practice exercise in *Lectio Divina*.

The passage of scripture in which Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus was chosen for a practice exercise (Mark 10:46-52). Whoever is leading the retreat will gently guide the group through the various movements of *Lectio Divina*. The group leader reads the passage aloud four times with a minimum amount of instruction as the retreatants make their first attempt at contemplative reading in a group setting. A number of possible scriptures were handed out to individuals for their silent prayer walk.

## 5. Short Break

This will be a fifteen minute break for water or juice and a healthy snack. This will be the last opportunity for conversation and chatting before the time of silence.

## 6. Individual Prayer Walk in Victoria Park.

Following the break resources will be made available for the prayer walk. Notebooks will be made available for journaling to those who may want to write down their thoughts, reflections, prayers etc. Paper and coloured pencils will be made available for those who may wish to draw pictures of their impressions and reflections. Others may have brought digital cameras to take pictures of things that speak deeply to them. Some may not want to do any of these things but feel the need to just rest in the presence of God without any props or aids. People will be encouraged to be completely free to stroll, sit, lay down, read, meditate, bird watch, take in nature, sleep or whatever makes them feel at home in God's presence. The group will be asked that there be no more talking until after lunch.

Possible scriptures for private *Lectio*:

Luke 10:38-42

Luke 13:10-13

John 5:2-9

Isaiah 40:28-31

1 Samuel 3:4-10

Matthew 11:25-30

## 7. Soup and Sandwich Lunch.

People will be invited to gather for lunch without conversation or talking. Rather than fasting from food we will fast from words for a period of time to help us understand how bombarded we are with words and speech.

8. Group sharing time.

The group will gather back together where silence will be broken with the prayer; “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14) If the group is small everyone will stay together. If the group is larger it may be divided into smaller groups of six to eight people. The group facilitator will ask if anyone has anything she/he wishes to share with the group. Journal entries, drawings, pictures etc., may be shared. It is primarily a time to debrief and interact and to celebrate with one another the diversity of ways God speaks to his children. The facilitator will attempt to hear from as many people as possible who wish to share. No pressure will be placed on people who are not comfortable with sharing in a group. The facilitator will attempt to affirm everyone in the group irrespective of individual experiences.

9. Evaluation.

After discussion is over the retreatants will be asked to fill out a brief evaluation form. The evaluation will help leaders as they plan for another retreat by identifying strengths, weaknesses and areas that could be improved on the retreat experience.

#### 10. Farewell blessing and send off.

When all the evaluations are in the facilitator will ask all to rise for a traditional blessing as everyone leaves.

### **TRADITIONAL BLESSING:**

Till we meet again:  
 May the road rise to meet you;  
 May the wind be at your back.  
 May the sun shine warm upon your face  
 And the rain fall softly on your fields.  
 Until we meet again  
 May God hold you  
 In the hollow of His hand.

The Sermon Series.

One of the best avenues for introducing important spiritual concepts is through the pulpit ministry. It is crucial to lay a biblical foundation for this emphasis on the spiritual formation of persons through an intentional walk with God. In the act of preaching a pastor learns to trust God to work in people's lives. A bedrock belief in the power of the Word of God combined with the act of Spirit empowered preaching is essential. The author of the book of Hebrews states it wonderfully, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword it penetrates to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12 NIV). Preaching the Word of God week after week is the pastor's joy and privilege. It is the pastor who lives and works among the people year by year who best understands the hurts, needs and sins of the people. It is also fundamentally important for the preacher to

be a pilgrim who is on a journey of transformation. The preacher doesn't have to be an expert who has arrived, in fact the preacher needs to be honest and vulnerable enough to share with the congregation her/his weaknesses as well as strengths. It is important to offer a word of caution here, there is a difference between allowing your humanity to show in the pulpit and using the pulpit as a place to bare one's soul. The pastor should be able to be a real person who lets his/her humanity show without having to abuse the pulpit by sharing every dark secret and hurt she/he has experienced. There is something powerful that happens when the preacher has heard from the Lord and stands to deliver the message. The Holy Spirit is able to use the "earthen vessel" with all of its imperfections and deliver a message of life-change. In writing about the art and craft of preaching Frederic Buechner gives one of most convincing images of what preaching really is;

Basically, it is to proclaim a Mystery before which, before whom, even our most exalted ideas turn to straw. It is also to proclaim this Mystery with a passion that ideas alone have little to do with. It is to try to put the Gospel into words not the way you would compose an essay but the way you would write a poem or a love letter – putting your heart into it, your own excitement, most of all your own life. It is to speak words that you hope may, by grace, be bearers not simply of new understanding but of new life both for the one you are speaking to and also for you. Out of that life, who knows what new ideas about peace and honesty and social responsibility may come, but they are the fruits of preaching, not the roots of it.<sup>192</sup>

Preaching matters and preaching that changes lives is both full of faith and patient. Life change takes time and the pastor is in a unique position to take on the slow and painful work of preaching and living with people through any and all circumstances. With this in mind I preached a series of messages on spiritual formation at Immanuel Baptist Church in the autumn and winter of 2007-2008. (See appendix D)

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<sup>192</sup> Frederic Buechner, *Listening to Your Life*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, A Division of Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 327.

This series of sermons began with a message designed to introduce the topic of spiritual formation and to call people to something more. The message title was “Shaped by the Potter” and the scriptural text for this message was Jeremiah 18:1-6. It is the account of God telling Jeremiah to go down to the Potter’s house to watch the Potter at work. God gave Jeremiah a message for the people of Israel through the image of the Potter shaping a vessel on the Potter’s wheel. The central question of this message was, “can people really change?” In describing Israel’s condition, and listening to the Word the Lord gave Jeremiah for the people the conclusion is; God can change the nation with all of her flaws and backslidings. In this message the preacher wants to convey the message that God is able to change our lives and transform us to be more like Christ. The sermon followed the simple outline suggested by the text itself:

1. God has a plan to shape and transform your life.
2. Each of us is a mixture of good and bad. We are flawed.
3. None of us can change our basic nature.
4. The Holy Spirit is secretly at work shaping us to be more like Christ.

Using scripture and illustrations from ordinary life the sermon attempted to help people see both the need for change and the possibility of change as people open themselves up to the gracious, shaping work of the Spirit of God. The message concluded with a powerful verse of scripture from the prophet Isaiah which acknowledges our dependence on God, “Yet, O lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

The second sermon in the series was written and presented to further develop the notion that God wants us to grow up spiritually become more like Christ. The title of the sermon was, “What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?” The scriptural text for this sermon was 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 with an emphasis on verses 17-18; “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18 NIV). The central thought of the sermon is that when we grow up spiritually God wants us to be like Christ! Several New Testament verses are quoted which speak of believers becoming like Christ (Romans 8:29), having Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19), walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6), and being transformed into his likeness and reflecting more and more the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). The sermon used the idea put forward by Dallas Willard who says believers should be “apprentices” of Jesus learning his manner of life as well as his teachings. The sermon looked at the life and character of Jesus and offered several suggestions as to what Jesus was really like? Believers were called to emulate the life of Jesus in the following ways: First, he was like us, he was truly human with all of the emotions and struggles associated with humanity. People are called to be real. Second, he was incarnational. Jesus did not grasp at power or exploit his deity; rather he emptied himself and humbled himself to enter our world and reach out to us. Believers are called to take on the same attitude of un-selfishness for the sake of others that Jesus had. Third, Jesus modeled the leadership of servant-hood. He did not come to be served or to lord it over those he was leading. Believers must learn to be servants. Finally, Jesus loved. In Ephesians, Paul calls Christians to, “live a life of

love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” (Ephesians 5:1-2). In order not to make this seem overwhelming the sermon reminded Christians that this is an ongoing process of transformation and that the Trinity is deeply involved in this process of growing us up to be like Christ.

The third sermon in the series was part one of a two part message on the differences in personality encouraging people to find the spiritual disciplines which best fit their type. The sermon title was, “One Size Does Not Fit All,” and the scripture text was Romans 12:1-13. The introduction of the sermon focused on a series of questions helping people see how different their tastes and preferences really are. The people were asked to respond by raising their hands if they wished to give an affirmative answer. The questions focused on music style, entertainment, sports, leisure, love of nature, art etc. These questions were asked in both Sunday morning services and it was fascinating to see the response of the different people. It really helped people see how diverse the congregation really is.

In the twelfth chapter of Romans Paul asks believers to have an honest assessment of themselves and to seek a place in the body of Christ to use their unique spiritual gifts. While this passage lends itself to a discussion of spiritual gifts it also hints at the unique life-gifts each of us brings to the body of Christ. Romans 12:5-6 in The Message Bible are quite helpful;

So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ’s body, let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren’t (Romans 12:5b-6 TMB).



The sermon encourages people use their gifts in a way that that is consistent with the personality given them by God. Each person is born with a preferred way of functioning as a personality type just as each person is born with a preference for being right handed or left handed. This sermon gives an overview of four types of spirituality and encourages people to find a type that fits their personality style. The strengths and weaknesses of each type are noted. It also gives a few hints on how to find the growing edge for each type. It is an opportunity to celebrate differences and help people be more accepting of themselves and others. The concluding thought is from Romans 12:5-6 in the message Bible and people were exhorted to; "... go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

The second part of this sermon was given the following Sunday. The title was simply "One Size Does Not Fit All" part two. The scripture for this sermon was, Psalm 139:1-18. The sermon began with the central thought that each of us is "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the image of God. The New Living Translation says; "Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – and how well I know it" (Psalm 139:14 NLT). Not only is God intimately involved in our creation and development but God is deeply interested in every aspect of our lives. This is expressed in incredibly beautiful poetic language in this Psalm, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you" (Psalm 139:17-18 NIV).

To help people understand something of the wonderful diversity of personality created by God the sermon offered a brief overview of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The sermon looked at how people are energized (Extraversion or Introversion), how people perceive the world around them (Sensing or Intuition), how people make decisions (Thinking or Feeling), and how people choose to organize their outer lives (Judging or Perceiving). Several cautions were offered to keep people from abusing the Personality Type Indicator. There is never an excuse for judging others. No one type is better than another, only different. The sermon also focused on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit to refine and change people. Personalities should never be static but always growing and becoming more mature in Christ. The sermon offered a few general suggestions for an approach to the spiritual disciplines for the different personality types. Finally, the sermon closed with an illustration from the life of Mike Yaconelli. Mike was a pastor and minister to students for over forty years. He co-founded and owned Youth Specialties Ministry. Mike always felt inferior and second-class because he had no formal training or education. While speaking at a Ministers' Retreat for one hundred fifty Seventh Day Adventist pastors, Yaconelli confessed several times that he was not a real minister because he was not ordained. At the end of the conference the leaders did something unheard of in Adventist circles. They got permission from head office to go ahead and ordain Mike Yaconelli as a Seventh Day Adventist Minister. It was a humbling time as one hundred fifty pastors laid hands on Mike but God had used him in a powerful way to minister to those people. God can use anyone!

The sermon series shifted at this point to a focus on spiritual disciplines for Christian living. While this was the fifth sermon in the series it was the first sermon of several outlining and commending spiritual disciplines among the people. This sermon was on the importance of reading scripture. The title of the sermon was, "Reading for Relationship," and the scripture was Psalm 1:1-6. Without using the terminology of Lectio Divina this sermon was an introduction and call to lectio. There are several ways to read the scriptures but the emphasis of this sermon was not Bible Study but devotional reading. Psalm one tells us that there is a special blessing for the person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1:1-2). In this sermon people are exhorted to read the Bible not so much for information and understanding of the text; rather they are exhorted to read with a view to get to know the author behind the text. Marjorie Thompson likens this type of reading to receiving a handwritten letter from a dear friend. She writes; "Here are words that bring a sense of your friend's presence vividly into your life." One author says of this type of reading, "our task is not so much to master the text of scripture as to be mastered by the Source of that text." The sermon gave a brief outline of how to find a comfortable spot to sit and read the Bible in this "listening way." It was basically a teaching on lectio without using the words lectio divina. The sermon closed with a personal illustration. In the week prior to preaching the sermon the pastor had one of those serendipitous moments while reading the Bible devotionally. God came and spoke through the text of scripture but in a very personal way. It was a communion Sunday and the closing illustration seemed to lend itself to introducing the Lord's Table very well.

The next sermon in the series was on prayer. Again, there are many valid types of praying and the sermon really only focused on one type of prayer. Many people have been taught the basics of prayer but this message was a call to contemplative prayer. The title of the sermon was, “Prayer; The Heart’s True Home,” the scripture was Ephesians 3:14-21. Once again people were called to a “relationship” with God through prayer. Richard Foster’s writing on prayer helped inform this message. In describing prayer Foster writes; “He invites us into the livingroom of his heart where we can put on old slippers and share freely” (Richard Foster, *Prayer, Finding the Hearts’ True Home*). In Ephesians chapter three Paul got on his knees and prayed for the Ephesian Christians to be filled with all the measure of the fullness of God and to know the width, and length, and height, and depth of the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17-19). It is only in the place of prayer and listening to God that people are able to plumb the depths of the love of God. The Psalms exhort believers to “Be still and know” (Psalm 46:10), to “Be still in the presence of the Lord” (Psalm 37:7), and to “wait quietly before God” (Psalm 62:1). As Ruth Haley Barton says “In this type of prayer we must come with empty hands and empty heart, having no agenda. Half the time we don’t even know what we need; we just come with a sense of our own spiritual poverty... Emptiness is a prerequisite for receiving.<sup>193</sup>” The instruction in this type of prayer is quite different and a little frightening to some people. In this type of praying the person is not trying to get anywhere. There is no list of wants and wishes and there is no performance anxiety; it is not about trying to get something from God. It is about being aware of the presence of God, being present to the presence of God and being open to the voice of love who may choose to speak or may choose to let us bask in the presence. In this sermon the emphasis is not on changing

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<sup>193</sup> Barton, 68-69.

God's mind to answer our prayers. It is acknowledging that in the end prayer changes me! Once again the sermon offers several practical tips for centering oneself and becoming quiet in the presence of God. There is a concluding illustration stressing the importance of learning how to listen.

The seventh sermon in this series of sermons is a sermon on the discipline of Confession. The title of the sermon is, "Confession is Good for the Soul," and it is based on the text in James 5:13-20. The sermon began by acknowledging that each of us sins against God and against one another. We are broken people seeking healing but at times our brokenness affects our relationships negatively. Human beings are complex and each of us has developed layers of self-defense and self-denial to cover our brokenness. Amazingly God anticipates our brokenness and in James chapter five offers the church a way forward and a path of healing. Eugene Peterson translates James 5:16; "Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed." First, people need to know that they are loved deeply by God and that they matter to God. The following statement from the sermon attempts to help people understand this; "God's love is unconditional, it is a gift to you, you cannot earn it, nor can you lose it, you cannot alter it, you cannot add to it, you cannot take away from it. It is the most incontrovertible fact in the universe." Sin and failure are part of the human condition and everyone fails. God wants us to know that failure is not the falling down but the staying down. There is always hope, we need to get back up, dust ourselves off and keep going. Next, the sermon turns to the act of confession. Too often protestants have avoided this discipline for fear of becoming

Catholic. While it is true we don't need to confess our sins to a priest to be forgiven; we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. In this sermon people were called to go directly to the person whether a spouse, or a friend, or a co-worker to confess our sins. There is a time to stop defending ourselves, admit our wrongdoing and say I am sorry for my actions or words. The closing illustration is meant to help people realize that when they get tired of hurting all the time and have the courage to admit to being wrong the path of confession is one of God's wonderful disciplines on the road to healing.

The final sermon in the series is a sermon on servant-hood. It was preached on Palm Sunday, 2008. The title of the sermon was, "Downward Mobility," the scripture for this sermon is found in John 12:12-19 and John 13:1-9. In order to connect the hearers to the Palm Sunday the sermon began with a description of the Triumphal Entry. The strange thing about Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem was the fact that he accepted the accolades and the praise of the people. The sermon asks the question, "Did Jesus suddenly have a Messiah complex? Why did he allow the cheering crowd to put him on such a pedestal? The truth is, Jesus understood greatness in a way that confuses us. Jesus knew his path to greatness was a downward path of servant-hood and suffering.

In John thirteen, Jesus and his disciples finished the evening meal. John revealed an amazing truth; Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love (John 13:1 NIV). Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist and began washing his disciples' feet. A

jar of water was kept at the door of Israeli homes for the purpose of washing the feet of whoever entered the home. It was a common courtesy but not one of the disciples had offered to wash one another's feet. Later when Jesus took the time to explain his actions he said; "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). Jesus set the example of greatness through service. He expected his followers to follow in his example. True leaders and true greatness is seen in those who are willing to humble themselves and serve others. Richard Foster says, "service is not a list of things we do... but a way of living" (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*). Foster talks about the service of hiddenness, doing some kind deed for another and not revealing it to anyone. Often serving is shown in small things like taking the time to listen, offering hospitality, guarding someone's reputation and doing acts of kindness. The sermon concluded with an illustration about a journalist named Morton Kondrake. When his wife Milly came down with Parkinson's disease she thought he would leave her. Apparently 50 percent of men whose wives are chronically ill leave. He had to convince her he was in it for the long haul. He is now taking care of her. He said, "I've asked God innumerable times, you know, "So what is my purpose here on earth?" The message always comes back the same: "Your job here is to take care of Milly." I asked the congregation to join me in a brief prayer of benediction. It is a prayer recommended by Richard Foster; "Lord Jesus, I would so appreciate it if you would bring me someone today I can serve."

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS OF THE PROJECT**

It is difficult to measure the success of a project designed to effect lasting character change. It sometimes takes years for meaningful transformation to take place. The path toward Christian maturity and growth in Christ likeness is not a straight line but more like a meandering country road. Spiritual transformation is a rather complex process. Even when deliberate steps are taken and spiritual disciplines are practiced, other factors are involved which influence the outcome. As has been mentioned, people struggle with a sinful bent which resists meaningful change. When the Apostle Paul contrasted the acts of the sinful nature with the fruit of the Spirit he wrote, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5: 17 NIV).

Another significant factor in the spiritual formation process is the influence of suffering in a person’s life. The Bible indicates that God is able to use all of the experiences of life, good and bad, to shape our lives for his glory. In the book of Romans Paul wrote about our “present sufferings” (Romans 8:18) and described how God could use them.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:28-29)



These experiences of trouble and suffering are completely unpredictable yet, afford opportunities for growth yet, not everyone responds positively to suffering.

Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend make a distinction between legitimate suffering and capricious evil. If someone has been “mugged” by an evil act (the authors liken this type of suffering to being mugged in the street) that person will not be helped by telling her that God wants her to grow through this situation. Such people need support, comfort and caring from others. All of us have areas in our lives that remain unhealed or untransformed. God will use a crisis or a trial to bring us an opportunity to experience the transformation of healing grace. Cloud and Townsend suggest that this type of suffering is like that caused by the surgeon.<sup>194</sup> They go on to discuss the importance of legitimate suffering and pain in our lives.

We all have coping mechanisms that cover up pain, help us deal with fear, cope with relational inabilities, and help us hold it all together. Trials and suffering push those mechanisms past the breaking point so we find out where we need to grow. Then true spiritual growth begins at deeper levels, and we are healed. Righteousness and character take the place of coping.<sup>195</sup>

Spiritual formation is not automatic, in the end people choose how they will respond to suffering. Suffice it to say the Holy Spirit is always gently at work behind the scenes prodding people toward growth.

Despite these variables there have been signs that people at Immanuel are changing. This was evident both during the implementation of the project and since its completion. There is a heightened awareness and interest in learning and practicing the spiritual

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<sup>194</sup> Henry Cloud, and John Townsend, *How People Grow, What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 212.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, 213.

disciplines. All of the people who attended the Spiritual Retreat are very enthusiastic about going on retreat again. The exercises used on the retreat to help people experience contemplative Bible reading were designed so that people could practice them at home.

There was something for the extraverted types, the intuitive types, the sensing types, the feeling types and the thinking types. The use of music, candles, imagery, oral scripture reading, silent scripture reading, audible and silent prayer, small group interaction, writing, drawing, nature walking, silence, and solitude combined to give people choice in their method of prayer for listening to God.

Although the twenty people who went on retreat were quite different, each one participated fully in the spiritual exercises and in sharing their experience of the presence of God. It was interesting to see how people experienced God in different ways and through different mediums. Some people journaled, others wrote poetry, some people drew pictures and others spent time quietly in the presence of God. Yet, during the small group sharing time every person shared how meaningful the time of silence and prayer had been.

The retreat format was developed in such a way as to be duplicated by merely substituting a different spiritual discipline. Though the retreat was designed to appeal to a wide range of participants some people are afraid of solitude. One weakness may be that spiritual retreats do not appeal to everyone in the congregation.

The sermon series on spiritual formation was well received. People were genuinely interested in learning more about spiritual disciplines. The sermons were designed to offer practical suggestions for introducing the disciplines into a person's faith journey. Soon after the completion of the sermon series approximately twenty people from the congregation attended a Renovaré conference with Richard Foster to learn more about Spiritual Formation. There are now two spiritual formation small groups at Immanuel using Renovaré curriculum. It may be that some people who are threatened by the idea of a spiritual retreat will feel more at home in a small group.

Members of Immanuel showed special interest in the sermons that dealt with personality development and spirituality. These messages garnered more interest and more requests for transcripts than any the author has preached to date. The messages were written to help people find a relatively guilt free way to practice disciplines consistent with their personality type. People were very interested in discovering their personality type and understanding themselves better. In the future it would be helpful to offer a specific seminar designed to help people take a personality test using Myers-Briggs or some other personality assessment. This three-hour seminar would include personality assessment and practical suggestions for spiritual disciplines based on a person's personality type.

It also would be useful to develop a second series of sermons on the spiritual disciplines not covered in the initial series. Some of the disciplines to be included in a subsequent series of sermons would be, fasting, study, worship, honoring the body, fellowship, witness, submission and silence.

The in-depth interviews with people in the congregation proved to be very insightful. One of the unforeseen benefits of the interviews was the opportunity for pastoral care as people shared rather deep emotions and experiences. It was an opportunity to get to know members of the church family in a significant way. The interview questions moved people from idle chitchat to discussing the intimate details of their spiritual journey. In hindsight it would have been good to ask each of the interviewees to take a modified Myers-Briggs Personality Type Inventory. This information would have provided even greater understanding as people shared their stories. Never the less for the most part personality types were revealed as people shared.

A definite weakness in this project was the fact that the author of this thesis transitioned in ministry soon after these elements of the project were completed. This precluded any further follow up with those who attended the retreat or of the interviewees. It also meant that the author of the thesis is no longer able to be present to assess the level of congregational participation in spiritual disciplines.

At the beginning of this project it seemed apparent that the goal was to help people become more like Christ. In the course of writing and implementing the project, however, it became evident that it was not only the people who needed to change. As a result the author of this project has made a shift in methodology in ministry. I came to understand more fully that spiritual transformation is contingent upon many factors and a “one size fits all” approach to doing ministry will frustrate many people in the

congregation who desire to grow spiritually. As the project went on, the connection between personality development and spirituality loomed large. As a result, my style in preaching, teaching, and even my approach to pastoral care of people has changed. As one comes to understand the diversity of people's circumstances, personalities, spiritual heritage, age, socio-economic background etc., it becomes easier to empathize with people.

As a preacher I have experienced a significant shift in style and approach to preaching. It has become more and more evident that there are people with different learning styles. It has meant deliberately thinking about how different people respond to the truth of God's Word and attempting to develop communication to reach them. In the past few years I have worked at developing Power Point slides for each sermon. These slides utilize photography, maps, art work, scripture quotes from different translations, significant quotes from authors and commentators, music, video, charts, graphs and lists. Recently sitting in a church that has beautiful stained glass windows I realized that we are doing with power point and video what other generations did with stained glass; we are telling the story of the Bible with pictures and images.

It is interesting to note that large sections of the Bible are written in narrative form. One of the best methods for communicating life changing spiritual truth is telling the story of the Bible. I have been amazed at how people respond when the stories of the Bible are told in a powerful, engaging way. Jesus was a master storyteller who connected his audience with the truth of God's Word in practical everyday situations. Whether he told

the story of a farmer sowing his seed or a woman searching her house for a lost coin, Jesus made his point powerfully in ways that affected real people in the real world. It is important for the preacher to use stories that help connect the modern hearer of the Word with real life situations.

Another benefit of the project is how increased understanding of personality/spiritual type has impacted my own leadership. In September I began a new ministry as Executive Minister of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. Soon after beginning this work I called the staff to a one day retreat in which each person did basic personality testing. Through this exercise, I was better able to understand the senior staff with whom I work directly and they gained important insight into my personality and leadership style. This is critical when working in a team environment. Every time we seek to understand people better we are given the opportunity to treat others with respect and dignity and build a sense of team. This helps put an end to prejudice and pigeon holing people and promotes acceptance. A safe environment to share ideas encourages creativity and team morale.

Throughout this thesis I have been on a spiritual journey of development as well. I am convinced that it is important to gain a balanced view of spiritual development which could be summed up as understanding Christians as “contemplatives in action”. I think it is critical for Christian people to practice Christian disciplines which promote withdrawal and reflection as well as engaging in ongoing relationships with others in ministry, family and community. It is in striking such a balance that we will grow into the Christlikeness to which we have been called.

Through the process of writing the thesis and developing the congregational project I have been persuaded that individual spiritual disciplines on their own are not enough. There is a way of doing church which opens the door for ongoing spiritual direction/formation. In order to move in such a direction Pastors and leaders need to be willing to practice the discipline of “discernment” at every level of church life. Those who have taken spiritual formation seriously understand the need for spiritual direction. A spiritual director is someone who accompanies us on the journey of faith and formation. At the congregational level it is critical for leaders to find ways to journey together and provide spiritual accompaniment for one another in the body of Christ. It may mean setting aside Robert’s Rules of Order and spending group time reflecting on scripture and praying for God’s direction for the Church.

I would like to say a final word about the study of personality development and spirituality. One of the supreme benefits of being aware of my own personality type and the personality types of others is to promote understanding and acceptance of others. It is my personal belief that holiness can be summed up by the word wholeness. In understanding my own Wesleyan roots it is interesting to note that John Wesley’s emphasis on holiness is best described in something he called, “perfect love.” Wesley understood “perfect love” as loving God and neighbor with heart mind and soul. As I grow in my understanding of how God created each of us differently and as I develop in love and acceptance of other people I am being shaped more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

**Appendix A:****INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Personality Development and Spirituality

**Gender** \_\_\_\_\_**Age** \_\_\_\_\_**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Can you think of a time or a specific experience in your life when you felt especially close to God?
2. How would you describe your relationship with God?
3. How do you experience the presence of God?
4. When I mention the word “prayer,” what comes to mind first?
5. How would you describe your prayer life?
6. What spiritual disciplines do you practice most frequently?
7. Of these practices, which is the most meaningful to you? Why do you think this is so?
8. Are there specific resources you have used to aid you in your spiritual development?
9. What would you say gives you the most frustration in your walk with God? Where do you think God may be calling you to grow?
10. Which of the following words or phrases best describe your relationship with God; intimate, personal and warm, thoughtful, distant or, detached? (Or, use your own words to describe this relationship) Explain.
11. Do you have any goals for your spiritual journey?
12. There is a lot of talk these days about “Spiritual Formation,” how do you understand the phrase.



## Appendix B: Notes on Congregational Interviews

### Interview

**Age: 14**

**March 12, 2008**

When \_\_\_\_\_ relative died suddenly she experienced God's closeness. Her Dad left right away to be with this family. Twenty-four hours later a Hurricane struck and their home was without power. She and the rest of her family spent really close time together that week praying and seeking God's strength. \_\_\_\_\_ really feels that God was close to her during that time and that God gave them the strength to help them through that time.

She feels her relationship with God is very strong. Both her parents were raised in Christian homes. She has had the Lord in her life since she was four years old and being raised in a Christian home there never was a time when God was not involved in her life. She said, "I know the Lord can do anything and he can help me get through anything."

God's presence is like a feeling of relief when something happens there is a sense of relief that God is there. Trust is a problem for \_\_\_\_\_. She has trouble trusting people and trouble trusting God. So, when she does experience God's presence it is as a sense of relief that all is going to be well.

Upon hearing the word prayer her first reaction was to say, help! It is a cry for help and an assurance that you will get that help in return.

In speaking of her prayer life she stated; "I don't think there is a day that has gone by that she hasn't prayed or seen the results of prayer." She has seen the results of prayer in her friends, and her family this past year. Her parents have prayed with her since she was little so it is a natural part of her life.

In speaking of spiritual disciplines \_\_\_\_\_ talked about reading her Bible. She also talked about the many people who have influenced her life as a Christian. Singing is very important to \_\_\_\_\_. She has been traveling some with a Christian singing group and this has strengthened her faith. Last Sunday night they were singing in concert and she really found that to strengthen and help her. She sees the situation of so many people who are in trouble and she feels compassion.

The most important or, meaningful discipline in her life is her music and singing for the Lord. It is something she wants to do more of even when she is older; it is something she plans to do all her life. When she is singing she feels closest to God.

When she was only eight or nine years of age she read a book that helped answer a lot of her questions about God and heaven. She found this really helpful.

The one area of frustration in her walk with God is in the area of trust. Trusting God is very difficult for her and she gets frustrated with herself, not with God. She knows she should trust God more but finds it difficult. She gave the example of the sudden and tragic death of her relative. Lately when traveling with the Christian singing group, she has found herself in bad driving conditions. When they are on the road in terrible snowy conditions and she thinks the car is going too fast she gets really afraid and finds it hard to trust God to take care of her. She thinks, "If God let \_\_\_\_\_ die will he protect me or, will he let me die too?"

She wants to grow musically. But, she needs to grow in the area of becoming more trusting. She wants to trust people more and to trust God more.

She feels her relationship with God is on its way to becoming more personal but she knows there is still room for growth. But she would describe it as personal and warm.

She has set goals for herself musically. Her goal is to use her music to reach out to others in a missionary way. She feels her Christian heritage and being financially able to have certain advantages places her in good position to serve. She wants to give something back by being able to help others.

Spiritual Formation to her means; "I think it is growing a better relationship with God. The idea of forming or being formed by God. It is learning to hand things over to God and trusting him to take care of things.

#### Interview

Age: 17

Female

March 12, 2008

The time when she really felt closest to the Lord was Tidal Impact, 2004. Tidal Impact is a summer Youth Mission trip with hundreds of other young people. For a long time she felt as if she was in a tiny minority of people who were trying to follow the Lord. Being at Tidal Impact God really showed her that she was not alone because here was such a large group of young people who were also passionate about following Jesus. It was a real encouragement to her faith.

She would describe her relationship with the Lord as "rocky" right now. A youth leader gave her a new devotional book that is helping. She finds High School a very tough place to live out your faith.

When she experiences the presence of the Lord she would describe it as “completely overwhelming.” When this happens she says that everything becomes very clear to her. At such times she has an inner revelation and she sees things spiritually. She finds it quite emotional and at times can’t stop crying.

She had two words to describe prayer, “miracles and fellowship.”

She describes her own prayer life as a one sided conversation. She has trouble sitting in silence without being distracted. Music is a help but even music can be a distraction at times. For her music helps bridge the gap she feels exists between her and God. But, the message of the song is often the only thing she can concentrate on and this distracts her from experiencing God.

Music is her number one spiritual resource. She has learned many scriptures that have been set to music. She has listened to Christian music through tapes and c.d.’s since her childhood. She also receives a daily devotional by email. The devotional has scripture, a devotional thought and recommended prayers.

The thing that frustrates her is that God seems so far away. To \_\_\_\_\_ High School seems like such a spiritual wasteland, it is as if God is not there at all. She has lots of friends who don’t know anything about God. \_\_\_\_\_ loves them very much but doesn’t know how to communicate her faith with them.

She needs to grow in her ability to listen to God. It is in having her own quiet time where she doesn’t get so distracted.

In trying to describe her relationship she was struggling with the fact that her walk is inconsistent at best. It is both personal and warm and distant depending on the particular time. When she speaks of this she is talking about God’s closeness and her own attentiveness to her relationship with God.

\_\_\_\_\_ goal is to be as close to the Lord as her spiritual mentors. Her mentor is a former youth pastor and his wife who served at the church several years ago. There is just something about how close they are to the Lord that draws her and makes her yearn for more of God.

When she first heard the word “Spiritual Formation” she thought of a group or “formation” of angels. But as she thought about it she believes it means, “growing in your walk with the Lord and, building yourself up in faith.”

## Interview

Male

Age: 18

March 03/08

\_\_\_\_\_ has really experienced the Lord's presence and his closeness at a Christian Retreat setting that has a strong youth program. The last time \_\_\_\_\_ went to the retreat the presence of God especially close. He thinks the reason why this is so is because he was in leadership this last time. He was a small group leader and he helped lead worship. When he leads worship he feels especially close to God.

For \_\_\_\_\_, the presence of God is that experience when everything feels right. You know that everything feels the way it is supposed to be. It is as though everything in the world has aligned and all is well.

Prayer to \_\_\_\_\_ is something he does all the time. He calls it a communicative response to what is happening around you.

He has no set times of prayer. He says, "I pray when I am walking down the hall way, in the shower, when I think of it or, when I am alone. It is just a conversation with a friend."

For \_\_\_\_\_ the spiritual practices he finds most meaningful are; singing worship songs and playing his guitar. \_\_\_\_\_ is able to express his love and faith toward God through this medium. It is a time to let go, an opportunity to express his love for God.

His greatest frustration in his walk with God is that sometimes he feels it is hard to have the energy to initiate that time to be with the Lord and to be energized by Him.

\_\_\_\_\_ feels that he needs to grow in his missionary heart to respond to the call he feels God has placed on his life.

He likes reading the Bible. He believes that sharing with people and showing the love of Christ to people is an important spiritual discipline. Just living your life in a Christ like way let's people see the difference. You don't really have to say anything.

\_\_\_\_\_ describes his relationship with the Lord as constant. He sees that there are times when his relationship with the Lord is intense and other times when it is rather distant; never the less the relationship is always constant. It is like a relationship with a family member. You are connected by blood and nothing can separate you.

His goal is to get better. It is not really a definitive goal but to keep on in his relationship with God.

Spiritual Formation is a new phrase to \_\_\_\_\_. He has never heard the phrase before. It sounds to him like something set in stone.

## Interview

Male

Age: 25

Date: March 07, 2008

Shortly after \_\_\_\_\_ girl friend broke up with him he had an encounter with God. It was a very difficult time for \_\_\_\_\_ because he really cared for this woman. He was feeling sorry for himself and was really down, it was a major crisis in his young life. He turned to God for comfort. \_\_\_\_\_ went with friends and a group of young adults to a Christian concert. It was there \_\_\_\_\_ experienced a profound sense of God's presence and it was the first time he raised his hands in worship to God.

During this time he started attending the 40 Days of purpose small group which met at the \_\_\_\_\_ home. As he read Rick Warren's book and interacted with others he really began to grow spiritually.

He describes his relationship with God as growing. He is starting to get more involved in church. He is certainly learning more about the politics and inner workings of church. He sometimes finds it a struggle to maintain growth and to read his Bible. He struggles but would like to become more consistent in his routine of Bible study and prayer with his wife.

The presence of God for \_\_\_\_\_ is peaceful, a feeling of comfort. For him it is not really a mountain top experience but more introspective. He describes God's presence as a calming presence.

Prayer is a conversation between God and himself. It is asking for things, praying for healing or praying for safety. It is something \_\_\_\_\_ feels he needs to do more of.

In talking about his prayer life \_\_\_\_\_ feels there is something lacking and he needs to be more consistent. He feels his prayer life is not complete.

He really enjoyed co-leading an Alpha small group and felt he was growing along with the people he was facilitating. He enjoys serving in the church. He loves doing the practical things like mowing the lawn, being a teller who counts money and serving the communion as a deacon. He loves these hands on type of activities more than being up front.

The most meaningful practice to \_\_\_\_\_ is helping others and volunteering to serve.

Some books that have been helpful are; "The Purpose Driven Life," a book on marriage by Dr. James Dobson. He also found a book for couples on sexual purity very helpful.

His frustration is a busy lifestyle that keeps him so involved in good things like church involvement but keeps him from having quality time with God and with his wife. Although he feels this may be an excuse because if he were more motivated to put God first and set his priorities he could find time for the important things in life.

A growing edge for \_\_\_\_\_ is stepping out of his comfort zone. It is too easy for him to stay in the background and just keep doing what he has always been doing.

He described his relationship with God as thoughtful.

His goal is not really specific, just to grow spiritually, to grow closer to God.

In speaking of Spiritual Formation it was a new concept. He saw it as referring to God's order in the family. For example; the husband is the head of the household, his wife next and his children under them.

Interview

Female

Age: 26

Date, March 7, 2008

Her first major experience with God was when she was sixteen years old at a Bible College Booster week-end. \_\_\_\_\_ was unhappy. She told God that she was tired of everything in her life. So, she cried out to God and God came to her in an awesome way. She fell to the ground and felt God's amazing presence as an awesome hug from God. She heard the Lord say to her, "Daughter, I am here and I love you." It was a pivotal moment and a turning point in her life.

In the last six months she and her husband have been trying to have a baby. She has been feeling defeated and has been tempted to get angry with God. She didn't want to let Satan have the victory in this. At church recently we were singing the song, "Blessed be the Name," this song talks about receiving blessing and pain from God's hand. In fact she remembers the line, "Though there is pain in the offering." This spoke to her deeply and she began sobbing. She began telling God that no matter what happened she would still praise him and she knew it was going to be ok. At this point she felt a tremendous relief.

She said, I hear him some times, I am stilled. She thinks it is like that verse, "Be still and know that I am God." God's presence brings clarity, peace or it is like a drop of wisdom that comes to you that speaks peace. For her it is emotional and often accompanied with tears.

When \_\_\_\_\_ hears the word prayer she thinks of a conversation.

Her prayer life is ongoing. As she gets a little older and more mature she is becoming quieter in her prayer life. It is becoming much more about time with God, having conversation continuously through the day.

Spiritual practices that are very meaningful to her are fasting and prayer. She always feels closer to God when she does this. The other is solitude with time just to be with God.

The most meaningful practice for \_\_\_\_\_ is prayer.

Resources that have been helpful; she took a course at University on Spiritual Disciplines, or practices that really helped. She has found that having theological discussions and debates with her dad have really helped her grow. Richard Foster's book, Celebration of Discipline has been a good resource.

She is impatient. She wants to know now, she doesn't like waiting. She knows God is in control but she doesn't like not knowing the answer. She is frustrated by a lack of time and by having to wait and has some control issues.

Her growing edge is a problem with busyness and not taking enough time to be with God. She always feels rushed and she does have a problem with lack of patience.

Her goal would be to put God first in her schedule. She also wants to be more focused in her couple time with her husband and their devotions and prayer together.

She describes her relationship with God as close, genuine, could be better, could be worse but growing.

Spiritual Formation is growth and development of her connectedness with God.

Interview

Female

Age: 48

March 10/08

\_\_\_\_\_ said, "I have really felt the presence of the Lord in my life." I felt the presence of the Lord very strongly in my childhood. I was a young child when I felt the Holy Spirit's presence drawing me and directing me. When she listened to a pastor on Christian radio, or, listened to her pastor preach and, when she listened to Billy Graham and read the literature and read her Bible she experienced God's presence in a very real way. Once when she sent away for a Bible Study and she started using the material she felt the Holy Spirit warning her that this was not from God and she stopped using it.

Once God woke her up in the night and she knew intuitively that someone was going to die. She thought it must be her grandmother but it turned out to be her teen-aged sister who died of complications from severe asthma. It was a traumatic time but God's presence was real and comforting. She was planning to go to Community College after High School and God clearly spoke to her and told her to go to Bible College. She told the Lord that if he wanted her to go to Bible College he would have to provide the finances that she didn't have. At School one day they announced a job position for the summer. \_\_\_\_\_ went and saw the lady about the job. The woman asked her what she planned to do with her money if she got the job. She said, I am going to go to Bible College and she hired her on the spot. God provided the job and the money for College.

In describing her relationship with the Lord she said, "He speaks directly to me. We are very direct with one another. She describes her relationship with the Lord as close and comfortable.

In talking about the presence of God, she claims, He is just there and real. His presence is tangible. It is comfortable. It is like having a companion. When she was a child she often felt as though she was alone. As the wife of a very busy person she has felt alone and lonely but God has been her constant companion. She really enjoys creation and experiences God's presence in creation very clearly.

Prayer is; talking to God and telling him everything. She enjoys his presence and his peace. She argues with God until he finally convinces her that something is the will of God and then she finally surrenders to God.

She describes her prayer life as constant. He is there and I talk with him anytime I want. She enjoys God's presence and is very aware that God is with her. She has never felt angry with God and even finds it hard to understand people who might be. She trusts God.

The Spiritual Disciplines she practices the most are; being still and listening to God. I learned a long time ago to stop and be still. It is in my nature and personality anyways. She means to be purposely still. She enjoys practicing hospitality and reaching out to friends. She spends time reaching out to people who have been abused and who have had their boundaries broken. She has a great deal of care and compassion for these type of hurting people. She has had a ministry of taking care of a small child once or twice a week to give a single parent a break. She loves reaching out to people who really don't have a church background or have nothing to do with church and befriending them. She doesn't talk to them about God unless they bring up the subject and want to do so.

Helpful resources have been the speaking of Chuck Swindoll and, Billy Graham. She loves reading the Guideposts magazine and finds it very uplifting. Robert Schuller's ministry on T.V. has been extremely encouraging to \_\_\_\_\_. (Because it is so positive) Also, she has read a number of biographies of Christian people that have helped her. Examples are; Jim Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot, Catherine Marshall, Corrie Ten Boom, Billy Graham, Hudson Taylor etc.



She says she really doesn't have any frustration in her walk with God. She seems content in the knowledge that when God wants to touch her life and bring about change she is open to the gracious way His Spirit nudges her.

She describes her relationship with God as thoughtful. She doesn't really have any goals for her journey.

Spiritual formation to her means; Pausing for God or, acknowledging God's presence in your life.

Interview

Male

Age: 53

Feb. 20/08

One of the most significant spiritual encounters with the presence of God for \_\_\_\_\_ was at a conference in 1991. He accepted Christ as a teenager but really didn't walk with the Lord. He got married and started having children he went to church for his wife and the children's sake. They attended the Anglican church and his wife attended a Charismatic home group. \_\_\_\_\_ didn't go to this and was a little worried and told \_\_\_\_\_ to be careful. People in her group were praying for \_\_\_\_\_, he wasn't involved and not interested.

For some reason he said yes to attending the conference. There was a breakout session on Spiritual Warfare that seemed to interest him. During the session he was really convicted to deal with God's call and get rid of all the garbage in his life. He went forward for prayer, the invitation was to come and give all the garbage in your life to Jesus; to leave it at the cross. \_\_\_\_\_ was left alone for awhile and he was praying and interacting with God. It was as though God wanted him to give everything over. \_\_\_\_\_ said yes to God but felt there was more that God wanted. He finally believed he was to give his children over to God. He still felt there was more and he wrestled with God until he had to surrender his wife to God which was a real test of his faith. Standing there he felt completely stripped bare and empty before God. He felt naked and transparent before the Lord. As someone put a hand on his back to pray for him a lot of pent up emotion was released. It was the Pastor from another church in his home town who prayed with him. Everyone who saw \_\_\_\_\_ after this said he was literally walking lighter and his countenance had completely changed. He gave everything over to God and experienced God's presence as trust and love.

\_\_\_\_\_ feels that his present relationship with the Lord could be described as "lukewarm." He feels that the problem is definitely on his end not God's. Probably busyness is a factor. It is easy to let the relationship slip. It feels too comfortable and he may be taking it for granted.

In some ways it is like a mountain top experience of being wowed by the presence of God. Sometimes seeing the beauty of creation is a powerful experience of God for him. Sometimes God's presence is like a thought or an impression. There have been times when reading scripture he experiences a revelation or quickening that is from the presence of God. Sometimes during the worship music and singing he experiences a wonderful presence that could be described as a sense of well-being or love. He likes to describe this relationship as a two way reciprocation of love.

When the word prayer is mentioned he immediately thinks of communion (with God).

He was quite negative about his prayer life. I think he was talking about regularity of time set aside for prayer. He doesn't necessarily have a specific prayer time. He said he doesn't pray a lot of long prayers. But, he says he is almost always aware or conscious of God's presence or, his omniscience. He likes to pray telepathic prayers, they are short and specific. Sometimes God will bring someone to mind and \_\_\_\_\_ will pray for the person. He prays a lot for personal and family needs. He often is very thankful for God's love and mercy and for what He has done for me on the cross.

One of the disciplines very important to \_\_\_\_\_ is food, fun and fellowship with other Christians. He does read his Bible and reads books for spiritual nourishment. He believes that fasting and prayer is an important spiritual discipline but he has not been practicing it recently. Another important discipline is mentoring others or, if you like, being one who disciples others.

He really believes that the most important discipline is mentoring others or; the process of making disciples.

Reading books about the Lord.

His frustration is in the area of dealing with all of the crap and difficulties life throws at him. He said, "I get annoyed when God doesn't come through and answer prayer or change situations. This really bothers him when these prayers appear to be in line with the will of God revealed in his Word. Sometimes God does something completely different than he asks for and he finds this hard.

The growing edge for \_\_\_\_\_ is his belief that he should be spending time fasting and praying. He believes that if Jesus needed to fast and pray and spend time alone with God; we too need to set aside time for this discipline. He believes that to be obedient in this is to move from a head knowledge of God to a heart knowledge of Him.

He described his walk with God as thoughtful and trusting. He feels his relationship with God is not overly intimate but not distant or cold either.

His number one goal is to be a disciple of Christ who disciples others.

For \_\_\_\_\_, spiritual formation is all about being and making disciples.

Interview

Female

Age: 64

Feb. 25/08

A time when \_\_\_\_\_ really experienced the presence of God was when her mother in law was in the hospital. \_\_\_\_\_ was really praying for her. Her mother in law was not a believer. \_\_\_\_\_ was really concerned for her. She was spending a lot of time reading the Bible and in prayer. The Lord used a verse of scripture that came alive for her and this became a promise to her that He was going to bring salvation to her mother in law. She did accept the Lord before she died.

Once \_\_\_\_\_ was going through a really hard time and feeling alone. She couldn't really share with anyone. It was a time when she really had almost lost hope. She was out with a couple of friends and one said, I feel the like the Lord wants me to tell you; "You are not alone." This was really meaningful to \_\_\_\_\_. The Lord's presence is not so much a feeling as it is experiencing answered prayer or God's help in a given situation.

When her mother was dying they had taken her off the respirator. \_\_\_\_\_ and her sister were in the elevator and \_\_\_\_\_ said to her sister, "This is really hard." A total stranger in the elevator turned and said to them; "We walk by faith and not by sight." The next morning when they went in to see their mother she was sitting up in bed. Their experience with the hospital staff was very negative and it felt like there was constant spiritual warfare simply because they were Christians.

\_\_\_\_\_ defined prayer as "talking with God." She defined her prayer life as inconsistent at times and fairly good at other times. I get the feeling sometimes that \_\_\_\_\_ struggles with performance anxiety and she struggles with feeling good enough.

The most important thing to \_\_\_\_\_ is the word of God and prayer. She likes a quiet time and space to read and pray. When she is doing this consistently she feels close to God. Reading Christian books that are designed to strengthen her faith is important to Sharon. She does a lot of online Bible Studies. She finds corporate worship with other Christians very important to her faith.

Her greatest frustration is a lack of self-discipline. When I am disciplined I feel close to God. When I am busy and don't make time to be with God it does not help me grow spiritually. She feels her growing edge is to be more consistent in her time with God. She said, "I need to take more risks to step out in areas of ministry to people."

\_\_\_\_\_ feels like there is a gap. She feels distant from God and rarely feels God's love. She is really striving to please God. Her father was very strict and detached. She intellectually understands the love of God but it is difficult for her to experience it in any deep way.

The word “spiritual formation” was a completely new concept or phrase. She was not familiar with it at all. She thinks it means your growth as a Christian from the time you accept Christ until the time you go to be with him.

Further comments; She came to the Lord in a southern Baptist church at eight years of age. Eventually as a teenager she found the church too strict and too negative in its hellfire and brimstone teaching and left. Years later her sister wrote and called her to talk about an exciting new relationship with the Lord that she was experiencing. She was living far away and her sister came all the way there to see her to share her new found faith with her. \_\_\_\_\_ started wanting what her sister had. She started going to Bible Study and eventually accepted the Lord, she was in her thirties. Her husband accepted the Lord a couple of years later.

Interview

Female

Age: 82

Feb. 27/08

When \_\_\_\_\_ came to faith she was teaching school in a small town in N.B. In 1947 she started hanging out with a group of Christian young adults. She attended a lot of missionary meetings. She knew the Lord was speaking to her heart. She didn't go forward at the service where she felt God was speaking to her. But, that night she couldn't sleep and finally said yes to the Lord. She experienced a deep sense of God's peace. Two years later she left teaching and went to Ontario to go to Bible College to earn a degree in Religious Studies.

It was as though God really spoke to her to prepare her to go to Bible College. She was teaching grade three in a small community in New Brunswick. Children came from very poor homes and rough backgrounds. One day these young children began talking to \_\_\_\_\_ about how much they were looking forward to the week-end. When she quizzed them about it they told her their daddy would be going to the liquor store to buy them a treat. \_\_\_\_\_ was broken hearted and felt a call to learn more about God and his word so she might be able to make a difference in the lives of the children and lead them to Christ. She graduated from Bible College and though many of her friends were heading for the Mission field she really felt her mission field was back home in New Brunswick. She went back to N.B. and taught school for 35 years.

After \_\_\_\_\_'s husband died she was attending Bible Study at Church. The lady who led the study was having health problems. She decided to give up the study and announced one day in group, \_\_\_\_\_ is going to be your new leader. \_\_\_\_\_ was completely dumbfounded, it was the first she had heard of it. She went home and prayed about it and she felt the Lord calling her to do it. It has been a tremendous blessing and \_\_\_\_\_ says she gets more out of the study than the women she leads.

\_\_\_\_\_ reflects; “I feel the Lord has had his hand on me since I was 3 years of age. When playing school with her siblings she would cry until they would let her be the pretend teacher. When she was seventeen years old she wanted to go to teacher’s college. Her mother thought that maybe \_\_\_\_\_ had talked so much about being a teacher that she had been deluded into thinking this should be her chosen career. Her mother suggested she get a local license to teach and try teaching for a year to see if she really wanted to be a teacher. That is exactly what \_\_\_\_\_ did. For thirty six years she taught school and taught every grade from grade one to grade twelve and loved it.

\_\_\_\_\_ said, “I depend upon God in everything I do.” It just seems I don’t know what I would do without the Holy Spirit with me. I pray for something and the Lord answers. God’s answers are not always what I want. I don’t think I could live alone if I didn’t believe in the Lord. He supplies all my needs and even more so.

She has a sense of peace and assurance. Knowing that the Lord hears and answers my prayers gives me great comfort. Sometimes her prayers feel flat or that they aren’t going anywhere but she stops and comes back to that prayer later in the day. Often a scripture will come to mind. So many scriptures that she memorized in the King James Version come back to her. The Lord’s word comes to her when she needs it. She has taught Sunday School and D.V.B.S. and Bible club. There was a dear Christian woman who was like a mother to her who mentored her in her faith. The woman and her family were traveling to attend \_\_\_\_\_’s graduation and she was killed in a car crash.

If you mention the word prayer to \_\_\_\_\_ the first thing that comes to mind is, “The Lord.”

She said, I pray every morning and every night. I thank the Lord every morning for rest and for safety. The Friday afternoon prayer group gives an important opportunity to pray for the needs of others. “When we see answers to prayer it gives a boost to our faith.” She never leaves to go on a trip unless she prays for the Lord’s protection. I know the Lord does take care of me. She has no worries; she is taken care of financially. Her biggest concern is the health of her sisters. She is 82 years old and thinks nothing of getting into her vehicle and driving to Fredericton to visit.

Prayer, scripture reading, memorization, fellowship and attending Bible Study and church services are very important to her. Christian friends have really helped strengthen her faith. There was a certain man who was a great Christian friend who helped influence her to go to Bible College.

She reads a number of Christian books, especially the WMS reading list books. These have helped to strengthen her faith. She likes the fiction of Grace Livingston Hill. She likes the poetry of Helen Steiner Rice. She has enjoyed Philip Yancey’s writing and the book on “Heaven” by Randy Alcorn. She has also read a number of biographies of great Christians such as William Carey and others.

She really has no frustrations. She feels like a favored daughter of the Lord. I don't have any real frustrations. In the past she has. Since the death of her husband she has been forced to completely depend on the Lord.

She feels like the word "intimate" describes her relationship with the Lord. She said, "I don't act upon something unless I ask the Lord. I believe he guides me."

She has no goals. She feels like she is nearing the end and is very much at peace with life and with the Lord. "I am just going day by day trusting in the Lord to see me through," she said. She knows that when life ends she will be in the presence of the Lord. She has a deep, abiding peace. Living in Truro she feels like her life has come full circle and it feels right to her.

I am not sure she really understood the concept but talked about church and how it has changed down through the years. She acknowledged the need for change and the need for the church to grow bigger but I sensed a bit of sadness and loss as though something in church life has been lost for her. She made a comment about our two services and the challenge to connect the older people in the second service with the younger people in the early service.

Interview

Male

Age – 83

Date – Feb. 18/08

In thinking of a time when he was close to God. The first thing that came to mind was when he made his commitment to following Christ. He came to the Lord through a friend. He was between 15 and 17 years of age. He became friends with a young man who lived in town, \_\_\_\_\_ lived on the farm. This friend invited \_\_\_\_\_ to church and he attended with him for about 2 years. They attended a Young Men's Group of 16-18 boys who met weekly for Bible Study and prayer, usually on Sunday evening. It was December and he was really sensing that he was a lost person and needed Christ. This feeling lasted for about two weeks.

A friend picked him up in his car and went joy riding at the airport but \_\_\_\_\_ didn't enjoy it. He had already decided he wanted to talk with the pastor that night after the meeting. He went to the Pastor's home and talked with him. He made his commitment to Christ that night and walked the three miles home. It was a crisp, clear walk home and all nature seemed to be more beautiful that night. It was a real time of renewal.

Another time \_\_\_\_\_ experienced God's closeness was just a few weeks ago. He had some kind of spell and had to be rushed to the hospital. He had an incredible sense of peace come over him that he cannot completely describe. There was a tremendous sense of well being and, that everything was going to be just fine.

In describing his relationship with God, he talked about a continuous experience of God's presence. He enjoys a quiet time in the morning when he spends time with God. He has come to the conclusion that he needs to begin with and affirm the absolute authority of scripture. He seeks to personalize the scripture he reads. He wants to grow in his absolute dependence on God, quoting Jesus who said, "Without me you can do nothing." He identifies with Isaiah's reaction in Isaiah Chapter 6 when, he acknowledged his unworthiness before God. This is what establishes the basis for relationship with God. Lately he has been going through the Lord's Prayer, especially the part about deliver us from evil. He believes that protection of the mind and the thought processes is so important. Through Dallas Willard he is reminded of the way the powers of evil attempt to attack our mind and thoughts. He needs this protection every moment of the day. Sins of the mind and the thoughts violate the holiness of God. For \_\_\_\_\_ this is a very crucial dimension to his faith and his relationship with God. He is very aware of the deceptive power of Satan in Genesis 3. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. Our state of being is determined by our thoughts.

In thinking of prayer the sovereignty of God comes to his mind. Even in trying to determine what to pray for and what to focus on. God knows my desires completely. He knows my motives, my objectives, my will; there is nothing that God does not know. \_\_\_\_\_ believes that we must ultimately submit to the will of God. This became a time of conscious decision when \_\_\_\_\_ began to deal with his thought life. Romans 1 and Romans 8 were important in helping him come to this place of obedience. He felt his will had to shift and submit to the will of God.

He has been thinking about his life lately and all the things that have happened and how God has been leading and how God's sovereign will has shaped his life through these experiences. An example would be when he was boarding with a family and the man of the home was asked to be principal of a school in \_\_\_\_\_. The man asked if he would come and teach in the school. \_\_\_\_\_ and his wife got married and a week later went to teach on another continent. \_\_\_\_\_ saw God's protection and his hand upon them in so many ways in life.

\_\_\_\_\_ has a set time for prayer and study. He uses scripture as a basis for prayer. He likes to use Paul's prayers as a guide for prayer. He prays for the church of Jesus Christ both locally and globally. He spends time praying for his family. He doesn't always pray specifically but likes to pray that God will work things out according to his will. He believes it should be done in God's way, his time and his jurisdiction. Lately he has become more aware of Pastors and has been praying for them. He prays for pastors to be more reliant upon the scriptures. He likes to pray for various mission organizations in China and Russia.

Three spiritual disciplines he practices most frequently are, 1) Reading the scriptures. 2) Prayer, communion with the Father, 3) Prayer for the fruit of the Spirit to be revealed in his life through the Holy Spirit. He wants to have the right words for the right people at the right time with the right attitude.

The most meaningful and important disciplines for \_\_\_\_\_ are the reading of scripture and prayer. This is more evident as he looks back over the years. He takes time to read the scriptures very carefully looking at concepts, words, sentence structure. \_\_\_\_\_ reads scripture with an eye to personalizing the message to instruct his own life.

In 1952 \_\_\_\_\_ began teaching a Bible class and it was a great source of growth in his own spiritual life. He taught Moody's book on Doctrine to mostly young married couples. Books on the Sudan Interior Mission and how the Ethiopian church developed during the time of the Italian occupation were very helpful. The Church began so small but through a time of persecution the church grew in numbers and strength. The Italians were brutal. Elders of the church were treated severely; one elder was lashed 400 times and thrown in prison for proselytizing. Their courage and faith inspired \_\_\_\_\_.

He has been influenced by the writings of R. C. Sproul, a reformed theologian. Other writers of significance; John Owen, a Puritan author. Dallas Willard has made a real impact on him in recent times. \_\_\_\_\_ believes that his conceptual framework of understanding scripture began when he was doing doctoral work.

His biggest frustration is his own inability to change his behavior patterns. He has had personal struggles, knowing what the scriptures teach but failing to live up to it. He realized that through submission to the scriptures with the power of the Holy Spirit he is able to change. He talked about his own trouble asking forgiveness based on how he sees himself before a holy God. \_\_\_\_\_ says, "To see my utter depravity and to see Christ on the cross leads me to a proper place of humility.

Where does God want me to grow? God wants me to develop a greater degree of sensitivity to certain areas where God would want me to function differently. It is only as the Holy Spirit enables me to be sensitive to this because humanly I cannot do it. Only the Holy Spirit can do this work in me. I need this in interaction with other people, I want God to touch others through my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ gave a bit of an illustration of this. His relative is not a Christian and is going through a difficult time. He is displaying symptoms of Bi-Polar disorder. The relative called to apologize about something and \_\_\_\_\_ wants to be sensitive and try to minister to this person. \_\_\_\_\_ wrote the relative a long letter to try and answer one of the relative's questions. \_\_\_\_\_ is using logic and knowledge to try and get the relative thinking.

\_\_\_\_\_ describes his relationship with the Lord as being intimate and thoughtful. This reflects how he understands his relationship with God. Scripture gives us a basis of what God is like. As he reads the Word, God's presence becomes evident. This has become more so since he focused on personalizing scripture. The Bible deals with concepts very specifically. The process of personalizing the scriptures is the key but is most difficult.

Instead of stating goals \_\_\_\_\_ is in a time of reflection due to aging and health concerns. He was a teacher but due to problems with his voice he is no longer able to



teach and I suppose his age means this is no longer a viable option. He is now looking at different ways of influencing one person at a time. He is very interested in a ministry to men. He likes the idea of a small group of men meeting, studying together, grappling with issues that arise from work, or business.

\_\_\_\_\_ is struggling with his limitations and a period of readjustment during this time of aging and diminished strength. He is interested in hospital visitation and trying to make an impact on people in his daily interactions.

He understands spiritual formation to mean to become more Christ like in our life style. It is a process beginning at conversion and follows the teaching of Paul in Romans 12:1-2 with us being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Reflecting on his journey \_\_\_\_\_ realizes he is very much a product of the culture and environment in which he was raised. The things taught and modeled in his childhood are deeply embedded in his life and personality. He has had a rich and varied experience with his travels and teaching. He would describe himself as a loner, very independent and that he doesn't really warm up to people quickly.

## Appendix C:

### *Retreat Evaluation*

1. Did you find the information in the brochure adequate and helpful in preparation for the day?
2. Did you find the instruction for *Lectio Divina* clear and helpful? How might it be improved?
3. What did you like most about the retreat?
4. What did you like least about the retreat?
5. What would you like to see changed for the next retreat?
6. Is there another spiritual discipline or emphasis you would like to experience at the next retreat?
7. Do you have any final comments for the organizers of the retreat?

## Appendix D: Spiritual Formation Sermon Series

### Sermon 1: SHAPED BY THE POTTER Jeremiah 18:1-6

Do people actually change? Is it possible for a person to change her/his basic nature? Is there even a need for change in my life; in your life? As you consider these questions let me start with a story from a movie I saw about a year ago:

*In the movie, “16 Blocks”, Bruce Willis plays Jack Mosley; a burned out, dishonest, cynical cop who drank too much. The inference is that his drinking is a crutch to cover up his guilty conscience and his need to change. Jack Mosley is asked to escort a petty thief from the lock up to the court house to testify in a case. Eddie Bunker (Mos Def) has had a few run-ins with the law but he is a man with dreams and hopes for the future. He plans to open his own bakery and specialize in cakes for special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries. In conversation with Jack (the cop), Eddy makes the comment that people can change for the better. Jack Mosley sarcastically replies; **“Dates change, seasons change but; people don’t change.”***

*Unfortunately, there are those who were attempting to stop the young man from testifying. Later in another scene, Eddie has eluded the bad cops and is on his way to the courthouse but changes his mind and goes back to help Jack. When he finds Jack he says “Chuck Berry has served time in jail and he changed, Barry White spent four months in jail and he changed, I can change.”*

*In the course of trying to protect the young man’s life Jack gradually begins to change. He actually starts to care about the young man and he realizes that he does care about the truth. Jack finally does the right thing. Jack, the burned out, cynical police officer testifies in court about the police corruption. He himself is implicated and goes to prison for two years. Jack is finally released from prison. The final scene in the movie shows Jack celebrating his birthday with a small group of family and friends. Suddenly, there is a special delivery; Jack opens a box to find a birthday cake. There was a simple inscription on the cake: **PEOPLE WHO CHANGED; CHUCK BERRY, BARRY WHITE, EDDIE BUNKER, JACK MOSLEY.***

Now, let me give you a qualified answer to my original question. Yes, people do change! Do people change themselves, I don’t think so. Let me explain using the wonderful picture described for us in today’s text. The Lord sends the prophet Jeremiah down to the Potter’s house to observe the Potter at work. The Lord says I am going to give you a message there at the Potter’s house. Jeremiah says, “So I went down to the Potter’s

house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the Potter formed it in to another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.” (Jeremiah 18:1-6) This is a wonderful passage of scripture which uses such vivid imagery that anyone can understand and comprehend the basic message. Jeremiah instantly understood the message. God is the Potter, Israel as a nation is the clay that becomes marred in the Potter’s hand. Israel has been unfaithful, she is a flawed and sinful group of people who have been disobedient to God and broken the covenant He made with her as a nation. Yet, the Lord says he is able to break the clay down, moisten it, and rework it into another vessel that will be beautiful and useful in His eyes. Now, let’s apply this passage of scripture to our own lives. There are some important points to be made from this brief passage. I want to give you a brief outline of my thoughts from this passage and this outline will guide my comments to you today:

- 1. God has a plan to shape and transform your life!**
- 2. Each of us is a mixture of good and bad. We are flawed.**
- 3. None of us can change our basic nature.**
- 4. The Holy Spirit is secretly at work shaping us to be more like Christ.**

Notice who is working the clay? It is the master potter, the artist and artisan who is at work shaping the clay. I have good news for you; God is at work in your life. God wants to be the Master-Potter shaping, changing, molding your life to become more like Christ. I will say more about the activity of the Holy Spirit in shaping and molding us a little later, for now let me encourage you to know that God is not aloof sitting in heaven waiting for you to screw up. God is alive and actively engaged in shaping and transforming our lives in the here and now if we recognize Him and if we allow Him. The editors of the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* write;

*God is busy molding, forming, pushing, and pulling Israel into shape, just as the potter shapes clay. God is not passive, but actively forming the community in unseen and unacknowledged but powerful ways.*

God is not passive, He is busy molding, forming, pushing us into shape, just as the potter shapes the clay. As I was looking for some pictures online of a potter working at the wheel I came across the following picture and comment by Donna Lear which spoke to me about God’s activity in our lives: Listen to what Donna had to say about her experience with the potter;

*Hands fascinate me. I find myself drawn first to someone's eyes and then their hands. I watched a potter demonstrate his craft, his hands alternately gentle or firm on the clay, molding it .. making it come alive. Watching him, the clay almost seemed to breathe. "Have you tried this?" he asked. "Yes," I told him, "long ago and I liked it very much." "Why did you stop?" "I liked the feel of the clay, making it rise or fall, expand or not. But I could never center it.. not even once." Working on a wheel, he told me, is as much physics as it is art. "Here... like this. If you make it deliberately off center first, it strives nearly on its own to be centered." **Somehow it made me think he was talking about more than clay.** (Donna Lear)*

Deep inside each of us is a innate desire to be centered in relationship with God. Each of us has a desire to be whole.

Why is God pushing, pulling and shaping us to change? Let me give you the secret, it is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter eight:

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*  
Romans 8:28-29 NIV

Eugene Peterson translates verse twenty-nine; “*God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.*” The bottom line is simply this, God is at work in our lives using every possible means to shape and change us to become more like His Son, Jesus Christ.

As we read the account in Jeremiah chapter eighteen we see that the clay was marred or spoiled in the potter’s hand. There was something wrong with the clay. Now, the clay wasn’t all bad. It was a mixture of good clay and some kind of imperfection. There may have been sticks or a stone in the clay that caused it to spoil the pot that was being made. Isn’t that also true of each of us; we are a strange mixture of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, kindness and self-centeredness, compassion and cynicism. The Bible is a book of paradoxes and we see very clearly that human beings are created in the image of God which is very good. Listen to the scriptures; “*So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*” (Genesis 1:27) In verse thirty-one of the same chapter we read, “*and God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*” So, we know human beings are good and that they are created or, stamped with the image of God, “the imago Dei.” The Psalmist said we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We also know that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and rebelled in the Garden of Eden they passed on to the human race a terrible flaw; God’s nature in us has been marred by a condition the Bible calls sin. In Romans 3:23 we read, “For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.” We have received this nature which makes human beings capable of the worst kind of atrocities. Is it not true that human beings are capable of the highest form of humanitarianism and kindness and yet, at the same time human beings are capable of the most heinous crimes against one another? This strange world we live in has given us a Mother Theresa of Calcutta and yet it has also given us an Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein. The Bible teaches there is a little of Mother Theresa and a little of Adolf Hitler in all of us. Let me give you an example. Some of you have heard of the Christian singer, song-writer Rich Mullins. You probably know that Rich was killed in an accident a few years ago. Rich was a wonderful, transparent Christian. He was also a very flawed human being like the rest of us as this next illustration shows;

*The late musician Rich Mullins taught me an invaluable lesson about the true meaning of repentance. One rainy day he got into a blistering argument with his road manager, Gay Quisenberry. Angry words were hurled back and forth, and Rich stormed out the door. Early the following morning, Gay was awakened from a sound sleep by the loud buzz of a motor outside her house. Groggy, she looked out and saw Rich mowing her lawn!*

Now let's take a moment and recap these important concepts in Jeremiah chapter eighteen:

- 1. God has a plan to shape and transform your life!**
- 2. Each of us is a mixture of good and bad. We are flawed.**
- 3. None of us can change our basic nature.**

If we accept the fact that we are a strange mixture of good and bad, and that we are basically flawed human beings we need to face another important truth. None of us can change our basic nature. You can't change or remove your sinful nature (the nasty side of you) any more than you can stop the sun from setting or the moon from rising. The clay on the potter's wheel has no inherent power or ability to make itself. It is absolutely dependent on an outside source to shape it and mold it and make it into a beautiful and useful vessel. The same is true of you and I. We cannot change ourselves or make ourselves into something that God desires. If God desires us to be like Jesus Christ how does one grow to be more like Christ? The Bible says our best efforts to change and be like Christ are quite pitiful. Listen to what the Bible says,

*We are all infected and impure with sin. When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are but filthy rags*  
Isaiah 64:6 NLT

Eugene Peterson translates them as "grease-stained" rags, the kind you would find in the back pocket of the neighborhood mechanic. Try as we might our self-help and efforts at character refinement are rather pathetic. It reminds me of golf. They tell us that with all of the incredible improvements in technology and equipment, the score of the average amateur is not getting any lower. Think about it, we have over-sized heads, titanium shafts, hybrid irons and woods and computer engineered equipment. You can have your swing analyzed by a computer to pick up every fault from front to back. You can go to a professional for lessons, you can get playing lessons from the pros on the Golf Channel, you can read thousands of golf tips online and in magazines, you can buy David Leadbetter's DVD's and watch them until the cows come home. The truth is, most of us will only be like Tiger Woods in our dreams. Tiger, Phil, V.J., and even Mike Weir are in a different league than the rest of us and no amount of self-effort is going to help us be like them. The Bible is clear, Jesus lives in a different spiritual realm than the rest of us and our meager attempts at being like him will fall pathetically short of the goal. We need outside help. We need the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to shape and change us. Let me be clear. I am not absolving us of all responsibility to change. I am not advocating some kind of passive Christianity. I am simply saying we need to find a different way of doing things. Another example might be found in a Capital One

commercial: One quick scene in the ad gives us a spiritual metaphor. As the barbarians charge past one store clerk at the perfume counter, she sprays perfume on them. Trying to civilize a horde of bloodthirsty barbarians, to get rid of their foul aroma, with a few squirts of perfume, is what we are doing when we hope to transform ourselves by squirting our lives with a little religion. Religion cannot change the barbarian at the heart of every person. Let's return to the story of the potter shaping the clay on the potter's wheel. When the clay collapsed and broke down on the potter's wheel the potter didn't give up on the clay and throw it away and start over. Rather, the potter began to work with the clay again. He moistened it and shaped it and began to fashion a completely new vessel with the same piece of clay. That is exactly what the Lord wants to do with you and I. Let's recap these steps on last time:

1. **God has a plan to shape and transform your life!**
2. **Each of us is a mixture of good and bad. We are flawed.**
3. **None of us can change our basic nature.**
4. **The Holy Spirit is secretly at work shaping us to be more like Christ.**

In the beginning of this message I shared a quote from the Renovare Bible that tells us God is not passive but that He is actively working behind the scenes of our lives to transform us and change us into the likeness of Christ. It might be difficult for us to fully comprehend but God is more interested in changing us than He is in making us comfortable. I believe it is possible to arrange our lives for transformation. As I have said, it is important to note that it doesn't mean we are passive. It simply means instead of trying to change our lives by mere self effort we need to learn to open ourselves to God and put ourselves in a place where we can be more attentive to the God who is already at work behind the scenes in the presence of the Holy Spirit. I am here to give you a resounding yes to the question; "Can people change?" Yes, people can change but real change, lasting change only comes when God the Holy Spirit is released to work in our lives. Philip Yancey recounts the story of a prostitute who has been brought into the kingdom of God:

*Juanita, for example, was sold into sexual slavery by her own mother at the age of four. While other children went to school, she worked in a brothel, earning for her mother the higher rates paid for young girls. Eventually she had two children of her own, whom her mother took from her. With no education and no other skills, she continued working in the brothel, in the process becoming addicted to alcohol and cocaine. One day a customer grew enraged when she wouldn't do what he asked, and hit her on the head with a baseball bat. She lay in a hospital bed, desperate. "I got on my knees and pled with God. I wanted somehow to escape prostitution, to become a real mother to my children. And God gave me a vision. He said, 'Look for Rahab Foundation.' I didn't even know the word Rahab." She found the organization's phone number, though, and a few days later Juanita showed up, bruised and bandaged, at Rahab's door. "I need help," she said, sobbing. "I'm dying. I can't take it anymore." A kindly woman named Mariliana took her in and told her about God's love. "I couldn't believe the hope on Mariliana's face," Juanita recalled. "She smiled and hugged me. She gave me a clean bed, flowers in the room, and a promise that no men would harass me.*

*She taught me how to be a real mother, and now I am studying a trade to live for the glory of God."*

Yes, people can change. As I close the message I want to return to the theme I started with. Remember the scene in the movie Sixteen Blocks. There is Jack Mosley celebrating his birthday and he receives a special delivery. Upon opening the parcel he discovers the Birthday cake with the inscription; **PEOPLE WHO CHANGED: CHUCK BERRY, BARRY WHITE, EDDIE BUNKER, JACK MOSLEY.** And if you look very close I think you can see another name inscribed on that cake. The Holy Spirit is working to inscribe your name there. People who changed; people who were transformed, now look closely and you will see your name. Let me leave you with a wonderful Bible verse:

*"Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand"* (Isaiah 64:8 NIV).

## **Sermon 2:**

### **WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?**

#### **2 Corinthians 3:1-18**

What do you want to be when you grow up? Everyone loves little babies. Everyone wants little babies to grow and mature and become responsible adults. When we come to faith in Christ we are like spiritual babies. The Lord loves spiritual babies and treats them with grace and compassion. When babies say silly, immature things we find it cute. When adults act like babies it is no longer cute, it can be quite discouraging. Someone sent me an email outlining some of the things children say in church:

#### **KIDS IN CHURCH**

3-year-old Reese:

"Our Father, Who does art in heaven,  
Harold is His name. Amen."

A little boy was overheard praying:

"Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it.  
I'm having a real good time like I am."

After the christening of his baby brother in church,

Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car.

His father asked him three times what was wrong.

Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

One particular four-year-old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets." A Sunday school teacher asked her children as they were on the way to church service, "And why is it



necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

A father was at the beach with his children when the four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore where a seagull lay dead in the sand. "Daddy, what happened to him?" the son asked. "He died and went to Heaven," the Dad replied. The boy thought a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back down?"

A wife invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

These childish outbursts may be funny but, the Lord doesn't want us to remain spiritual babes indefinitely. I have known people who have been believers and have been involved in church life and church activities for decades and yet they are still "babes in Christ." This is not God's plan. Let me ask another question: ***"What does God want you to be when you grow up?"*** ***Have you given this any thought?*** This brings me to the first point of this message today:

## **1. GOD WANTS YOU TO BE LIKE CHRIST!**

It is the intention and plan of God to shape us and change us until we start living and acting like Jesus Christ. God is not interested in religious people, he is not even primarily interested in good people who go to church every Sunday. Not that it is a bad thing to be good and go to church. Rather, God has a more radical, revolutionary plan for your life. His plan is to use every possible means available and every situation in your life and my life to make us more like Jesus Christ. The following scriptures remind us of the incredible plan God has for us:

- *"... he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son..."* (Romans 8:29 NIV)
- *"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."* (Galatians 4:19 NIV)
- *"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."* (1 John 2:6 NIV)
- *"And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him (Jesus) and reflect his glory even more."* (2 Cor. 3:18 NLT)
- *"... But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."* (1 John 3:2 NIV)

In case you are still in doubt, let me reassure you, it is God's direct intention to transform your life until your character and your lifestyle reflects the lifestyle and character of Jesus Christ. Some people have completely misunderstood and misrepresented Christianity. Some have said; God wants you to be healed. God wants you to be healthy. God wants you to be wealthy. God wants you to be prosperous. This is not the primary mission of God at all! I do not doubt that God heals people. I do not doubt that God still prospers people from time to time. But, that is not the primary mission and goal of the Lord for your life. His primary goal is that you become more like His Son. Jesus made an incredible statement: ***“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...”*** What did Jesus mean by that statement. Dallas Willard has said that every follower of Jesus should become an apprentice of Jesus. What does it mean to be an apprentice? Apprenticeship is ***“on the job training.”*** When I decided I wanted to follow in my dad's footsteps and become a bricklayer I went to Vocational School and studied for two years. I studied the theory of bricklaying. I studied codes and different methods of laying bricks and block. We did some practice bricklaying in the shop but it wasn't the same as real construction work. When I graduated from school and went to work with my dad I began apprenticeship. It was on the job training. I could watch a master brick layer at work. I saw real life situations and construction jobs up close and personal. All of the book learning I had done in school and the practice bricklaying didn't really prepare me for the real world of construction. I watched, I observed my dad do his job. He watched me as I took my first faltering steps of laying bricks. In the first few weeks I was rather arrogant and thought I really knew something. It wasn't long before I humbly acknowledged that I had much to learn from someone who was a master practitioner. It is only as you and I really get to know Jesus and spend time with him in the Gospels and spend time with him in relationship that we begin to see his manner of life and his way of being that is so different from anything we learned in life. Dallas Willard writes in; *The Spirit of the Disciplines*;

*My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing – by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.*

The next important question we need to ask ourselves is, “What was Jesus like?” If we are going to pattern our lives after Jesus to become like him we need to know what kind of a person he was when he walked on this earth. This brings us to the second point of this message:

## **2. WHAT WAS JESUS LIKE?**

How will we know what Jesus was like if we do not study his life and spend time observing his every move? In the next few moments I want us to think about the life of Jesus. This is an enormous subject and I will limit my discussion to six characteristics in the life of Jesus we should seek to emulate.

- ***He was like us*** – First, we see that Jesus was a man. He was human, he lived, he loved, he laughed, he cried just like the rest of us. Jesus knew what it was to feel hungry, exhausted, betrayed, frustrated, angry, joyful, and sad. He had every range of human emotion and feelings that you and I have. He is able to sympathize and empathize with our human condition. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are –yet was without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:15) **To be like Jesus is not to be perfect but, to be truly human. It means being a real person with real needs and struggles just like everyone else.**
- ***He was incarnational*** – (Philippians 2:5-8) We see Jesus emptying himself of power, prestige, honor and omnipotence to become small enough to enter our world. To be found in appearance as a man is the greatest self-emptying act the God of the universe could perform. This humility is the opposite of pride and arrogance. You can only be like Jesus if you are willing to humble yourself and truly enter the world of those you are trying to reach with the Gospel. *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* Phillipians 2:5-8. **To be like Christ is to empty-yourself of selfishness and self-seeking for the sake of others.**
- ***He was a servant*** – Jesus style of leadership was radically different than the world in which he entered. I might add, it is radically different than our world too. On one of the last evenings Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion he taught them a lesson they would never forget. We find the account in John 13. Jesus got up from the supper table, took off his outer garments wrapped a towel around his waist and got down on his knees and washed his disciples feet. This was a menial task usually reserved for slaves. In doing so Jesus established what true leadership in the kingdom of God was like. *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* John 13:15-17 **If you really want to be like Jesus, learn to be a servant to your family, your co-workers, your friends, your neighbors and your brothers and sisters in Christ.**
- ***He was loving*** – Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians; *“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...”* (Ephesians 5:1-2) Every deed of kindness, every person Jesus healed, every outcast and sinner he forgave was an act of love. This love found its ultimate expression in the crucifixion where Jesus gave the supreme sacrifice for you and I in love. Jesus was truly authentic. He not only preached, he embodied the things he was teaching. One Hindu professor in India once identified one of his students as a Christian and said to him, ***If you Christians lived like Jesus Christ, India would be at your feet tomorrow.*** From the Islamic world, the Reverend Iskandar Jadeed, a former Arab Muslim, has

said, *“If all Christians were Christians, that is, Christlike – there would be no more Islam today.”*

**To be like Christ is to be authentic and to embody the teachings of Christ. In other words, to practice what you preach!**

Let me share with you an example of the kind of sacrificial love I am talking about:

*After ten years of marriage, Cindy and Chip Altemos were in the long process of getting a divorce. The proverbial baggage they brought from previous marriages seemed too great to overcome, so they separated and even agreed to date other people. Five years into the painful separation, Chip was in the hospital with kidney failure. With his health deteriorating rapidly, his soon-to-be ex-wife came to his aid—in spite of Chip's being in another relationship at the time. "He was still my husband. There was no way I could walk around with two kidneys, and he had none," Cindy told the press. "It was the right thing to do." She agreed to donate a kidney, telling Chip there were no strings attached—no written agreement concerning a better share in divorce court. The transplant took place on February 21, 2007, and a funny thing happened as they both recovered in the hospital: they fell back in love. Chip thought to himself, Why would I want to date someone else, when I have a woman who would give part of herself so I can keep living? He put an end to his other relationship and asked Cindy to come back home with him. The two will be married 17 years in October.*

Sam McKee, Sunnyvale, California; source: Associated Press, "Kidney Saves Marriage," [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com) (5-6-07)

### **3. HOW CAN WE BECOME LIKE JESUS?**

There is one final, very important question. How in the world can you and I ever live lives that are like Jesus? Do you feel overwhelmed by this proposal? Do you feel as **completely inadequate** as I do? If you do, be of good cheer, you are not alone. The good news is, we can't live like this on our own. We cannot become like Jesus through sheer **self-effort** and will power. We need a power greater than ourselves to come and live in us and empower us to be more like Christ. John Stott talks about this in a wonderful sermon on Christlikeness. He quotes William Temple, former Archbishop who said; **“It is no good to give me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and tell me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it – I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it – I can't. But, if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like this. And if the Spirit of Christ could come into me, then I could live a life like His.”**

The good news is found in the passage of scripture read in our service this morning. In fact this passage is replete with encouragement for would be Christ-Followers. Paul begins 2 Corinthians chapter three telling the Corinthian believers that their very testimony of being in Christ was a result of the power of the Spirit of the Living God coming upon them. Paul claimed that the competence of the Apostles was not their own brilliance or giftedness but because the Spirit of God was alive in them. The Old

Testament ministry of trying to keep the Commandments contained a certain amount of the glory and power of God. But, Paul went on to say that believers in Christ are not following the old way of keeping the law. Now, **the Spirit of the living God** is actively involved in our lives. He said wherever the Spirit of God is there is freedom. He concludes this amazing section by stating; *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* Once again we see the Trinitarian nature of the Gospel. God the Father planned from before the creation of the world to send his Son to this earth to demonstrate the love of God and provide salvation for all mankind. Jesus returned to the right hand of the Father and sent his Holy Spirit into the world and into the hearts of his followers to empower them to live like Christ and carry out his mission on earth. It is an **ongoing work of transformation**.

*“What Jesus longs to see in radical disciples is what he saw in little children: a spirit of sheer receptivity, utter dependence, and radical reliance on the power and mercy and grace of God mediated through the Spirit of Christ. “Apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)*  
Brennan Manning

### **SERMON 3:**

#### **“ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL”**

Romans 12:1-13 (pt. 1)

I want to ask you a few questions this morning. How many of you prefer sitting quietly and listening to classical orchestra music? How many of you prefer loud music with a strong beat and lots of electronic instruments and drums (Christian or secular)? How many of you prefer listening to Country Music? How many of you don’t really like music at all? How many of you love participating in and watching competitive sports like hockey, baseball, basketball, soccer, football etc.? How many of you can’t even understand people who get involved in the hype, the competition and the violence of organized sports? How many of you love to take long walks in nature enjoying the solitude and find that it refreshes your soul? How many of you are thrilled with a great piece of art work? How many of you can’t understand people who enjoy spending hours looking at art or spending time in the quiet solitude of nature? How many of you love adventure, fast cars, powerful machinery and living on the edge? How many of you are terrified at the very thought of such things? How many of you feel a day at home curled up reading a good book is a treat? How many of you think that spending a day exploring new terrain on a four wheeler until you are covered in mud from head to toe is an awesome experience? I could go on but I hope you are getting the picture. I simply want to show how different or diverse we are. We have different tastes, different likes and different personalities.

In Romans chapter 12 Paul talks to Christians about their place in the body of Christ. He talks about some of the different gifts people have and how they should make a sober judgment about their own abilities and gifts. Paul even describes some of the gifts that people have and how they should serve. I want to share a few of the verses from Romans 12. First let's look at these verses in the New Living Translation:

*As God's messenger, I give each of you this warning: Be honest in your estimate of yourselves, measuring your value by how much faith God has given you. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well.*

*Romans 12:3-6*  
NLT

I really like how Eugene Peterson renders the last part of Romans 12:5 and 6:

*So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, **let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be**, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or **trying to be something we aren't**.*

*Romans 12:5b-6 TMB*

I believe the emphasis of the first eight verses of Romans 12 is this; **we are to give ourselves completely to God as living sacrifices as best we can, and we should find ways to serve God that match with our personalities and gifts.** I could launch into a talk about finding your spiritual gifts and using them to serve the Lord and his church but I want to talk about something else. In fact this is a big subject and I want to take this Sunday and next Sunday to discuss it.

In the past few years I have become more and more convinced that there are several different personality types in our churches. Because we are so different one specific approach to spirituality will not work for everyone. While I firmly believe that each of us are called to Spiritual Transformation which leads us on to Christlikeness; I am even more convinced we each need to adopt spiritual disciplines that fit our personality and make up. God has created us with differences and spiritual practices which work for one person may not work for everyone.

In my early years as a Christian I was reading the biographies of many of the great saints of the church. I labored constantly trying to emulate these great Christians. I could begin to list some of the people whose lives impacted mine. I would mention people like Hudson Taylor, Praying Hide, Brother Bevington, Savanarola, David Brainard, John & Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, George Mueller, George Whitefield, Billy Graham, Dawson Trotman, Jim Elliot, Mother Theresa, Theresa of Avilla, Henry Nouwen.... on and on I could go. The problem was, I could never quite live up to these great saints or be just like them. *I have good news for you; God doesn't want me or you*

to be like anyone else. He wants us to be ourselves. He wants you to be the best you, you can be. Listen to Paul's words again;

***let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.***

Romans 12:5b-6 TMB

It has taken me a long time but I have a better understanding of my personality and it has helped me accept myself and be very content with the way God has made me. I want to take a few moments this morning and talk about personality. Your personality type will really determine how you approach spirituality. It is important that you understand yourself and that you understand why others approach God and spirituality differently than you do. There are many ways to approach this subject but I want to attempt to do this in a way that is fairly easy to understand. I have been doing quite a bit of research and I have found the Myers-Briggs Personality Type indicator to be very helpful but, it would take at least a one day seminar to help you understand your personality with Myers-Briggs. Instead I want to share a model with you that is fairly simple and easy to grasp. Some authors have discovered four basic types of spirituality one of which will appeal to you based on your personality type. I am going to rely quite heavily on the work of John Ackerman and Corrine Ware who have written excellent books on this subject. Let's look at the four types of spirituality:

## **THE FOUR TYPES OF SPIRITUALITY:**

### **1. Thinking Spirituality:**

This group favors sermons, lectures, and study. Content and a coherent way of thinking about God and things of the spirit is important. Prayer is verbal, written prayers are often preferred. This group of people favours what they can see, touch, and vividly imagine. The content of theology and belief is very important to this group. They make major contributions in the area of theology, education and written publications. This group wants everything done decently and in order in church worship services. A common danger of this group is to become too dogmatic about their beliefs. They sometimes over-intellectualize, with one's ideas about God replacing the reality of the presence of God. Theological discussion comes easy and natural with this group but the danger is that it can become merely a "head trip," if these people are not careful. A growing edge for this group of people is to learn to enjoy God, to be with God in solitude without having to be productive or get anything done. People who are the Thinking types should grow by functioning in their opposite quadrant. This might mean solitude, meditation and contemplative prayer.

### **2. Feeling Spirituality:**

These people want to get to know God with their feelings. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches around the world are dominated by this group of people. For

those in this group the presence of God is felt. There is movement in the heart. People generally tell stories of God working dramatically in their lives with results that touch the heart. This group loves to talk about the transformation of life and personal renewal leading to holiness. While Thinking people may argue; “My doctrine is purer than yours,” Feeling types counter with, “My walk with the Lord is closer than yours.” These folks tend to emphasize personal evangelism and sharing the experience through testimony. This group stresses the immanent presence of God. In other words, God is right here in our midst and you can feel him. Prayer is more extemporaneous and personal, less formal than the Thinking types. Their contribution to the whole is the warmth of feeling, energy, and freedom of expression some of the others lack. One danger of this group is they can be too emotional. Also, a weakness is wishing everyone’s heart to be “strangely warmed” like theirs. The problem with identifying the presence of God with an emotional state is the danger to think God has abandoned them when the emotions are not there. There is also a danger of becoming exclusive and feeling it is us against the world. The growing edge for this group is to focus on the opposite quadrant and be obedient to God by “doing” God’s will and finding God in the ordinary. These people need permission to be human (According to Corinne Ware). One author recommends this group follow the prayer of *examen* developed by Ignatius of Loyola. This type of prayer helps a person look for God’s presence or absence in the daily routine of life.

### 3. **Being Spirituality:**

Some call these type of people the “mystics.” These Christians are contemplative, their experience of God is not necessarily emotional or intellectual. They find it easy to be with God and just spend time with God. They may talk about listening to God, or wondering at God’s creation or just enjoying being with people. These people aren’t always interested in theology or ideas about God, to them God is not really concrete but mysterious. Their theme verse might be, “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10) Often this group feels they are more advanced in their knowledge of God than others. These people may want to stay in a state of contemplation all the time and sometimes find it hard to relate to ordinary people. One author says, people attracted to this type of spirituality are often by nature contemplative, introspective, intuitive, and focused on their inner world as real to them as the exterior one. Hearing from God is more important than speaking to God. These people make a great contribution to the whole by writing, publishing and reminding us of the mystery, giving us an incredible sense of the holy, otherness of God. A danger for this group is to be too detached and unrealistic in their beliefs. Their growing edge may be actually appreciating how God can use other types. One danger is for this group to center so much on their spiritual practices of prayer and centering that the practice sometimes replaces the experience of God. Another danger of this group is a retreat from reality and having little interaction with the world. They need to learn how to be “contemplatives in action.”



#### 4. Doing Spirituality:

These people are the spiritual activists. They have a passion for transforming society, for social justice, or for acts of compassion. Frequently, these people say they have no time for quiet prayer, but practice the presence of God as they are working to usher in the “Kingdom of God.” Dorothy Ware says this is likely the smallest group of people in many of our churches. This group doesn’t go out crusading to change the world simply driven by duty; they actually do it just for the joy of doing it. These people will generally say they find God or, feel close to God when they are doing something kind for someone else or when they are making a difference in the world. The chief weakness of this group may be superficiality and a lack of development in spiritual life. They are not likely attracted to prayer meetings or retreats but they will be the ones signing up to build houses for Habitat for humanity, helping the homeless, serving in soup kitchens or, taking up the cause of oppressed people. Corrine Ware writes, “Theirs is a courageous and sturdy idealism that takes responsibility for change; they have a passion for transforming society.” This group tends to be assertive, even aggressive. There is a danger for this group to be too moralistic and are in danger of having tunnel vision. The growing edge for this group is to be more patient with others and to realize that God is in control and they do not need to be so driven.

You may see yourself in more than one quadrant of this model of four types of spirituality, that’s normal. But, the truth is you will likely be drawn to one type more than others. We do not study personality type so that we can pigeon hole ourselves or other people, or so that we can smugly judge others. Corrine Ware is very helpful at this point;

*Rather, the typology shows that we all have tendencies toward certain ways of living out our spirituality and that our growing edge is the tension placed on us by “the other.”*

(Corrine Ware, Discover Your Spiritual Type)

Because of the personality God has given us we have certain preferences that are natural. Let me give you a homely little illustration. Pick up a pen or pencil and write your name. Did you have to think about which hand you were going to write with? My guess is you automatically pick up the pencil in your dominant hand and write your name without even thinking about it. It comes naturally to you. Now, pick up the pencil in your opposite hand and write your name. How does it feel? It feels awkward doesn’t it? It doesn’t feel natural and you have to carefully think about what you are doing. I am right handed and when I try to write with my left hand it feels awkward and the results are pretty much illegible. The same is true of personality. You are created in the image of God and it is time you accepted the personality God has given you. In fact I would say it is time to rejoice in the fact that you are “fearfully and wonderfully” made. I want to close this message with the words of the Apostle Paul to the Roman Christians:

***Let’s just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or***

*trying to be something we aren't.*

Romans 12:5b-6 TMB

**SERMON 4****ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL (part 2)**

Psalm 139:1-18

Last week I talked with you about personality and spirituality. We talked about four spiritual types generally found in churches. I want to continue on this theme today and did a little deeper into our basic personality types. I also want to ground the things I am saying in scripture. Psalm 139 is a beautiful Hebrew poem which speaks of how intimately God is involved in each of our lives. I have a word from God for every one of you. You are not an accident? Your existence and your destiny were determined by God even before you came into this world! What's more, God takes special delight in you! God is crazy about you! God is the person in your corner who champions your cause. Listen to these amazing words in Psalm 139:13-18 NLT:

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body  
and knit me together in my mother's womb.  
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!  
Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it.  
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,  
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.  
You saw me before I was born.  
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.  
Every moment was laid out  
before a single day had passed.  
How precious are your thoughts about me, O God!  
They are innumerable!  
I can't even count them;  
they outnumber the grains of sand!  
And when I wake up in the morning,  
you are still with me!*

It is incredible to think that God was there when microscopic cells began to knit themselves together in your mother's womb. That God saw you while you were still a fetus and said all he had made was very good. That before you were born God had an amazing plan for your life to have meaning and purpose. That God has so many loving thoughts about you that you couldn't even begin to count them all. Let's look at a verse in the New Testament that affirms Psalm 139:

*Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.*

(Ephesians 1:4 MSB)

Before God laid down the earth's foundations, he had you in mind and you as the focus of his love. The trouble is for many of us it is so difficult to hear this at a deep spiritual and emotional level. We have been told all our lives that God loves us yet, even most evangelicals still live as if we somehow have to earn God's approval. I have a news flash for you, you don't have to do one thing. God is crazy about you. In fact he designed you, you are exactly the model he wanted. He doesn't have to kick the tires or anything, he takes one look at you and says, **MINE!**

Last week I said that we find these four basic types of spiritual people in the church of Jesus Christ. Now, I must be careful not to push this analogy too far but I don't think it is too great a stretch to see that though each of us are to love God fully certain functions of this four fold loving will come easier to us based on our personality type.

After sharing these scriptures with you I want to come back to talking about personality. A number of people have asked me to send the notes of last week and it seemed to really raise some curiosity. The trouble is, some of you said you couldn't find yourselves fitting neatly into any of the four categories I shared last week. For that reason I am going to bravely (or stupidly) venture into a brief discussion of Myers-Briggs Personality Type indicator to see if I can help you identify yourself a little more readily.

The type indicator helps people understand their natural preferences. These preferences are part of who we are in the same way as we discover we are either left handed or right handed. It is very important for us to understand that while there are different personality types; no one type is better than another, they are simply different. Also, while you may see some of your traits that cross over into another type you will still have a default position or, you have natural preferences. We will discover that there are basically sixteen personality types through combinations of the following character traits:

- How we are energized. (Extroversion or Introversion)
- How we perceive the world around us. (Sensing or Intuition (N))
- How we make decisions. (Thinking or Feeling)
- How we choose to live our outer lives. (Judging or Perceiving)

Let's look at these a little closer at how we are energized;

***Extraverts** are energized through contact with other people or through engaging in activities.*

***Introverts** are energized through the world of ideas, pulling back from activities to allow time for thought and reflection.*

Next, how we perceive the world around us;

**Sensing** types pay attention to what they perceive through their five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.

**Intuitive (N)** types pay attention to what might be described as their sixth sense – the unseen world of meanings, inferences, hunches, insights, and connections.

Third, we examine how we make decisions;

**Thinking** types base their decisions on impartial criteria – cause-effect reasoning, constant principles or truths, and logical analysis.

**Feeling** types consider the impact of their decisions on people – their needs and those of others, the values to be served, and circumstantial or community variables.

The final group examines how we choose to live our outer lives;

**Judging** types like to order their lives – plan ahead, wrap things up, and accomplish set goals.

**Perceiving** types like to live life as it unfolds – keep their options open and enjoy what comes along.

I want to take this a little further to help you identify your personality type. Consider the following word pairs as you try to determine your preference: As we work through this try and pick one type from each column that shows your preference. For instance if you think you are an extrovert give yourself an E. If you are an Extrovert who is sensing you will have an ES etc.

**A word of caution:**

1. Understanding personality type is only a tool that will help some people but not likely all people. Millions of saints have been following Christ for centuries without it. We are not trying to replace the Holy Spirit.
2. No one type is better than another, there are no right and wrong types only different.
3. Be careful you don't fall into the trap of "BLM." BLM stands for Be Like Me. At our deepest levels we feel that if everyone could just Be Like Me the world would be a better place. (Pastor from Ottawa)
4. Don't use personality as an excuse not to grow; "God made me like this and you are just going to have to deal with it.

Mark Pearson from the Institute for Christian Renewal, writes;

*When God goes to work making us holier people, He does not destroy the personality we have. He transforms it... The Peter of the Gospels is spiritually immature. (He regularly had hoof and mouth disease, he blurted out when he should have kept his mouth shut and made promises he couldn't keep) But in the Acts of the Apostles, by which time the Holy Spirit has accomplished some spiritual growth in Peter, we don't suddenly find an introvert mystic. God didn't give Peter a different personality. God improved the personality he had already given him... God says to you and to me: "My child, I gave you this personality as my special gift. I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Just as your eye color and the shape of your ears are a part of how I made you, so is your personality. It is something I gave you; thus, there is no personality type that is better or worse than another. Any personality type can be used for my glory or can be an expression of rebellion to me. Yes, you have misused it. You need to come to Me for forgiveness and you need to let the Holy Spirit mature you. Yes, it has been wounded because of the sin of others. I don't want to give you a different personality. If you were supposed to have a different personality, I would have given you that one in the first place. **What I want to do is make you a better version of who you already are.***

Depending on our personalities we experience a relationship with God in different ways. Some people find their relationship with God is most enhanced by being with others studying the Bible and sharing the Christian faith. Some people are totally drawn to the world of ideas and concepts and a systematic logical approach to the faith. Some people feel closest to God by being alone and dwelling in the interior world of silent prayer, reading, journaling or just being quiet in God's presence. Some people feel closest to God by spending time in the concrete real world of nature or doing practical mundane tasks of service. Some people are content to accept the mystery of God and the universe and really enjoy "Being still and knowing that God is God" (Psalm 46:10). Others are filled with a holy restlessness and feel closest to God when addressing issues of injustice; they need a cause to champion for Christ. Each of these personality types will need to grow in their area of weakness but it is so refreshing when people begin to realize God created them uniquely with the personality and preferences they have. When people are free to grow in relationship with God according to their God given bent they will develop more into the person God intended them to be all along. I close with an illustration from the life of Mike Yaconelli. Yaconelli was a pastor for many years, he was a minister to students, he owns and co-founded Youth Specialties, is the former editor of a magazine and an author. What you may not know is, Mike felt like a complete failure. He had no training as a minister. He was unordained because he never went to Bible College or seminary. His uneducated past bothered other people but it bothered Mike just as much. Once he was invited to speak in Oregon at a Minister's retreat for Seventh Day Adventist's. In talking to over one hundred and fifty pastors he was honest about the frustrations of pastoral ministry. He talked about the loneliness and isolation he felt. People were really resonating with his remarks. Many times he referred to his lack of education and the fact that he was not ordained. After he finished his talks the leaders came forward and asked him to stay, they had a gift for him. He wondered if it would be another T-shirt. The state director said, "Mike, you have spent the entire weekend

apologizing for your lack of training. You have constantly referred to yourself as a K-Mart minister and reminded us you were not a real minister because you weren't ordained. Well, you are Wrong, Mike, because you have ministered to us this week-end. While you've been speaking we have been in touch with our national headquarters, and as far as we know, this has never been done before, but we want to ordain you in the Seventh Day Adventist Church!" There was stunned silence, everyone in the room looked shocked, then one hundred fifty people came forward and laid hands on Mike and ordained him.

I believe there are people here today who have felt like second class Christians. You have berated yourself because you are not as spiritual as others. You have derided yourself because you don't feel good enough or worthy enough to be used by God. I am here to affirm you today and to say, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. I urge you, I encourage you to spend some time getting to know yourself and the personality God has given you so that you can go ahead and be the best you, you can be. You will grow spiritually as you begin to accept yourself and as you begin to love God in a manner consistent with your personality. You don't have to be like others. In closing today would you join me by standing and repeating these words from Psalm 139 as a benediction:

**Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!  
Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it.**

(Psalm 139:14 NLT)

**SERMON 5:  
READING FOR RELATIONSHIP**  
Psalm 1:1-6

Within the Baptist tradition there has always been a strong emphasis on living a devotional life. Influenced by both Anglican and Puritan tradition there has been an emphasis on spirituality marked by private prayer, scripture reading/memorization and, a general piety of life. This is evident in a wonderful statement written as a Collect (prayer) in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer;

*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Baptists have been known as people of the Book. Today I want to talk with you about the importance of reading the scriptures in your own personal life.

The text for today's sermon is Psalm 1. This Psalm promises a blessing to those who avoid ungodly counsel. But, more importantly the Psalmist proclaims a blessing on those who delight in God's Word;

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers (Psalm 1:2-3 NIV).*

Eugene Peterson renders these verses in a slightly different way but I think it should grab our attention:

<sup>1</sup>How well God must like you—  
 you don't hang out at Sin Saloon,  
 you don't slink along Dead-End Road,  
 you don't go to Smart-Mouth College.  
<sup>2</sup>Instead you thrill to GOD's Word,  
 you chew on Scripture day and night.  
<sup>3</sup>You're a tree replanted in Eden,  
 bearing fresh fruit every month,  
 Never dropping a leaf,  
 always in blossom.

Let me talk with you a few moments about what it is like to delight in God's word. Imagine, God promises a wonderful blessing to the person who reads the scriptures. He blesses those who meditate upon the scriptures, and memorize the scriptures. In fact he talks about a blessing for those who delight in God's word. God wants his people to have a deep love for the Bible, the Word of God.

Let me give you a little testimony. When I finally surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus Christ I was twenty years of age, the Lord gave me an instant love for his word. No one really explained this; I just fell in love with the Word of God. Somehow I knew intuitively this was God's special word given directly to me and I expected to hear God speak to me through his word.

I have a confession to make, I became an addict. I couldn't get enough of the Word of God. I would go to bed at night with my Bible and read into the wee hours of the morning. In fact many times I would awaken at four am with my light still on and my Bible open on the bed. When I went away to Bible College I took this little King James Bible my church family gave me as a gift. (I brought the Bible with me today) I quickly found the designated prayer room in my dorm and I would visit it frequently. I spent a great deal of time on my knees with the Bible open in front of me. I don't think I could

have articulated what was happening at the time but, now I would say I was “Reading for Relationship.” It wasn’t really Bible Study and it wasn’t really reading to get knowledge of the scriptures as much as it was reading to get to know God the author of the scriptures.

Marjorie Thompson gives some insight into what this type of reading is like;

*Imagine for a moment that you have just received a handwritten letter from a dear friend who lives at a great distance and from whom you have not heard in a long while. What would you anticipate about this letter? Where would you like to be when you open it? Perhaps you can imagine settling into your favorite easy chair or finding a quiet and secluded spot outdoors – a place where you can set aside the unfinished tasks of your busy life and enter into the world of your friend’s letter. Eagerness for news could tempt you to devour each page as quickly as possible, yet the sheer delight of spending precious time in your friend’s company might compel you to slow down, savoring the words, phrases, and images written specifically for you. In them you discover how it is with one who is dear to your heart, what she or he is thinking, experiencing, and questioning. Here are words that bring a sense of your friend’s presence vividly into your life.*

I would like to suggest that there is a way to read the Bible that is unlike what many of us have been taught. Many of us have been taught to read the Bible for information or, we are trying to understand the text and the context of what has been written. There is a place for this kind of reading the text but, I want to suggest that reading for relationship is one of the most important ways we can approach the text of scripture. Again, let me share the words of Marjorie Thompson;

*The manner of spiritual reading is like drinking in the words of a love letter or pondering the meaning of a poem. It is not like skittering over the surface of a popular magazine or plowing through a computer manual. We are seeking not merely information but formation.*

One author commenting on Psalm 139 writes;

*Perhaps when we meditate with such a psalm we become aware that our task is not so much to master the text of scripture as to be mastered by the Source of that text.*

In her book, *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton, writes;

*When we engage the Scriptures for spiritual transformation, on the other hand, we engage not only for our mind but also our heart, our emotions, our body, our curiosity, our imagination and our will. We open ourselves to a deeper level of understanding and insight that grows out of and leads us deeper into our personal relationship with the One behind the text. And it is in the context of*



*relational intimacy that real life change takes place... When we engage the Scriptures for spiritual transformation, we make it our top priority to listen to God relationally rather than seeking only to learn more about God cognitively.*

I would like to challenge you to take time to approach the scriptures in this wonderfully devotional way. Here is what I am going to ask you to do.

- 1. Give yourself permission to sit and leisurely read the Bible. (A half-hour to an hour)**
- 2. Find your most comfortable place to sit, with Bible and, your favorite tea if you like.**
- 3. Choose a brief passage of scripture, a story, a parable, a teaching of Jesus or Paul for example. (Make sure it isn't any longer than 5-10 verses)**
- 4. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, become aware of your breathing. Pray that God will give you an open heart to hear what He wants to say to you.**
- 5. Slowly, meditatively read the passage taking note of any word or phrase that catches your attention.**
- 6. Ask one of the following questions; "What is in my life that needed to hear this word today? Or, "Where am I in this text?"**
- 7. Take a few moments and allow prayer to come from your heart to God. Is God calling you to any action?**
- 8. Take a few moments and rest in quiet and solitude not trying to do anything but be still.**

This is an informal way of reading the scriptures by listening to God and wanting to grow in a relationship with God. It has been used by Christians down through the centuries.

It is my desire to raise the level of your love for the scriptures. I want you to get hold of the idea that the scriptures are a wonderful resource for you as you seek to enter a deeper more intimate relationship with God.

In concluding this message would you join me in reciting that lovely prayer from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer;

*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

We are entering the Communion Service and I want to share an experience I had while reading the Bible this past week. My reading was from John 21 where Jesus reinstated Peter and the other Apostles after his resurrection. They were sitting in their boat in the

morning completely dejected. They had fished all night and not caught a thing. Jesus was on shore with a little fire going. John tells us he was cooking some fish and had some bread toasting on the fire as well. He called out to the men and said, "Friends, haven't you caught any fish?" When they answered no, he simply said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat." As soon as they did they had more fish than they knew what to do with. Someone said, "It's the Lord." Peter, jumped into the water like a scalded cat and swam ashore. Jesus invited them to come have breakfast with him. The Bible simply says he took some bread and gave it to them. Those words, He took the bread and gave it to them leaped off the page at me and I had one of those serendipitous, God moments. This was a Communion service. Oh! I know it was breakfast, but it was the Lord's table and it was a holy moment. A few weeks before this Jesus had broken bread with them just before he sacrificed his life for them. Now, he was breaking bread with them and calling them to sacrifice their lives for him. Going back to their old way of life would be unfruitful if not impossible. They couldn't go back to fishing and really enjoy it any more. They had been called to surrender and die to their own selfish wills and follow Jesus wherever he decided to send them. Jesus said, "Peter, do you love me, feed my sheep. Peter, do you love me, feed my lambs. Peter do you love me, feed my sheep." When Peter pointed at John and said, what about him? Jesus said, "What is that to you? You must follow me. I believe there is someone here today that needs to hear this word from God. Jesus has come here this morning to break bread with you. He is calling you to surrender your will to his. He is calling you to die to your own desires. You can't go back to the past. Don't look around at someone else, What is that to you, Jesus says, "you must follow me." Have you heard him calling you today? Will you respond to his call?

## **SERMON 6**

### **PRAYER; THE HEART'S TRUE HOME**

Ephesians 3:14-21

Prayer is a scary subject to preach on. None of us prays as well as we should, not even preachers so I guess it is not difficult to see why we avoid it. But, today I want to talk with you about prayer. There are many types of prayer that are valid and many ways to pray but I want to focus on the kind of prayer that is the kind of praying to develop a love relationship with God. In our generation one of the people who has written most clearly on prayer is Richard Foster. In fact the sermon title today is a slight alteration of the title of Foster's book on prayer. His book is called, "Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home." I will begin this message sharing a few thoughts from Richard Foster's book. His desire and mine too is that we would hear the call to develop a loving prayer relationship with God the Father. I do not want to heap guilt or shame on you today. We all feel inadequate in our praying but God is calling us;

*Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence. (Richard Foster, Prayer, Finding the Hearts True Home)*

If there is one thing I would like to convey to you today it is that “God longs for you and I to spend time with him in a loving relationship of prayer.” Instead of wallowing in defeat or shame at our lack of prayer we should hear the loving invitation of God. Again Foster is helpful;

*We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the livingroom of his heart where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of his friendship where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of his strength, where we can feast to our heart’s delight. He invites us into the study of his wisdom where we can learn and grow and stretch... and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of his creativity, where we can be co-laborers with him, working together to determine the outcomes of events. He invites us into the bedroom of his rest where new peace is found, and where we can be naked and vulnerable and free. It is also the place of deepest intimacy, where know and are known to the fullest. (Richard Foster, Prayer, Finding the Hearts True Home)*

This invitation to know God in a prayer-relationship is found throughout the scriptures. I want to draw your attention to a specific passage of scripture which will be the basis of this message. In Ephesians chapter three Paul prays for the Christian believers at Ephesus. His prayer is not only eloquent and beautiful, it is instructive concerning the things Paul believed were essential to the Christian faith. He prayed very specifically in verses 14-21 for the church at Ephesus. He prayed that God would strengthen these dear people with power through the Holy Spirit in their inward being. He prayed that at a deep inner level they would experience the indwelling Christ. He also prayed that they would be rooted and established in love. In fact he went so far as to use hyperbole to pray for these Christians to be permeated with the incredible love of Christ. He writes; “*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of he fullness of God*” (Eph. 3:17b-19). His concern was that these Christians would be filled with the fullness of God. In order to know the fullness of God like this it is impeditive that we spend time with God.

In talking about prayer, Richard Foster quotes Samuel Coleridge who said, “He prayeth well, who loveth well.” Richard Foster says of prayer; “Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love.” This type of praying is a bit different from petition or intercession. This is like being with a true friend when words are unnecessary but just spending time together is all that is required. The Psalmist said, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). In Psalm 37:7 in the New Living Translation we read, “Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act.” And in

Psalm 62:1 NLT; “I wait quietly before God, for my salvation comes from him.” Ruth Haley Barton writes;

*This is a prayer of self-emptying that enables us to receive whatever it is that God wants to give. We come to him with empty hands and empty heart, having no agenda. Half the time we don't even know what we need; we just come with a sense of our own spiritual poverty. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Emptiness is a prerequisite for receiving.*

repeat the song. Just as soon as I completed the song looking deep in her eyes she would say, “again!” This went on over and over again. But, an amazing thing happened, she began to let down her defenses and little by little she began to sink deeper into my arms and let me hold her in a loving embrace. When we were almost home I thought she had gone completely to sleep. Her eyes were closed and she was completely relaxed in my arms. I was singing very softly now and when I completed the song I heard her say one last time, “again!” Somehow I had gotten past her outer defenses and she had allowed me to communicate my love to her. I think the kind of prayer our heavenly Father loves is when we stop our busy attention-deficit lives long enough to linger in his presence until his love gets past our silly defenses. How easy I am distracted in prayer. The words of the great pastor, poet John Donne ring true to me;

*“I neglect God for the noise of a fly, the rattling of a coach, the creaking of a door.”*  
John Donne

If I can be still in God's presence and wait for him, he will come and reveal himself to me in wonderful ways. “As Woody Allen says: *Ninety percent of life is showing up. Why? Because simply showing up is a kind of loving.* This kind of praying is learning to be present to the presence of God that is already present. It is not God who needs to show up, I just need to show up and be present to Him.

Marjorie Thompson gives an excellent definition of prayer; “Prayer is so much more than asking God for things. Prayer is first and foremost about developing a relationship with God. This relationship is like any loving relationship; it involves talking, listening, intimacy, silence, sharing, closeness and times of withdrawal or, times of being alone.”

The type of prayer that we are talking about is sometimes called Contemplative prayer, Brennan Manning writes about this kind of prayer;

*Contemplative prayer is simply experiencing what we already possess... During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was asked Thomas Merton: “How can we best help people to attain union with God?” His answer was very clear: “We must tell them that they are already united with God.” “Contemplative prayer is nothing other than coming into the consciousness of what is already there.” The task of contemplative prayer is to help me achieve the conscious awareness of the unconditionally loving God dwelling within me. “What this means, in very practical terms, is that I don't have to worry about ‘getting anywhere’ in prayer, because I am already there.*

To arrive at the awareness that the unconditionally loving God already dwells within me. This is the purpose of prayer. Richard Foster said, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.” C. S. Lewis learned this important lesson on prayer;

*CS Lewis was the author of the widely read children's books, The Narnia Chronicles, as well as many novels for grown-ups and books on issues surrounding the Christian faith. The movie Shadowlands (directed by Richard Attenborough and produced in 1993) tells Lewis' story, focusing in particular on his relationship with his wife, Joy Gresham. Gresham and Lewis meet while Lewis is a don at Oxford University.*

*After Joy is diagnosed with cancer the couple marry. The movie invites us to witness their love, their pain, their grief, their struggles with faith and God. Eventually Joy dies.*

*At one point in the story a friend says to Lewis, "Christopher can scoff, Jack, but I know how hard you've been praying; and now God is answering your prayers." Lewis replies "That's not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. **It doesn't change God, it changes me.**"*

Source: Film quote found at *Internet*

In the end, when any of us truly prays it is not God who changes but us. This is the true nature of prayer. As we spend time contemplating the love and grace and holiness of God we are graciously changed. Many of us struggle with spending time alone with God. Our minds are full and distracted. We find it difficult to concentrate on God for any length of time. How does one learn to spend time in God's presence waiting? The following bit of advice is gleaned from the writings of Marjorie Thompson and Adelle Calhoun on centering prayer;

1. Take a few moments to relax your body and quiet your spirit. Sit quietly with your hands on your knees, palms up. Breathe slowly and deeply and imagine the presence of God in your breathing, in your body and all around you.
2. Choose a single word or phrase to repeat which helps you focus your attention on God. It may be Jesus, Abba, Peace or, God. Another possibility is to say the 'Jesus Prayer.' The Jesus prayer is the prayer of the tax collector taken from Luke 18:13, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." The long form of the prayer is, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The short form is, "Lord, have mercy." Some have found it helpful to say; "Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy." There are many other short 'breath' prayer's that may help you be attentive to God's presence. In her book, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun gives a number of examples of 'breath prayer's' that could be very helpful:
  - *Breathe in "Abba," breathe out "I belong to you."*
  - *Breathe in "Lord," breathe out "here I am."*
  - *Breathe in "Jesus," breathe out "have mercy on me."*

3. When distractions come as they always do, simply return to your sacred word or phrase and begin to relax in the presence of God again. When distractions or pressing responsibilities crowd the mind it might be good to write these things down as a 'to do' list and tell yourself, "I will attend to these things later."
4. Imagine Jesus himself sitting or standing near you and open your heart to him. Conclude this time of prayer with a brief benediction of thanksgiving to God.

With practice we can become more adept at listening for the voice of God. It depends on what we really want. I close with the following story to illustrate this point;

A Native American and his friend were walking near Times Square, New York. The streets were filled with people, across multiple lanes cars were honking their horns, taxicabs were squealing around corners, and sirens were wailing. Suddenly, the Native American stops and says, "I hear a cricket." His friend is astounded, "What? You must be crazy. You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!" "No, I'm sure of it," the Native American said, "I heard a cricket." "That's crazy," said the friend. The Native American listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes and sure enough, he located a small cricket. His friend was utterly amazed. "That's incredible," said his friend. "You must have super-human ears!" "No," said the Native American. "My ears are no different from yours." "But that can't be!" said the friend. "I could never hear a cricket in this noise." "Yes, you could," came the reply. "Here, let me show you." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and dropped them on the sidewalk. And then, with the noise of the crowded street still blaring in their ears, they noticed every head within 5 metres turn and look to see if the money that tinkled on the pavement was theirs. *"See what I mean?" asked the Native American. "It all depends on what's important to you, on what you're listening for"*

Source: Story authorship unknown.

**SERMON 7:**  
**CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL**  
 James 5:13-20

I am sure it is everyone's favorite activity; owning up to our weaknesses, admitting our failures and confessing our sins to one another, not! Believe it or not, confession is a spiritual discipline that has been practiced by Christians since its very inception. In fact, James makes this amazing statement;

*Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.*

James 5:16 TMB

The first thing I want to say about this is that all of us sin against God and against one another. We are broken people and just as Adam and Eve in their fallen state hid themselves from one another and from God, we too try to hide our brokenness from God and from one another. Have you ever noticed how complex we human beings are? We have developed layers of self-defense and self-denial to cover our brokenness. We have a tendency to cover up our weaknesses. It is a protective reaction. Ruth Haley Barton writes;

*As we become more spiritually attuned, we become painfully aware of how negative thought patterns and relating patterns hurt ourselves and others. We see the places where we are incapable of love and true self-giving. We realize that our responses to wounds we've received have caused us to become hard and self-protective. We notice the subtleties of our jealousies, our mean-spiritedness, our manipulations, our controlling ways, and our mistrust of God that keeps us from giving ourselves wholeheartedly.*

Marjorie Thompson sheds more light on our human condition;

*We are creatures damaged by the disorientation of sin. Sin means being "off target," like an arrow wrongly directed. Instead of being aimed toward God, we are aimed toward a distorted image of self. We are directed by self-centered desires, chained to unmet needs, compelled by illusions about who we are and what makes us acceptable or important. We strive to be in control of our lives. In the process, we manipulate those who seem to get in the way, as well as those who appear to be stepping stones to our goals. Our state of misdirection makes us blind.*

Let me put it simply, we are broken people. We have been wounded by our own sins and the sins of others. But, the Bible says there is a path of healing for our brokenness. This path will be found through the biblical practice of "**CONFESSION.**" Listen again to the words of James;

*"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*  
James 5:16 NIV

Before we can talk about confession it is important to get one thing settled first. In order to experience the healing effects of confession we must first know at a very deep level that God loves us. Too many people suffer with paranoia and false guilt because they have never experienced the incredible depth of God's love. Let me quote Marjorie Thompson on this point;

*"God loves us with an overwhelming love that none of our sins can erase. While we can grieve and disappoint this love, nothing we do or fail to do can alter its depth or reality. It is a gift, a given. We cannot control whether God loves us by*

*our efforts to gain this love or even to lose it. Since we neither deserve nor earn such love, God's fondest dream is that we will receive and respond to it."*

Catholic Spiritual writer, Richard Rohr writes;

*Because God loves us unconditionally – along with our dark sides – we don't need to dodge ourselves. In the light of this love the pain of self-knowledge can be at the same time the beginning of our healing.*

Now, if you indulge me I am going to belabor this point a little further. Richard Foster writes in his classic book, *Celebration of Discipline*;

*The usual notion of what Jesus did on the cross runs something like this: people were so bad and so mean and God was so angry with them that he would not forgive them unless somebody big enough could take the rap for the whole lot of them.*

*Nothing could be further from the truth. Love, not anger, brought Jesus to the cross. Golgotha came as a result of God's great desire to forgive, not his reluctance. Jesus saw that by his vicarious suffering he could actually internalize all the evil of mankind and so heal it, forgive it.*

Now, let me repeat some words that I hope reverberate in your soul. ***God's love is unconditional, it is a gift to you, you cannot earn it, nor can you lose it, you cannot alter it, you cannot add to it, you cannot take away from it. It is the most incontrovertible fact in the universe.*** If you ever doubt the depth of God's love for you take another long look at the story of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' suffering on the cross is the ultimate expression of God's love for you. Too many Christians in evangelical protestant churches have been given a substandard understanding of the love of God. Some people actually believe that God will only love them if they behave a certain way. This is not the Gospel of Grace, this is half a Gospel and worse than no Gospel at all. A long time ago when my son was a pre-teen he did something wrong, something really stupid and I had to discipline him. I was hurt and disappointed in his behavior but I sat down and looked him in the eye and said, **"Son, there is absolutely nothing you could ever do in life to stop me from loving you, you are my son and you will always be my son regardless of how you act."**

Let me share a brief story that comes from the life of Brennan Manning. Brennan is an author and wonderful Christian statesman who leads spiritual retreats and conferences. Brennan had been struggling with his own failure and sinfulness as a Christian. While on a silent retreat God spoke to him so clearly;

*ON Good Friday morning at 2:00 a.m., as I prayed in faith I heard him say, "Little brother, I witnessed a Peter who claimed that he did not know me, a James who wanted power in return for service, a Philip who failed to see the Father in me, and scores of disciples who were convinced I was finished on*



*Calvary. The New Testament has many examples of men and women who started out well and then faltered along the way. “Yet on Easter night I appeared to Peter; James is not remembered for his ambition but for the sacrifice of his life for the kingdom; Philip did see the father in me when I pointed the way; and the disciples who despaired had enough courage to recognize me as the stranger who walked the road to Emmaus. My point, little brother, is this : **I expect more failure from you than you expect from yourself.**”*

Let me give you a few words of advice. If you are ever shocked by your own failure and your own capacity for sin, take heart, be of good courage, you are not alone. It is interesting to me the word James uses for sins in the sixteenth verse of chapter five. It is a word that the King James Version translates, faults and the NIV calls sins. The word literally means, to slip and fall or to fall away. Here is a picture of someone who; in the course of living this Christian life begins to fall away from the faith through stumbling, falling and failing to live up to this high calling. We need to be reminded that falling down and even failure to live up to this high calling in Christ is not the worst thing that can happen to us. We need to learn to get back up, confess our faults and failings and keep on going. Let me share a few words of wisdom from several well known people who talk about failure;

*Winston Churchill: “Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It is courage that counts.”*

See if you can recognize this famous sports hero;

*“I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On twenty-six occasions I had to take the game winning shot and I missed. And I failed over and over and over again in my life – that is precisely why I succeed.”*  
(Michael Jordan)

Finally, listen to the following advice; as the great actress Mary Pickford observed:

*“Today is a new day. You will get out of it just what you put into it. If you have made mistakes, there is always another chance for you. And supposing you have tried and failed again and again, you may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call ‘failure’ is not the falling down, but the staying down.”*

I believe with all my heart that God wants you to know that **failure is not the falling down but the staying down.** If you have fallen, you need to get back up, dust yourself off, realize that nothing you have done in life can ever stop God from loving you and, keep on going.

Now let’s return to the idea of confession and how we can begin to experience the healing we need. As Protestants we have made fun of Roman Catholic folks because they go to an earthly priest to make confession of their sins. We are right in our belief that we don’t need to confess our sins to a priest to be forgiven. We are wrong in our assumption that we don’t ever need to confess our sins to another human being. If we are going to be

set free from our guilt and from the darkness that lurks in our souls we need the healing grace of confession. The church has always encouraged both corporate and private confession as a means of grace in the believer's life. Listen to what Marjorie Thompson says about the healing power of confession;

*Confession unlocks a process of spiritual healing, opening us to forgiveness, cleansing, reconciliation, and renewal... Facing toward God's tenaciously faithful love frees us to start being real. In the light of God's grace and mercy, we find the courage to look honestly at who we are. Bathed in God's love, we can see clearly facades we have hidden behind, the excuses we have relied on to avoid taking responsibility, our habits of deception and control, our failure to love God, others, or ourselves adequately.*

Now I suppose most of us are able to confess our sins to God. It is much more difficult and scary to confess our failings to another human being. I am convinced it is why Christian Counselors are so busy. Please know that I fully support the important ministry of Professional Counselors, but I sometimes think that because too many in the church are shocked and unreceptive to hearing about brokenness that people are only able to talk freely about their brokenness in the safety of the counselor's office. Ruth Haley Barton writes about how difficult it is to practice this discipline of confession;

*One disturbing tendency among Christians is that it is all too easy for us to confess our sins to God privately or to make a general confession as part of a church service; it is much harder to confess our selfishness directly to our spouse, our jealousy to a friend, our impatience to our children or our ego-driven pushing to our colleagues.*

There are times when we need to stop defending ourselves, admit our wrongdoing and say I am sorry for our actions. I would take it a step further. When our children were little and they did something to hurt another person we taught them it wasn't enough to simply say I am sorry. We always taught them how important it was to seek forgiveness by asking, "Will you forgive me?"

The truth is, it is just as Winston Churchill said, "*Success is never final; failure is never fatal. It is courage that counts.*" My friends, it is courage that counts, not failure. I want to close with a little story designed to help you have the courage to be honest and real with people.

All of us tend to avoid pain. Sometimes, though, avoiding pain can lead to much greater suffering. Consider the story of William "the Refrigerator" Perry. Perry was a colorful defensive lineman for the Chicago Bears when they won the Super Bowl back in 1985. His nickname fit him well, because he was big and wide. Perry was also a friendly man with a wide grin. Unfortunately for his grin, though he was a mammoth man playing in the tough world of the football trenches, he apparently was afraid of the dentist, just like most of us. He was so afraid that he didn't go to the dentist for 20 years! He didn't go to the dentist even though his teeth and gums hurt terribly, even though his teeth began

falling out. Eventually he had lost half of his teeth—some he pulled out himself!—and his gums suffered chronic infection. He was suffering! Finally, as he neared age 45, he went to a dentist. The dentist had to pull out all of his remaining teeth. He had to insert screws in Perry's jaw and implant new teeth—all of which would have cost Perry \$60,000 except the dentist donated the procedure (apparently for the free publicity). Now there's a story every mother will tell her son when she tells him he has to go to the dentist or brush his teeth. But this is also a story for all who avoid emotional and spiritual pain of any sort, for the body teaches you things about your soul. There are lots of things that can cause pain to the soul but actually bring health, things like asking for help, hard work, repentance, looking honestly into our own souls, going to church, dealing with our problems, humbling ourselves, confessing our faults to one another. It takes courage to face pain. But as William Perry said of his new teeth, "It's unbelievable. And I love them....I got tired of my mouth hurting all the time."

Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com; source: "A Story with some teeth: Fridge gets a new smile," Chicago Tribune (12-20-07) section 4, p. 2

It takes an unshakable trust that God loves you no matter what and it takes a great deal of courage to admit you are a broken person and to confess your faults to another human being. But James says if we are willing to do this we will experience the wonderful healing grace of God at a very deep place. Sometimes bringing our darkness into the light of day is the only way to begin the healing process and help us move on.

**SERMON 8:  
"DOWNWARD MOBILITY!"**

John 12:12-19, John 13:1-9

We traditionally call this Palm Sunday. It is the celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It not only marks the beginning of Passover, more importantly it marks the beginning of Jesus' last week of ministry. It marks the beginning of Holy Week or, the week of Passion. Whatever you want to call it, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to a hero's welcome. He was hailed as the Messiah, the conquering King. He might as well have been Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, General McArthur or, some other larger than life champion. People lined the streets and cheered wildly for their King. Jesus came; riding. Hosanna they screamed. Jesus came; riding. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" they shouted. Jesus came; riding. "Hail to the King of Israel!" they shrieked. Jesus came; riding. Don't you think it is incredible that Jesus accepted their accolades? Do you not think it strange that this humble, carpenter-turned-preacher tolerated their attempts to put him on a pedestal? Does it not startle you that the one who preached humility and meekness reveled in the cheers of his adoring fans? At first glance it seems completely out of character. Had Jesus allowed his own popularity to go to his head? Did Jesus have a Messiah complex? It reminds me of a story Mark Buchanan tells in his book, *Your God is Too Safe*.

*In 1964 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, there were no fewer than three men who claimed to be Jesus Christ. All three were in the psychiatric ward of the local hospital. Their real names were Leon, Joseph and Clyde. All three suffered from psychotic delusional disorder. All three claimed to be Jesus. All three were patients of psychologist Milton Rokeach, who wrote *The Three Christs of Ypsilanti* about his experience with these would-be messiahs. Rokeach worked for two years with these men, trying to break reality in on their delusions. It was a tough job with little success. Finally, Rokeach decided to try an experiment; he put Leon, Joseph and Clyde together. They slept in the same room. They ate meals at the same time and at the same table. They were assigned shared tasks. And every day they met together for group therapy. In the end the experiment failed. Leon, Joseph, and Clyde were each so convinced that they were the messiah, so affronted by the other's claims to that status, so terrified by the prospect of themselves being merely ordinary, that no amount of contrary evidence, no amount of airtight reasoning, no amount of impassioned pleading could dislodge their delusions. There were some minor break-throughs. Leon, who claimed he was married to the Virgin Mary, finally admitted the woman was only his sister-in-law. But the breakthroughs didn't amount to much and didn't last long. What endured was the messiah complex. In one group discussion one of the men announced, "I'm the messiah, the Son of God. I am on a mission. I was sent here to save the earth." "How do you know?" Rokeach asked. "God told me." At this, one of the other men shot back, "I never told you any such thing."*

We chuckle at the unfortunate state of these men but, there were certainly those who thought Jesus was deluded. More often than not; I am the one with the messiah complex! We may not like to admit it but you and I often misunderstand the mission of Jesus Christ. Like Leon, Joseph and Clyde we want to be treated differently. We would rather others see us as special, unique and different. We tend to think our opinions, values and beliefs are right and the rest of the world is wrong. We want to be served more than we want to serve. We want accolades and praise, we enjoy the lime-light! I have news for you, Jesus was not delusional! He understood greatness and power and Messiahship in a way that leaves the rest of us baffled and dumbfounded.

In order to understand this concept a little better I want to direct your attention to John chapter thirteen as Jesus prepared to have a meal with his disciples. As chapter thirteen begins, John informs us that it was just before the Passover Feast. In a sentence pregnant with meaning John sets the stage for what will follow;

*Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. (John 13:1 NIV)*

Jesus was about to show his disciples the full extent of his love. Now we know the full extent of his love was shown by his willingness to die on the cross. But, Jesus gave his disciples an incredible demonstration of his greatness and his love through action, on that particular night.

We read that Satan had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus. But, this is not the story John wants to tell in chapter thirteen. Jesus met with his disciples in a home for a meal. It is common for homes in First century Palestine to have a container of water near the door of the home. The streets were dusty and dirty and people wore open sandals which were little more than soles fastened to the feet by leather straps. When people entered a home usually the first act was to wash the dusty, dirty feet of the guests. Generally this menial task was performed by a servant. For whatever reason; no one performed this important service when they entered the home. They just went ahead and prepared to eat the meal together. Some scholars have speculated that since the disciples were already arguing about who was the greatest; they refused to lower themselves to servant status and wash one another's feet. As they were reclining at the table eating the evening meal Jesus quietly left the table, removed his outer clothing and with just his undergarments on tied a towel around his waist, poured some water in a basin and began washing his disciple's feet. After Jesus carefully and tenderly washed his disciple's feet he removed the towel from around his waist and dried each one. The Apostle Peter was embarrassed and maybe a little ashamed and, when Jesus tried to wash his feet Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter showed his lack of understanding when he said, "Lord, not just my feet but give me a complete bath!" What an incredible object lesson Jesus gave his disciples that day. By serving his own disciples in this menial, dirty task of washing their dirty, calloused feet Jesus was teaching them true leadership. Here is true greatness. This is what it really means to be the Messiah. It is not in accolades, praises, podiums or, the waving palm branches that we acknowledge greatness. It is in serving one another. Listen to what Jesus said;

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

John 13:12-17 NIV

Jesus set the example of greatness through service. Isn't that amazing? He showed what it really meant to be the messiah by getting on his knees and washing the stinky, dirty feet of his followers. Then he had the audacity to say, if you really want to be great; if you really want to be a leader in the church, do the same for one another. He even said, **"Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."** Don't you find it is easier to talk about being a servant than to be one? I found this little story this week that seems to illustrate this concept;

*Mary Louise Starkey has a difficult job. She is trying to turn ordinary people into servants. The current economic climate has fueled the need for servants. In the past decade, the number of American households worth \$10 million or more has*

*quadrupled and the newly rich want help managing their large homes and busy lifestyles. Servants are needed, and Mary Starkey's International Institute for Household Management of Denver, Colorado, is trying to meet the need. With household managers earning \$60,000 to \$120,000 a year, applications are at an all-time high, but servanthood is not easy to learn. Those enrolled in the rigorous eight-week, \$7,200 course devote themselves to mastering the more mundane aspects of running a large household: dealing with trades and outside vendors, managing household staff, learning table manners, and taking cooking classes. Instruction is given regarding setting a formal dinner table and ironing table linens so they are perfectly crisp and wrinkle free. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of servanthood, however, is the element of personal self-denial. A consulting beautician at the school recently told an attractive young female student to trim her long blond hair, lose the showy earrings, and lay off the red lip-liner. It seemed that her good looks were drawing attention away from her employers. **Servants are not to draw attention to themselves; their only goal is to meet the needs of others.***

*New York Times (10-24-99); submitted by Kent Edwards, South Hamilton, Massachusetts*

Let me ask you a question. Have you ever tempted to be like the disciples? They were feeling so big and so important they refused to serve one another. When someone else gets promoted at work, do you cringe and play mental gymnastics thinking I am smarter and better at the job than her? Do you walk into a room and size people up? Do you ever find yourself in conversation with others playing the one-up-manship game? Do you secretly or not so secretly desire that other people will defer to you? Do you have to flash your credentials or state your position and status to impress other people? Do you really find it beneath you to do the menial tasks at work or at home, at school or at church? Do you have a messiah complex? If you think about Jesus Christ and his death on the cross you will begin to understand the spirit of servanthood. He laid down his life for our salvation and reconciliation and to restore us to a right relationship with God. The very essence of Christianity is sacrificial service. Are you ready to get rid of your messiah complex and start serving your family, your friends, your colleagues and the people you meet in your world? Richard Foster says,

*Service is not a list of things we do. It is not a code of ethics but a way of living.*

Foster talks about the service of hiddenness, doing something for someone else and not revealing it to a single soul. He talks about the service of small things you can do for another person. There is the service of guarding another person's reputation. There is the service of common courtesy to others. There is the service of listening. There is the service of hospitality. There is the service of being served and finally the service of sharing the life giving Word of God with others.

You may need to learn the same lesson that journalist Morton Kondracke learned;

Morton Kondracke is known as a no-nonsense, independent-thinking journalist who, in addition to writing, appears on shows like *The McLaughlin Group* and Fox's *The Beltway Boys*. But through his wife his life has been touched by Parkinson's, a disease that affects

over a million Americans. In an interview with Dick Staub, Kondracke describes how they first discovered the disease: She had beautiful handwriting, and she was writing a check and couldn't form the letter *k* right. I didn't appreciate that there was any difference. It looked fine to me. But she insisted that, no, there was something wrong. Later she had a tremor in the little finger of her right hand, and then her foot would sort of wobble on the brakes when she was driving. She had been a counselor at the neurology center in Bethesda, Maryland, helping families with patients with chronic neurological diseases. She was given Symmetrel which is a Parkinson's medicine by a doctor, and he didn't tell her what it was. But she called me up at work one day, totally distraught and hysterical in a way that I'd never heard Milly before. She said, you have to come home right away. Something terrible has happened. And I thought that one of the kids had been in an auto accident or something, so I raced home. There she was standing in the bedroom with this bottle in her hand. She said, "This is a Parkinson's medicine. It can't be Parkinson's. I've seen Parkinson's. It's a horrible disease. I won't be able to talk. I won't be able to walk. I won't be able to swallow. I won't be able to eat. You'll have to take me to the bathroom. I'll be totally dependent. You won't love me anymore. You'll leave me."

[I had to] convince her that I was not going to bug out. Apparently 50 percent of men whose wives have chronic illnesses split. Women tend to stick and men don't half the time. She couldn't be sure that I wasn't one of the wrong 50 percent in the beginning, but after a certain point she realized that I was there for the duration. You just ask God's help everyday, multiple times a day. I couldn't do this without God's help. I pray for help and strength and Milly's deliverance, all the time. I simply could not do this without feeling that I was doing God's work in a small way. I've asked God innumerable times, you know, *So what is my purpose here on Earth?* hoping that he will add a new and grandiose dimension to this, which he never does. The message always comes back the same: *Your job here is to take care of Milly.*

"The Dick Staub Interview: Morton Kondracke" ChristianityToday.com (8-13-0

As I conclude today, I would like to recommend that each of us try beginning the day with a prayer that Richard Foster recommends; "*Lord Jesus, I would so appreciate it if You would bring me someone today I can serve.*"

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