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# Living Rhythms: Movements Toward Health and Holiness

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LIVING RHYTHMS: MOVEMENTS TOWARD HEALTH AND HOLINESS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX

EVANGELICAL SEMINARY IN CANDIDACY

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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D.Min. Dissertation

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This is to certify that the D.Min. Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on October 10, 2013  
as fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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May the Lord bless and protect you; may the Lord's face radiate with joy because of you; may he be gracious to you, show you his favor, and give you his peace. Numbers 6: 24-26 [TLB]

Abstract of Dissertation

*Living Rhythms: Movements Toward Health and Holiness*

Jill K. Sidler Fleagle

“Human beings can honestly profess to believe what they do not believe. (Dallas Willard) Christians seek relational health apart from spiritual health and vice versa.

The problem is one of belief that it is possible to live in intimate fellowship with the Lord while in broken or unhealthy other primary relationships. Jesus addressed the problem of compartmentalized thinking when one of the Pharisees asked him to identify the most important commandment (singular) in the Law. Jesus’ answer inextricably linked loving God with loving others in his response of not one but two commandments:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it:

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22: 36-40 [NRSV])

Compartmentalized spirituality and unhealthy relationships directly and negatively influence one another, preventing the goal of living in the fullness of abundant life in Christ. (John 10:10) Advocating core competencies of honesty, humility, and teachability provides a foundation for health and the starting point for spiritual growth.



## CHAPTER ONE

*Live each day ~ Forgive everything ~ Love with abandon*

### Origins

“Live each day ~ Forgive everything ~ Love with abandon” reads the sign that hangs on my porch. I regard this bit of inspiration as a daily challenge, something I aspire to more than I have actualized in the present. I am in process. It is a good journey; one that is available to each of us. As I consider the above as an exhortation, I realize it is a great recipe for doing relationship, but is really only possible as we are first recipients of the divine gift of forgiveness that is offered to us by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, concepts like love, life, forgiveness, and relationship are all God’s ideas. We must, therefore, seek to learn what God has in mind to experientially become acquainted with these divine constructs.

In his speech, “Where Do We Go From Here?” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. branded “power without love” as “reckless and abusive, and...love without power (as) sentimental and anemic.” He continued, “Power at its best...is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”<sup>1</sup> In agreement with his assessment, and consistent with what I observe modeled in the life of Jesus throughout the New Testament, and Paul’s description of love in I Corinthians 13: 4-7, I derive this working definition of *love as the (non-violent) aggressive pursuit of the true good of another*. Love, like forgiveness, is at the same time

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<sup>1</sup> Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 186.

both mandatory and a choice for the follower of Christ. (cf., I John 4: 20-21; Matthew 6:14-15.)

Similarly, righteousness is both imputed to us through faith in Christ—a divine exchange in which we receive right standing with God in Christ by relinquishing our sin to him—and something that is linked to our own actions. Dennis D. Morgan explains,

The other righteousness has to do with moving away from sins and becoming more righteous in our behavior, inner attitudes, and affections. Some people focus on ridding the negatives. Others emphasize increasing the positives. Both are true for this transforming process, but neither is correct in and of itself. Even this type of righteousness does not occur outside relationships, and must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

This is the crux of what Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi, instructing them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12-13).

In their book, *Bold Love*, Drs. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III assert, “Love is dependent on forgiveness. A formula can almost be structured from this concept. *The extent to which someone truly loves will be positively correlated to the degree the person is stunned and silenced by the wonder that his huge debt has been canceled.* Perhaps another way to say it is that gratitude for forgiveness is the foundation for other-centered love.”<sup>3</sup> In the pages that follow, I will attend in greater detail to concepts like love and forgiveness, and to highlight what it is to choose to live in these as realities each day, one day at a time. This is truly a wise pattern for living, and as humans we are beings of pattern. Pastor and author Mel Lawrenz writes that, “Anything we do in

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<sup>2</sup> Dennis D. Morgan, *Life in Process: Moving Beyond the Things That Hinder; Moving Toward the Love That Heals* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 96.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Dan B. Allender and Dr. Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 43. (emphasis in original.)

life with any kind of repetition is a life pattern—whether it builds us up or tears us down. And there’s the rub: a good pattern progressively builds us up, but a bad pattern relentlessly erodes our humanity, like ocean waves pounding a coast. Being unaware of our life patterns is about the biggest gamble any of us can take.”<sup>4</sup> We will be looking at these life patterns, advocating replacing life-diminishing with life-giving patterns, or *living rhythms*.

Patterns are everywhere. Some are easy to spot; discerning others can require more training and intentionality. If we purpose to develop the art of noticing, we can detect the less conspicuous patterns in nature as in relationships, and in individual lives. In my vocation as a pastoral counselor, individuals, couples and families consult with me when they experience significant personal and interpersonal difficulties. Because I am a Christian counselor whose intake contract explains the counsel offered to be “biblically based” and my approach to be “dependent on the Holy Spirit,” many come seeking a Christian or biblical perspective. Over the course of time as I have paid attention to the presentations of all that is problematic, one distinct pattern has emerged, notably the association between conflict experienced in human relationships and a felt sense of disconnection from God. At what is determined to be an appropriate moment, I often ask the individuals reporting strain in some primary relationship, “How is it going in your relationship with the Lord?” Without exception, the response is something along the lines of, “Not so well; I feel disconnected.”

Given the high percentage of ministers who leave the ministry annually (unofficial estimates cite between 15,000 and 22,000), and the current cultural non-

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<sup>4</sup> Mel Lawrenz, *Patterns: Ways to Develop a God-Filled Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 22-23.

distinction between Christians and non-Christians experiencing relational struggles, the subject of relationships is one that must be explored. In his book, *Real Church*, Larry Crabb names “strained relationships” as “the number one cause for attrition on the mission field” for missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

I have observed some other recurring patterns over the past dozen or more years of meetings with counselees. One of these is the way that individuals attempt to compartmentalize their spirituality. When this is done, what occurs repeatedly includes patterns of strained and broken relationships and stifled, sterile spirituality. We cannot have a healthy relationship with God apart from living well within our human relationships.

In his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero boldly declares, “Human beings have an uncanny ability to live compartmentalized, double lives.”<sup>6</sup> He has devised a list of top ten symptoms of unhealthy spirituality. Appearing fifth on that list is, “Dividing our lives into ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ compartments.”<sup>7</sup> Scazzero goes on to cite “Gallop polls and sociologists” whose data reveal that “evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered and sexually immoral as the world in general.”<sup>8</sup> Theologian and scholar Dallas Willard observed that, “human beings can honestly profess to believe what they do not believe.” The result of this, he points out, is what he terms, “soul dissonance...when we try to live

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<sup>5</sup> Larry Crabb, *Real Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 123.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

as functional secularists in the public domain and followers of Christ in the private domain.”<sup>9</sup>

Over the past fifty or more years we have witnessed a shift away from a majority of people living in the United States who had some church affiliation or understanding of biblical values. This is accompanied by a shift in world view. Francis Schaeffer’s writings highlighted this shift, one that he cited in 1981 as occurring over the previous eighty years. In his classic, *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer wrote, “This shift has been away from a world view that was at least vaguely Christian in people’s memory (even if they were not individually Christian) toward something completely different—toward a world view based upon the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance.”<sup>10</sup> He saw that this has come about due to society’s tendency to, “see things in bits and pieces instead of totals.”<sup>11</sup> The shift away from our Judeo-Christian foundation has only increased the problem of compartmentalized thinking and living.

Jesus addressed this problem of compartmentalized thinking when one of the Pharisees asked Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” The question was posed in the singular, but Jesus’ answer was in the plural: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40 [NASV]). There is a wealth of information for us in both

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<sup>9</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 308.

<sup>10</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

the question and the answer written for our instruction. First, we can learn the importance of asking good questions. Whatever else may be said regarding this Pharisee, he posed a really good question. Here is how I hear what he was asking, “What is the one law I need to know and follow above all others?” Pharisees, remember, were all about the keeping of God’s laws. Second, in giving the answer he did, Jesus inextricably linked loving God with loving others. His answer provides the foundation for what we need to know and follow above all else.

### **Dangerous Opportunities**

I would propose that this post-modern, post-Christian era brings followers of Christ to a place of crisis. I am reminded, here, that the Chinese characters that combine to mean crisis are “danger” and “opportunity.” Relationships are in crisis. This places not only those of us in vocations of pastoral ministry, but all who are committed followers of Christ, into dangerous opportunities in the common struggles of life. The relationship crisis cannot fail to touch how we live out our Christianity. Defining and understanding all that affects relational health will hopefully yield fruit that impacts how Christ is formed in those who name the name of Christ, but whose praxis is indistinguishable from that of their secular counterparts.

We have technology that provides increased variety and opportunity to stay in touch with those with whom we are in relationship. Yet none of these technologies has produced more quality time or teachable attitudes, for instance. In a given day, I wonder how many take the time to look into the face of another with a holy curiosity about what is going on in the life and heart of the other. How many seek to identify with God’s

perspective for others, and God's interests in others? Too many of us relate more with computers than with face-to-face encounters characterized by holy curiosity. We are suffering for it.

Recently, for a marital couple who came in presenting difficulty with communication and conflict resolution, text messages and e-mails served as extended arenas where conflict thrived, adding to the scope of the conflict in relationship. It is not unusual for text messaging—and the conflict emerging from it—to be engaged between two people while in the same house! Dr. Archibald Hart identifies what he calls “hurry sickness” in his book, *Adrenaline and Stress*. He writes, “Hurriedness has become a distinguishing characteristic of the age we live in. Life has quite literally ‘speeded up.’ One of the culprits is technology.”<sup>12</sup> We cannot experientially know one another through text-messaging, Facebook, or other technology. There will never be a substitute for a personal word, eye-to-eye contact, a caring embrace, or beholding the countenance of another.

### **“I Have Issues”**

There are two types of human beings: those who live in the awareness of their natural bent toward self-centeredness, and those who live in denial of it. There may be a third type like those described in James 1:24 who catch glimpses of themselves, but readily forget what they see. I keep contact with a former client who periodically calls to pepper me with questions. Typically, following a few days of phone tag, we finally connect. After a greeting during which I ask how she's doing, she habitually responds

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 37.

with, “I have issues!” What a difference it would make in our relationships, both human and heavenly, if more of us would so readily: (1) admit that we have issues; and (2) be willing to examine the part we play in perpetuating the issues. I encounter many individuals who are stuck in holding patterns of unresolved conflict in relationship. One of the contributing factors to this is our human penchant for pride. Another is shame. Either can become an anchor holding us down until and unless we purpose to examine our own reactions, and become willing to ask some probing questions about the origins of the reactivity. Both pride and shame serve as distortions in communication, and at the center of most frustrated communication and unresolved conflict lays the commitment to the protection of self. Dr. Larry Crabb addresses what he calls “the fatal disease of self-centeredness.”<sup>13</sup> He delivers the bottom line: “The greatest obstacle to building truly good relationships is justified self-centeredness, a selfishness that, deep in our souls, feels entirely reasonable and therefore acceptable in light of how we’ve been treated.”<sup>14</sup> The only antidote to this justified selfishness is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Yet as powerful as is the Good News, it is not new—we have heard the news. Why does it seem to make no radical difference in how more of us live? In the words of Allender and Longman, “few are that silent or that grateful to God for the work of the Cross,” adding, “few Christians are that overwhelmed by the power of the gospel to save our souls from hell, because the unpleasant consequences of living in a fallen world feel too much like a hell in which God refuses to intervene.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Larry Crabb, *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Dan B. Allender and Dr. Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 43.



I have a framed Mary Engelbreit card on a table that reads, “If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it.” Rather than being a trite expression, it points to an undeniable reality: whether we are talking about relationships or circumstances of life, it is one’s perspective that will largely determine the chronicity of living in a sense of well-being or of dis-ease. Maintaining an optimistic outlook, for instance, increases motivation, leading to higher emotional intelligence, which in turn translates into overall increased life satisfaction. This study will include the place of emotional intelligence in our consideration of healthy relationships and spiritual formation.

Dr. Larry Crabb asserts that one area of universal struggle in relationship occurs through the perspective that views the situation between people as, “I hurt; you sin.” Everything could change if we would choose to transpose this to, “I sin; you hurt,” recognizing that we both sin and have been sinned against—both cause hurt to others by our sin and are hurt by others’ sin.<sup>16</sup> A shift in perspective here could serve to motivate us to take whatever steps might be necessary to move toward others in love. Hope for change shows in the paradigm shift from love of sin to conviction and contrition for anything that comes between our own heart and God’s. Crabb observes, “When we move from an indifference about our selfishness to a convicting awareness of it, an awareness that makes forgiveness more important to us right now than anything else we can imagine, then we are on the road to building good relationships.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. Larry Crabb, *The Passion/Wisdom Model of Spiritual Direction* (lecture, The School of Spiritual Direction at Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs, CO, June 17, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Larry Crabb, *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 92.

### Foundational Definitions

I am examining the correlation between relational health and Christian spiritual formation. Relational health is here defined as living self-differentiated (responsible to but not for others) and having a measure of growth in vitality, security, and authenticity in primary relationships as evidenced by mutually and habitually satisfying communication, the ability to resolve conflict, and affectionate care.<sup>18</sup> Christian spiritual formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a refinement process that involves increase in vitality and influence of the Holy Spirit in one's life as evidenced experientially and observably—to self and others—by a deepening or increasing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23[NASV]).<sup>19</sup> According to Psychiatrist Adnan Arif, healthy relationships, “provide empathy, feedback, positive reinforcement, mutual support and comfort, and a sense of cohesiveness that helps people feel safe and protected.”<sup>20</sup> Psychiatrist Mona Lal, M.D., adds, “A healthy relationship can actually reduce stress and improve your health and well being.”<sup>21</sup>

My goal is to advocate essential relational competencies required for Christian spiritual formation to begin. That is, without these core competencies, we cannot reasonably engage in a process of spiritual formation. Additionally, I will seek to focus

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<sup>18</sup> Definition derived from *Boundaries*, 100-102, 234-235; *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 45; *From Bondage to Bonding*, 157-163.

<sup>19</sup> Definition derived from *From Bondage to Bonding*, 185-193 and *Soul Feast*, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Perspective, *Healthy Relationships* (Palos Heights: IL, A Publication of Palos Community Hospital, Spring 2011), 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

on specific spiritual disciplines that, if faithfully utilized, could positively impact relational health as well as aid in spiritual formation.

As I began to explore this topic, the widely accepted place of spirituality in improved health across a spectrum of disciplines from psychology to medicine was clear. However, my goal is to bring attention to the mutual influence and interdependence of relational and spiritual health, and to help move Christ-followers along in their spiritual formation.

### **Relationships and Spirituality**

The desire for spiritual formation expressed by Christians must be coupled with a desire for relational health. I have observed the need for three core relational competencies that must be present before one can have a readiness for Christian spiritual formation. Knowing oneself is of far greater benefit than high intelligence in discerning the presence of these competencies. I propose that these core competencies are honesty, humility, and teachability. I will paint a picture of what these “look like” in a life, as well as sharing some biographical anecdotes for helpful illustrations and application. I will present the need for those committed to the process of spiritual formation to understand how habitual relational incompetence stifles Christian spiritual formation. I will advocate the intentional practice of kindness and committed engagement with spiritual friends who are both safe and honest in providing necessary feedback for healthy living.

The spiritual practices anticipated to be of greatest import in influencing health in relationships are study and meditation in the Word of God, prayer, and solitude and silence. While not advanced as a distinct discipline, we also need a framework for

comprehending the Word of God, which involves some form of training in the context of a mentoring community. I will present the helpfulness of practice in the development and use of these and other disciplines in participation with the work of the Spirit in one's personal spiritual formation. Additionally, I will devote attention to some mediating practices less focused upon, like the art of noticing in the development of a holy curiosity, developing and honoring helpful margins, and cultivating both thankfulness and humor. Applying the understanding of the correlation between relational and spiritual health has many implications, chiefly to help those in Christ to live in health, wholeness, and holiness with an enlarged capacity to love God and others, and to persevere in life, faith, and ministry. As there is a ripple-effect of sin, so there is a ripple-effect of healthy, holy living. Living in increased relational and spiritual health in the arena of Christian community has great potential for impacting the health and spiritual formation of others.

### **God's Design**

In God's design, we have been crafted with two foundational longings: security and significance. These are reflected in the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis:

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26 [NRSV]).

The security longing is derived from the account of our being made in the image of God, after God's likeness, and is, I believe, by God's design meant to be fulfilled primarily in relationship with our living God. Identification of the longing for significance derives from the description of the God-appointed way of purposeful living

for humankind. Dr. Larry Crabb suggests another way to frame this beginning understanding is to regard what he calls “deep longings in the human heart for relationship” [security] “and impact” [significance].<sup>22</sup> Security and significance are both part of our God-design from the beginning. We can even find commonality in consultation of the psychoanalytic ego psychology of Erik Erikson, who purported that a capacity for both intimacy and satisfying work leading to personal fulfillment characterized the healthily functioning personality.<sup>23</sup> These longings for security and significance are designed by God to be satisfied first in relationship with God. Problems emerge when we humans seek fulfillment of these primary longings in the counterfeit, or what Scripture calls “idols”, and chief among these are unhealthy relationships.

This discussion of our design and redemption will continue in Chapter Two, in addition to an examination of the biblical response to the outlined problems. Questions I will answer include: (1) What do we need to know and to do to live well? (2) How can we better participate with God’s design? and (3) What helpfulness can the Scriptures offer to address the problems of conflict and disconnection? Of primary focus in this chapter will be Trinitarian community, and discussion of the implications for human relationships.

Chapter Three will look at the process and practices in Christian spiritual formation. I will consult numerous theologians on the use of spiritual practices including prayer, the formational study of the Scriptures, and silence. I will consider various approaches and seek to find ones of simplest implementation for greatest helpfulness.

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<sup>22</sup> Dr. Larry Crabb, *Understanding People: Deep Longings for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher F. Monte, *Beneath the Mask: An Introduction to Personality Theories* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1987), 229.

In Chapter Four, the focus will be the development of discussion regarding relational competencies. Included will be some biographical anecdotes that will help to exemplify the core competencies. In addition to the identified core competencies, attention will be given to the influence of secondary competencies like humor, noticing, and wonder for healthy relating. An introduction to some relationship-enhancing tools will also be provided.

Chapter Five will focus on various resources that are determined to be helpful in improving relational competence. Included will be discussion of elements of family systems theory, relationship counseling and psychotherapy, cognitive/behavioral models, the EQ, and Meyers-Briggs temperament analysis.

Chapter Six will provide the conclusion of the correlation between relational health and Christian spiritual formation. In this concluding chapter, the hope is to emphasize the essentials. The resources herein are identified to be readily available to the readers, and are intended to serve as a kind of tool box of practical helps to facilitate demonstrable relational and spiritual growth, as they are faithfully utilized and developed. We were created by God for relationship with God. Our human relationships are to be reflections of our primary relationship with the Lord. They are also opportunities to practice and grow in relationship skills. Increased health in relationships and spiritual growth are mutually beneficial.

### **Connection**

God is relational. We cannot know God apart from relationship. Trinitarian relating is extended to us as we come to experientially know God in Christ. I have sadly

observed so few living in the joy and freedom of this relationship. I believe the reason for this is rooted in a foundational disconnection from God and from others with the result of relational and spiritual shallowness or sterility. Christians settle for life management, detached from the hope of comprehending the “abundant life” Jesus promised. (John 10:10 [NASV]). To be conformed to the image of Christ is God’s revealed will for each one of us. (Romans 8:19, 12:2 [NASV]). We can only participate well in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ as we are relationally healthy.

We are designed for deeply connecting with God and meaningfully connecting with one another. As I present this correlation between relationality and Christian spirituality, my hope is for us to apply what we learn to become healthier in our relationships, and more prepared for active engagement in Christian spiritual formation.

## CHAPTER TWO

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom....”

-Proverbs 9:10 (NRSV)

### **Knowing God and Oneself**

The counsel throughout biblical wisdom literature rests upon the cornerstone of Proverbs 9:10. Do you want to be wise? Come to revere the Lord and the ways of the Lord. A number of years ago, I attended a presentation given by the late self-described vagabond evangelist, Brennan Manning. There, he offered his definition of the fear of the Lord, explicating it as, “silent wonder, radical amazement, and affectionate awe.” The philosopher Aristotle, on the other hand, contended “knowing yourself” to be “the beginning of all wisdom.” A proper marriage of these two perspectives has been offered by John Calvin who wrote, “True and substantial wisdom principally consists of two parts, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves.”<sup>1</sup> A right perspective is required more than a right answer. Who is it that we most highly revere—who is at the center of our heart’s adoration. Is it the Lord God? Is it oneself? If not the Lord God, we err at the center. “There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). It is in reverencing rightly the Creator of our humanity that we have the possibility of knowing ourselves in our humanity. First is the self-existent God who created humankind in God’s likeness. Self-awareness proceeds from knowing God. We need both to fear the Lord and know ourselves to live well, to live in

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Tyson, ed. *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232.



wisdom. Apart from knowing oneself, that is, primarily having increased understanding about one's motivation, strategies and influence, what passes for other-centered love and service is often co-dependency or control. The paradox is that self-forgetting proceeds from increased, accurate self-awareness. It is in developing a greater capacity for self-forgetfulness that we grow in the development of healthy other-centeredness.

In his book, *The Wisdom of Tenderness*, Brennan Manning quotes from Kevin O'Shea's *The Thorn and the Rose*. O'Shea offers a poignant description of what it is to be alienated from the knowledge of oneself:

It is not a hell, it is just an eternal limbo...condemned to an eternal waiting in the alien of the self, that no one can recognize and no one can tread except the self encaptured within it. It is the impossible point between any hope and all despair, untouchable because it is neither. It is a numbness in the roots of one's being. It is a real saying, "I am not."...The feeling is bitter, but the sense of bitterness has died.... And the existence is known in something one could never have called an "experience."<sup>2</sup>

How do we become more self-aware? The process of becoming self-aware begins with a posture marked by humility, honesty, and teachability. This posture is well represented by the Psalmist's invitation, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."(Psalm 139:23-24 [NRSV]). Dr. Larry Crabb advocates the need to "be willing to look bad in the presence of love."<sup>3</sup> What this means in terms of relationship is the need to have a few people—even one or two—willing and able to be both safe and honest reflections of truth. These are ones who will be invited to walk alongside through seasons of life and speak truthfully in response to the Psalmist's invitation and questions

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin O'Shea, *The Thorn and the Rose*, quoted in Brennan Manning, *The Wisdom of Tenderness* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Larry Crabb, *The Passion/Wisdom Model of Spiritual Direction* (lecture, The School of Spiritual Direction at Glen Eyrie, Colorado Springs, CO, June 17, 2003).

like it. Is there a hurtful habit in my life? Do you experience my behavior to be consistent with my Christian values? If not, where do you see the inconsistency?

None of us can say what another experiences as he or she sits across from us. One of the finest ways we have of loving one another is for one to speak the truth in love about the experience of being in relationship with the other. Apart from this kind of information, we are left to guess, and our human bent is typically skewed to an either end of spectrum perception of grandiosity or debasement, neither of which can be true for those who are in Christ. Larry Crabb highlights the importance of gaining knowledge about one's impact: "When two people leave a group discussion, the one who thinks discerningly and honestly about how others might have perceived him or her, is far closer to loving well and to hearing the mind of God than the one who hasn't a clue about his social impact. Lack of concern for what others think of us reveals not personal strength, but willful arrogance."<sup>4</sup> The goal for the follower of Christ is complete identification with the life of Christ; therefore, we do well to have others in our lives who will help to reflect back to us something of their observations in this process. It is as we commit ourselves to live open to others' honest appraisal that we are able to carry out the Apostle Paul's instruction in Romans 12:3 "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." When we hold this alongside the counsel in Ephesians 4:15, directing us to be "speaking the truth in love..." we discover something that becomes one of the ways we love one another well. In his book *Conformed to His Image* Kenneth Boa writes, "When people experience increasing tension between their belief and their behavior, they will usually opt to modify their beliefs rather than their behavior. Since this process is

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Crabb, *Men & Women, Enjoying the Difference*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991, 126.

often unconscious, people are capable of living with a prodigious gap between their belief and their practice.”<sup>5</sup> He presents “a balanced approach to accountability,” that “esteems the value of being in relationship with people who love us enough to take the risks of honesty and candor when necessary.”<sup>6</sup> If we each had a commitment to listen and respond to one or a few safe, honest others in our lives who would tell us something of what it is to be in relationship with us—in effect, to hold up a relational mirror so that we may see (and to respond well to what we see)—we would be well on our way to authentic relating.

In our humanness, we can be drawn to either/or, programmatic answers. More often, the answers we seek are more of the nature of both/and. We need to both know the Lord and know ourselves. We need to both know and allow ourselves to be known. We come to this knowledge by both the Lord’s initiation (John 6:44) and by our own response of receiving (John 1:12)—by an act of our will.

### **Free Will: the Wonderful, Terrible Gift**

In his work, *The Contemplative Pastor*, Eugene Peterson describes some of what we are up against in this terrible, wonderful gift of free will:

My will is my glory; it is also what gives me the most trouble. There is something deeply flawed in me that separates me from God who wills my salvation; that something seems to be located in and around my will. I ponder St. Paul, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15), and I pray with my Lord, “Not as I will but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 380.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 444.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989),

I refer to this as a terrible, wonderful gift of free will because, as both Peterson and the Apostle Paul before him have described, within it is the capacity to effect great harm or great good. Which one is which will largely depend on one's world view. Former right-hand man to U. S. President Richard Nixon, former prisoner, and born-again founder of Prison Ministries, Chuck Colson determined the only answer to crime to be a change in world view. He advocated the need for a solid Christian world view. That is, the answers to the foundational human questions of where we came from, why there is sin and suffering, whether there is a way out, and what our purpose is are answered in relationship to God in Christ.<sup>8</sup> We need to understand the clash of world views as responsible for the ways in which people exercise their free will. When connected to Christian values of love and service of Christ's kingdom purposes, there is capacity for eternal good. When disconnected from identification with Christ and His purposes, at best, even service of others can only provide a superficial response to relief of pain and suffering, offering no impact for His eternally good purposes. We do well to consider this world view in the context of our primary relationships, for it is here that any discrepancy between what one claims to value and what one actually values will be exposed. Jesus taught that our actions reveal character, and called us to treat others—all others—the way that we want to be treated. (cf., Matthew 7:12, 15-23).

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<sup>8</sup> Chuck Colson, J.D., "The Perfect Storm: Worldviews Present in this Age" (Plenary address, World Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 17, 2009).

## Eternal Perspective

Our challenge is to pray with the psalmist, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). As psychologist and author Dan Allender has commented, “None of us is going to get out of here alive.”<sup>9</sup> He was speaking, of course about physical realities that none of us can escape, save in the event of Jesus’ return to earth during our lifetime. On the other hand, Jesus taught, “Whoever hears what I say and believes in the One who sent me has eternal life. That person will not be judged guilty but has already left death and entered life” (John 5:24). The pressure is off! When we rightly understand that in Christ we have already been transferred from death to life, there comes both a greater capacity to accept our human limitations and freedom to abandon ourselves to and for the purposes of God. (Galatians 2:20). The previous discussion of the process of developing self-awareness leads us to this intersection of discerning what our legacy is to be. As we are able to rightly regard both the brevity and import of this one life that God gives, we can become more intentional in our daily decisions. Knowing what we want to be true of our lives when we come to the end of our time here on earth helps to provide a grid by which we make choices day by day. It is to be a “big picture” thinker with an eye for detail. Colson points out that a solid Christian world view embraces the understanding of the Lordship of Christ over all of life. Colson founded Prison Ministry in 1976, and his shared observation from more than thirty years of ministry is how vastly divergent people’s definitions of Christianity are.

In his book, *A Christian Manifesto*, Francis Schaefer identified what he called “the basic problem of the Christians in this country” for what is now the past hundred

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<sup>9</sup> Dan Allender, “The Healing Path” (lecture, Oak Brook Community Church, Oak Brook, IL, February, 1999).

years or more, as seeing “things in bits and pieces instead of totals.” He described these as symptoms “of a much larger problem,” that being a shift away from a Christian world view. “This shift has been *away from* a world view that was at least vaguely Christian in people’s memory (even if they were not individually Christian) *toward* something completely different—toward a worldview based upon the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance.”<sup>10</sup> Like Colson, Schaeffer’s call has been to emphasize the need for Christianity to be understood as discipleship, about how God speaks to every area of life. Colson cited Dutch theologian and statesman, Abraham Kuyper’s declaration, “There’s not one inch that Christ does not cry out, ‘Mine!’”<sup>11</sup>

If this world is all there is, and the only good is to satisfy oneself, there is little hope or point to giving oneself to living for Jesus’ sake, or for developing a life that leaves a legacy. This world is our training ground for future endeavors. I like to think of it as boot camp for Heaven. What is it that was important from Jesus’ perspective? Having begun by noting that the Pharisee learned of not one but two great commandments—loving God with all that we are, and loving others as ourselves—we must go a step further by listening to what Jesus taught his followers regarding discipleship, that is, how to live the Christ life. Note the difference in depth as Jesus addresses not the religious leaders but his sincere followers. He tells them, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12). So for the follower of Christ, the bar has been raised because our standard of how we are to love

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<sup>10</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981), 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Chuck Colson, J.D., “The Perfect Storm: Worldviews Present in this Age” (Plenary address, World Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 17, 2009).

one another is the way that He loved. What do we see in Jesus' love as we trace his footsteps through the Gospels? We see others-centered, sacrificial love. Understood rightly, rather than as a burdensome, if not impossible, undertaking, what is required is not sheer grit but utter abandonment to and dependence on Christ. Dr. John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California has observed that, "Transformation takes at least as much grace as salvation," adding that, "a lot of people who understand what is to be saved by grace do not understand what it is to live by grace." He concludes his point, "Rightly understood, saints burn up more grace than saved sinners."<sup>12</sup> Pastor Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle notes that everything is from God and everything is for Him, so that Christianity has to do with the shared life of God Himself. The need for both ministers of grace and those we aid in being formed into the image of Christ is to abide in Christ as we are called to in John 15. In our humanity alone, we are incapable of loving others like Jesus loves. Rather than this being a word of hopelessness, what it means is that we must be so connected to Jesus, as the plant is to the vine, that His life of love flows through us. In the classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, we find the exhortations of Oswald Chambers:

If Jesus Christ is to regenerate me, what is the problem He is up against? I have a heredity I had no say in; I am not holy, nor likely to be; and if all Jesus Christ can do is to tell me I must be holy, His teaching plants despair. But if Jesus Christ is a Regenerator, One Who can put into me His own heredity of holiness, then I begin to see what He is driving at when He says that I have to be holy. Redemption means that Jesus Christ can put into any person the hereditary disposition that was in Himself, and all the standards He gives are based on that disposition: His teaching is for the life He puts in....<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Ortberg, Ph.D., "The Future of Spiritual Formation." (Plenary address, World Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 18, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, October 6<sup>th</sup> entry.

In one of the many paradoxes of the Christian life, what this calls for from the follower rather than trying harder is to relinquish oneself in surrender to the Lord. Again, the writing of Chambers affords fitting counsel, “If you will give God your right to yourself, He will make a holy experiment out of you. God’s experiments always succeed.”<sup>14</sup> After relinquishment, what is called for is an abiding in Him. We are completely dependent upon Him, for without him we can do nothing (John 15:5 [NRSV]).

### **Tri-unity Community**

We cannot know God apart from the revelation of God-self through the Tri-unity community. It is the Son relating to the Father who sends the Spirit to complete the work he started on earth. This original small group becomes the pattern for Christian formational community. Larry Crabb has observed that, “God is himself a small group...the only small group that really gets along well.”<sup>15</sup> In his book, *True Prayer*, Kenneth Leech comments, “God is not a private, but a personal and social, Being in relationship. That is the meaning of the symbol of the Trinity: that in God there is social life, community, sharing. To share in God is to share in that life. As the Athanasian Creed says of the Trinity: ‘None is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another.’”<sup>16</sup> Gerald Sittser reminds us that we have common longings that can only be fully satisfied in relationship with our Creator. Describing these as thirsts, he writes,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., June 13<sup>th</sup> entry.

<sup>15</sup> Larry Crabb, Ph.D., “An Evangelical Model of Spiritual Direction: What Christian Counselors Need to Know.” (lecture, World Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 16, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 8.



...a thirst that is part of our very nature as human beings who have been created by God and for God but who have rebelled against God and tried to find satisfaction in something less worthy. This insatiable thirst can only be quenched in one way—in a more intimate relationship with God as we know him in the face of his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Only the triune God can satisfy our deepest longings.<sup>17</sup>

If we are to live in increasing health and holiness we will need to attend to the Lord's design for how we are to be formed in community, well summarized in the following passages:

Jesus' last and great commission to His disciples was '...to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...' (Mt. 28:19) So saying, the Lord indicated that the making of disciples was indeed a Trinitarian process. This Trinitarian work is also established in the Johannine narrative, since the Spirit 'proceeds from the Father' (15:26) at the prayer of the Son (14:6). The Spirit calls to remembrance (14:26) and declares the things of Christ (16:14), which Jesus also described as being the things of the Father, since 'All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he (the Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you' (Jn 14:24-26)...Because of this inter-Trinitarian connection, St. Bernard of Clairvaux found all three persons of the Holy Trinity involved in the process of sanctification:

...those whom the Son first humbles by word and example, and upon whom the Spirit afterward pours out love, these the Father receives at length in glory. The Son makes us disciples. The Paraclete comforts us as friends. The Father raises us up as sons. And because not only the Son but also the Father and the Holy Spirit are truly called Truth, it is agreed that one and the same truth...works in these three steps. The first teaches us like a master. The second comforts us like a friend or brother. The third embraces us as a father does his son.<sup>18</sup>

Our first word of introduction to the Trinity from God's Word comes early in the Book of Genesis. In the first chapter of Genesis, we have the creation account wherein we read, "Then God said, 'Let Us make human beings in our image and likeness. And let

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<sup>17</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Books, 2007), 17.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Tyson, ed. *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30.

them rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, and over the tame animals, over all the earth, and over all the small crawling animals on the earth” (Genesis 1:26 [NCV]). The Hebrew word for God used here is Elohim, the plural form of El, from which we derive our understanding of plural (three) expressions of the One God. In the Gospel of John we find the presentation of the Trinity, beginning in John 1:1-4: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4 [NRSV]).

The above describes the coexistence of Jesus, the Word with God. As we consider the relationality of the Trinity, we can trace this to how we bear the image of our Creator. In the overflow of Trinitarian community, we humans were created and invited to participate in the fullness of this life. The Trinity, then, becomes the pattern for the life-giving ways we are to relate to one another.

What does the revelation of God the Father, Son and Spirit imply for us as followers of Christ? According to Larry Crabb, this revelation is to evoke “belief in and commitment to the glorious pre-eminence of Jesus Christ as Incarnate God who alone offers salvation through the Spirit for the praise and glory of the Father”<sup>19</sup> In other words, “The doctrine of the Trinity is asserted as foundational for realizing that final reality is relationality, i.e., there is no personhood apart from community.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Larry Crabb, Ph.D., *Training Manual for the Passion/Wisdom Model of Spiritual Direction*, 2002, 41.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 42.

## **Spirited Living**

As we progress through the Gospel of John, we find Jesus preparing His disciples for the time that he would go to the cross, introducing them to the presence and function of the Holy Spirit that they would come to know in a new way. He urged and encouraged his disciples with these words:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know Him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. (John 14:15-18 [NRSV]).

As he continued to prepare his disciples regarding the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus taught,

But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16: 5-7.)

Jesus continued his teaching by revealing the Spirit’s work of convicting the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, of guiding his disciples into all truth, speaking on the authority of whatever He hears from the Son. Jesus instructed that the Spirit would tell things to come, glorifying Him, taking what is His and declaring it to his followers. (cf., John 16:13-15.)

In the plan of God, “spiritual formation” is a work accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The Book of Romans presents the pattern in Trinitarian language as follows:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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 8:26-29 [NRSV]).

The Apostle Paul exhorted believers to “live by the Spirit...do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit...” (Galatians 5:16-17). The attitudes of our heart, what we think, how we act in the natural person, that is, in the flesh, will all be opposed to the Spirit-enlivened and directed attitudes, thoughts, and actions. In Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia, he is addressing serious problems among these Christians that he traces back to this one distinction: doing the works of the flesh rather than living by the Spirit. He urged these early Christians to keep their focus and not to be led astray by following what Paul called “a different gospel.” (cf., Galatians 1: 6-7). As his letter continues, he adds detailed description by which he illustrated what it was to do the works of the flesh, and then contrasted this with what it “looked like” to live by the Spirit. (cf., Flesh: Gal. 5:19; Spirit: Gal. 5:22-25). He closed this section with this exhortation, “Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.” (Galatians 5:26). This is worth emphasizing, and it is little wonder that Paul did just that. We cannot love one another in the way that Jesus Christ has called us to do when what fills our hearts and directs our actions is competition and envy. Should this be the condition of our hearts, what would keep us from recognizing and repenting of competition and envy but conceit—the very opposite of humility? We find a similar message in the Book of James.

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the

world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:1-4).

We need not be confused about what the Spirit's work is and what our part is to do. We cannot accomplish the work of inside-out change that the Spirit does. The Spirit will not obey for us. Oswald Chambers provides this simplification: "One reads tomes on the work of the Holy Spirit, when one five minutes of drastic obedience would make things as clear as a sunbeam...The tiniest fragment of obedience, and heaven opens and the profoundest truths of God are yours straight away."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Attitude of Gratitude**

There is a safeguard to the encroachment of envy in the heart, and that is the cultivation of gratitude. Like other aids in the process of developing healthy, holy living, this begins by intentionality and practice. This is a simple yet frequently overlooked area that yields great contentment. One need only live briefly on earth to be exposed to trauma or to experience loss and grief. For many, like premature or other physically challenged babies, they are ushered into life by trauma. Such is the normal state of affairs for humanity. Gratitude is not dependent upon favorable circumstances, rather is a chosen attitude that purposely finds expression. Paul instructed the Thessalonian believers, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18). What is God's will for us? His will is for us to be habitually grateful, and to express thankfulness in the midst of any and all circumstances. Richard Foster punctuates this truth in his book *Streams of Living Water*, coaching, "To move into this sacramental way of living, we must take deep into our heart and mind Paul's words,

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<sup>21</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, October 10<sup>th</sup> entry.

‘And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.’(Col. 3:17)”<sup>22</sup>

Some of the resistance we find here relates to the challenging circumstances previously described. How does one feel thankful for loss, for instance? We can find ourselves in the conundrum of being required to feel thankful while our hearts are breaking. Notice the subtle shift of perspective from faithful response to feeling, for so I have witnessed this trap in countless lives. The thinking then progresses to believing one is being hypocritical by feeling one way and acting contrary to this. Is this not pretending? Not at all, as we may be assured that the Lord God meets us where we are, not where we pretend to be. We have the invitation to “cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). We are not required to feel thankful, rather to *give thanks*. It is an assertion of our confidence in the Lord to whom we give our thanks. It is to say, “I will choose to trust You, Lord,” over and above the messages that may be derived from the circumstances. With the increase in the practice of giving thanks, we create the possibility of actually becoming more thankful. As Richard Rohr has observed, “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”<sup>23</sup>

There are relational byproducts from this practice that have confirmed to me God’s wisdom in calling us to lives of thankfulness. Thankfulness starves bitterness; the two cannot coexist in the same heart. It also defies despair. When one first becomes aware of the need for some personal encouragement due to pressing or distressing

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 263.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 19.

circumstances, a wise practice involves expressing both in prayer and in writing to the Lord and to others, specific points of gratitude and encouragement. The surprise comes that in the self-forgetting focus of prayer and attention to another's need, one finds one's own spirit strengthened and encouraged.

A pastor friend of mine is exceptional at giving thanks. I once observed his expression of thanks for the small gift of a utility cloth. He may as well have been given a bar of gold. He looked the giver full in the face, embracing his gift with both humility and honor. His words of "thank you" had an uncommon weight and expressiveness. He has exemplified the gracious giving of thanks. We, too, by increasing in the intentional practice of thanks-giving will become models for others in the way of *thanks living*.

### **The Language of Apology**

Again recall the problem of compartmentalized spirituality as the statistics remind us that Christians in relationships fare no better than non-believers. James reminds us that envy and worldly desires are root causes for the breakdown in relationships. We have a biblical snapshot of this problem in the character referred to as the "prodigal son." In the story that Jesus told as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, we are brought into the prodigal's ponderings after he had hit bottom. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, *and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son..."*'" (Luke 15:17-19. [emphasis mine]). So, here we have Jesus teaching a parable in which one of the main characters practices the language of apology.

Among intelligent, articulate, self-described Christians is still great resistance to the language of apology. “I am sorry I hurt you” are not words that roll readily off the human tongue. It is helpful, therefore, to follow what has been modeled for us by the “prodigal” and cultivate the language of apology by practicing. Two recently published books lend credence to the fact that we still need help with something as basic to relationships as the apology. Ken Blanchard and Margaret McBride have written a very practical, easily applied book entitled *The One Minute Apology*. Blanchard and McBride emphasize, “The sooner we recognize when our ego gets us off course, the sooner we realize *the only way to repair the damage we have done to ourselves and others is to be honest, admit we were wrong, apologize, and commit to change our behavior.*”<sup>24</sup> The depiction of Abraham Lincoln’s apology is itself worth the book’s purchase.<sup>25</sup> Noted author of *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman, has been joined by Jennifer Thomas to write *The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships*, which is based on two years of extensive research on apologies, and includes a personal assessment tool. If simply being in and observing others in relationship does not afford convincing evidence of our need for help with the language and practice of apology, perhaps a read of the aforementioned sources will.

When it comes to the language of apology, we need to practice, practice, practice. This works well while driving, and informal surveys indicate it to be preferable to cell or I-phone usage on the road. It goes like this: “I am sorry. I was wrong.” (Not to be confused with, “I am sorry I was wrong.”), and, “I was wrong. I am sorry.” or, “I am

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<sup>24</sup> Ken Blanchard and Margaret McBride, *The One Minute Apology: A Powerful Way to Make Things Better* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 90. (emphasis mine.)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-47.



sorry I hurt you.” One who is well-practiced in first uttering the above words is better able then to progress to the second step involved in an effective apology. Step two involves citing the specific words and/or actions that caused the breach of relationship. The spoken form of this, then is, “I am sorry. I was wrong for \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with the specific words and/or actions for which apology is needed).” The difficulty we have with the language of apology does perhaps also indicate that it does not go without saying that actions following the words must all the more be practiced. While words can be a powerful tool of healing, no wrongs are made right by words alone.

We are reminded in John’s first letter, “let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). The book of James declares faith without works “dead” (cf., James 3:20-26). Relationships in the human realm languish then die if all that they receive to nurture them is words apart from action. Solomon Schimmel notes the action called for includes a shift in behavior, such that, “you should be able to face again a situation similar in which your offense was committed, and not succumb.”<sup>26</sup>

In any process of breaking an unhealthy pattern to replace it with another, both great consistency and intentionality are required. One of the prevailing hurdles to overcome when two people are locked in unresolved conflict is the belief that each was more wronged than the other. Recall the dominant “I hurt; you sin” perspective offered by Larry Crabb as previously cited. When one’s focus becomes the many ways *someone else* needs to change, this then becomes an immediate indicator of a distorted perspective. The primary power of input in the process of change resides within oneself.

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<sup>26</sup> Solomon Schimmel, *Wounds Not Healed by Time: The Power of Repentance and Forgiveness* (NY: Osford University Press, 2002), 148-149.

Scripture describes how godly sorrow shows itself to be genuine, a sorrow that “produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow for sin is free of defensiveness, and shows itself in a turning away from whatever thoughts, attitudes, speech, and actions have broken or brought harm in relationship with God or others. The writer of Hebrews reminds us to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13). Fuller Theological Seminary Professor of New Testament Donald Hagner notes of this passage that, “if Israel, the people of God, could exhibit a hardened *heart*, the readers must beware of a similar danger in themselves....Every new day is a *today* in which to take one’s faith commitment with renewed seriousness.”<sup>27</sup>

Any consideration of the language of apology must include as well the “tools” of reconciliation devised by the Lord God for the people of God. Some of these are words that have largely been dropped from mainstream Christian vocabulary. While not culturally popular, concepts like *examination*, *contrition*, *confession*, *repentance*, and *forgiveness* have a central place for the Christian in both vocabulary and practice. If we can rightly regard the good intent of the Lord’s provision of these divinely powerful “tools,” perhaps we can begin to develop a fluency of usage that then leads to a greater measure of health in all of our relationships.

These “tools” are given for regular usage, rather than, as appears more common, only at the time of coming to salvation in Christ or during Sunday morning services. In the interest of surfacing the motivation in our hearts, we begin with the practice of

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<sup>27</sup> Donald A. Hagner, “Scholar’s Notes on Hebrews,” *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 2157.

*examination.* Author and founder of Renovare, Richard Foster, explains that, “God is the only One who can separate the true from the false; He alone can purify the motives of the heart, but does not come uninvited. If the chambers of our hearts have never experienced the healing Touch, perhaps it is because we have not welcomed the Divine scrutiny.”<sup>28</sup> As has been cited above, we assume the attitude of the Psalmist when we invite “the Divine scrutiny” (Psalm 139: 23-24). Our growth in grace depends upon the interplay of the exercise of our wonderful, terrible gift of free will in participation with the purifying work of the Spirit. Foster warns that, “we can stop our growing conformity to Christ at any point. God, in His wisdom and sovereign freedom, has given us veto power over our own formation. This is the dignity He bestows on us as free moral agents.”<sup>29</sup>

Contrition is most simply a sincere sorrow for our sin that marks the one who is changed by spiritual birth. Prior to one being in Christ, the only possibility is to be mastered by sin. By salvation in Christ, however, in the transfer from death to life, we receive a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ. While we can be numbered among those who have had the Spirit imparted, we are still free to quench the Spirit. We are free to choose to walk by the Spirit in a way that before we were in Christ we could not. Yet we can be like the abused child who has been legally adopted into a new and loving family but who continues to regard himself and function as though still bound to the old family. The spiritual person has a growing love of the things of the Lord along with a growing hatred of sin and all that is opposed to God and the ways of God. This is quite different from having angst at being caught in sin. Contrition has to do with identification with the

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<sup>28</sup> Richard J. Foster, “Salvation is a Life,” *Christian Counseling Today* 17, no. 1:14-15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1:17.

one we have offended that leads to the repentance required to break from this offense. Contrition is what Paul described in 2 Corinthians 7:8-11, and what King David expressed in Psalm 51, especially in verse 17. Ron Hawkins, Ed. D., writes, “Repentance is more than saying, ‘I’m sorry’; it carries with it the desire to change one’s ways. Repentance is an ongoing daily process as we seek to live for Christ despite our failures...seeking to let God change us to become more like Christ.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the practice most frequently dropped by Christians outside of Catholicism is that of confession, despite our counsel from God’s Word written to Christians: “confess your sins to one another...,” and, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (James 5:16; 1 John 1:8-9)

Similar to gratitude, repentance may begin in decision with action distinct from feelings. We may initially only be able to find ourselves in intellectual agreement with God about the nature of our sin, not hating it for the egregious offense it is to our Lord. Yet as we take the next good step as we understand it to be, we may find we are able to begin to identify with the harm that we wrought and even to be repulsed by our sin. It is a safeguard to our conscience to keep a regular rhythm of examination and confession and, as we exercise and lead others in these practices, we are more fully participating with the Spirit of God in the process of transformation.

Following is a reading from *A Manual for Prayer* by Phyllis Tickle that is a useful aid in developing the practice of examination, confession, and repentance.

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<sup>30</sup> Ron Hawkins, Ed. D., “More Than Sorry,” in *Soul Care Bible*, ed. Tim Clinton (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 1528.

The Reading

Litany of Penitence

Most holy and merciful Father:

I confess to you and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth  
I have not loved you with my whole heart, and mind, and strength. I have not  
loved my neighbors as myself. I have not forgiven others, as I have been forgiven.

Have mercy on my, Lord.

I have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. I have not been true to  
the mind of Christ. I have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on me, Lord.

I confess to you, Lord, all my past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and  
impatience of my life,  
I confess to you, Lord.

My self-indulgent appetites and ways, and my exploitation of other people,  
I confess to you, Lord.

My intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and my dishonesty in daily  
life and work,

I confess to you, Lord.

Accept my repentance, Lord, for the wrongs I have done: for my blindness to  
Human need and suffering, and my indifference to injustice and cruelty,  
Accept my repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward my neighbors,  
And for my prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from me,

Accept my repentance, Lord.

For my waste and pollution of your creation, and my lack of concern for those  
who come after us,

Accept my repentance, Lord.

Restore me, good Lord, and let your anger depart from me,  
Favorably hear me for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in me and all of your church the work of your salvation,  
that I may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,

Bring me with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime: A Manual for Prayer*  
(New York: Doubleday, 2000), 142-143.

## Forgiveness

If we have not received the forgiveness that is ours through faith in Christ, we cannot begin to appropriate any of the other of what I have termed “tools” of God, and we most certainly will not have the capacity to extend forgiveness to others. Martin Marty points out that, “Few of us ever can fully forget the wrongs which have been done to us. Acts of betrayal are not easily erased from our minds. Were forgiveness to wait for forgetfulness, reconciliation would rarely occur.”<sup>32</sup> He adds, however, that, “Amnesia is not a prelude to forgiveness. Forgiveness is knowing that something happened which made us furious and then deciding, in spite of everything, to deny anger its power.”<sup>33</sup> As we will see in the Neil Anderson presentation to follow, forgiveness is necessary for us to live in the freedom that is an essential part of God’s design. Marty discusses the various reasons people forgive, some doing so because, “they no longer want to revisit the betrayals of the past.”<sup>34</sup> He continues, “They have come to recognize that feelings have the capacity, as Louis B. Smedes has written, to ‘hurt the hater more than the hated.’ Make no mistake about it—anger and the misery it creates can become a curse in the life of a human being. Reconciliation becomes a possibility when a person realizes the emotional cost of being stuck in a painful past.”<sup>35</sup>

One of Judaism’s sages, Mar Zutra, is said to have adopted a practice, “saying, each night before he retired, ‘I forgive all who hurt me today.’ He understood the imperfections of humanity. He forgave wholeheartedly those who disappointed him. For

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<sup>32</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Being Good and Doing Good* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 43.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Mar Zutra, forgiveness was a gift that he gave freely to others, as well as himself.”<sup>36</sup> Mar Zutra apparently understood what escapes so many, “that he would sleep better and live happier having removed all the bitterness and hatred from his heart. Mar Zutra knew that those who torment themselves by harboring grudges and by reprising outdated feuds pay a heavy price for their refusal to outgrow bitterness and vindictiveness. Knowing this, he chose forgiveness each and every night. In doing so, he chose life.”<sup>37</sup>

Neil Anderson has provided one of the most thorough presentations of what forgiveness is and what it is not in his biblically based work, *The Bondage Breaker*, as delineated in **bold** print below:

**Forgiveness is not forgetting.** The opposite belief summarized in the cliché, “forgive and forget” is the first roadblock that turns humans away from the work of forgiveness. The truth that one is not required to forget to forgive empowers taking the next good step in the process of forgiveness.

**Forgiveness is a choice, a decision of your will. Since God requires you to forgive, it is something you can do.** We do well to bear in mind the fact that forgiveness is God’s idea as well as God’s way for us to live in freedom. We cannot do it on our own, but as we align our will with God’s, we can then count on God to provide what only God can provide.

**By Forgiving, you let the other person off your hook, but they are not off God’s hook. You must trust that God will deal with the person justly and fairly, something you simply cannot do.** We each have our own interpretive framework that is constructed through what we have experienced, as well as what has been modeled and otherwise communicated to us. We interpret according to who we are, not according to any purely objective view of how things are. We are limited by our humanness here, and are called to entrust the one we are required to forgive to the perfect justice of God.

**You forgive others for your sake so you can be free. Forgiveness is mainly a matter of obedience to God. God wants you to be free; there**

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Klein, *How to Forgive When You Can’t Forget* (Bellmore, NY: Liebling Press, Inc., 1995), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

**is no other way.** In the process of forgiveness, this is one of the truths that can become experiential only as one takes the step of obedience.

**Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin, but you are going to live with those consequences anyway whether you like it or not. The only choice you have is whether you will do so in the *bondage of bitterness* or in the *freedom of forgiveness*.** We need to understand that we cannot cling to the belief that we have a right to resentment without cost to our own hearts. Resentment left unchallenged becomes bitterness, and bitterness slowly, surely kills a heart. The only antidote to bitterness is forgiveness.

**Do not wait for the other person to ask for your forgiveness before forgiving them.** Believing that the other must first ask forgiveness is another point that becomes a roadblock to forgiveness. We simply must choose in obedience to and trust in God's design for living in grace.

**How do you forgive from your heart? You allow God to bring to the surface the painful emotions you feel toward those who hurt you. If your forgiveness doesn't touch the emotional core of your life, it will be incomplete. Too often we're afraid of the pain so we bury our emotions deep down inside us. Let God bring them to the surface so He can begin to heal those damaged emotions.**

**Forgiveness is choosing not to hold someone's sin against him or her any more. This does not mean you must continue to put up with the future sins of others. God does not tolerate sin and neither should you. Don't allow yourself to be continually abused by others. Take a stand against sin while continuing to exercise grace and forgiveness toward those who hurt you. You may need help in setting wise limits and boundaries to protect yourself from further abuse.**

**Don't wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving. You will never get there. Make the hard choice to forgive even if you don't feel like it. Once you choose to forgive, Satan will have lost his power over you in that area and God's healing touch will be free to move. We need to forgive others so Satan cannot take advantage of us. (2 Cor. 2:10,11).**

**Freedom is what you will gain right now, not necessarily an immediate change in feelings. We are commanded to get rid of all bitterness in our lives and forgive others as we have been forgiven. (Eph. 4:31, 31)<sup>38</sup>**

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<sup>38</sup> Neil T. Anderson and Rich Miller, *Steps to Freedom in Christ* (La Habra, CA: Freedom in Christ, 1997), 12-13.



Forgiveness is what marks the beginning of eternal life for us, and forgiveness is what keeps us living in the freedom wrought for us in Christ. (Galatians 5:1). Forgiveness is not negotiable: "...our forgiving is necessary both for our own health and for God's forgiveness."<sup>39</sup>(See also, Matthew 6:14-15).

### **Questions of Life**

The longer I live the fewer questions I have, or perhaps the more open-handed I have become with these questions. I have become more willing to live in the tension between the now and the not yet. I have come to be able to live with the answer to the question: Why do bad things happen? At least a partial answer involves the pervasiveness on earth of sin and its effects, the exercise of free will (the wonderful, terrible gift), and the presence and persistence of evil. We have not taken one breath that has been free of an environment that has been tainted by sin and its effects. I have also come to understand that we cannot ask the above question without also questioning why anything good occurs. How can people possibly know times of joy and happiness in this world so tainted by sin? To omit these kinds of questions is to minimize or discount the presence and influence of evil. Evil is both persistent and pervasive, and Satan is certainly an opposing but not an equal force with the Lord God. Living in a generalized disbelief in or disregard for the reality of Satan and evil is another way Christians fall into the trap of compartmentalized living. On this earth that itself groans until it is made new, we cannot quarantine evil and its effects (Romans 8:19). However, in Christ we have been given authority to defeat our enemy. It is for us to take God at His Word (Luke 10:19; Ephesians 1:19-23).

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<sup>39</sup> John Paton, *Is Human Forgiveness Possible?*(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 144.

I find it helpful to listen to the stories of those who have endured a deeper level of suffering than we can account for in our own experience. All of us live in need of encouragement to stay the course in faith in seasons of great pain, loss or hardship. We might even identify a hero or two. Joni Eareckson Tada is one such person. Now in her 50's, she has lived as a quadriplegic from the time she had been a carefree 16-year-old enjoying water play during a family outing until she dived off of a raft in shallow water, hitting her head on the bottom of the lake, causing paralysis. I have recently had the privilege of hearing Joni present her perspective on suffering. Regarding her accident and the process of character development and spiritual formation Joni shared her understanding that, "God permitted that which he hated to accomplish that which he loved." She reminded us that as Christ followers, we are called to share in the sufferings of Christ to become like him in his death (Philippians 3:10). Joni also reminded us that we are daily called to die *to* the sins Lord Jesus died *for*. (Philippians 3:17-21). She left us with the admonition to "Never distance the Bible's answers from the God of the Bible."<sup>40</sup>

Theological questions not sufficiently answered in the pages of Scripture are satisfied in the life, death, and resurrection of Lord Jesus, and in the certain hope of the Christian's final destination of being in the presence of the Lord. What has happened is that the questions have morphed into gratitude, so that my most frequently expressed prayer has become, "Thank You." I am increasingly grateful to God for not giving us justice. Our greater need is mercy. A.W. Tozer has written, "When through the blood of the everlasting covenant we children of the shadows reach at last our home in the light,

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<sup>40</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada, "God's Sovereignty: A Cause for Comfort?" Plenary address, World Conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 17, 2009).

we shall have a thousand strings to our harps, but the sweetest may well be the one tuned to sound forth most perfectly the mercy of God.”<sup>41</sup> As we are the recipients of His mercy, we are then able to offer mercy to others. We become compassionate and merciful through a process of discipline. The writer of Hebrews declared, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11). We turn next to the spiritual disciplines observed to be essential in this refinement process of formation.

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<sup>41</sup> A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 90.

## CHAPTER THREE

“...abandon yourself: that is the very best course.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Abandoned into Spiritual Formation**

In our humanity, we often lament any state in which we are not *in control*. We want to know what exactly *is* Christian spiritual formation? How do we assess spiritual maturity? Are there at least some indicators that let us know we are genuinely in process? If we are to heed the counsel of Meister Eckhart, becoming the kind of followers who abide in Christ begins by exercising our will to relinquish the right to a self-directed life—a life where we are *in control*. There are a number of things that may seem acceptable to the natural mind, yet these are recognized at best as detours to the Spirit-filled believer. The Apostle Paul described the openness that comes with having been set free from the death sentence of the law: all things become lawful for the believer. “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12 [NRSV]). Later, in the same letter, he adds the following exhortation, “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other...you are not your own...you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 10:24; 6:19-20).

As a means of addressing our human bent toward control, the approach of Alcoholics Anonymous provides a helpful perspective. The necessary first step begins with an admission of “unmanageability and powerlessness,” sometimes seen as a process

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Clark and John V. Skinner, *Treatises and Sermons of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 66.

first of “uncovery.”<sup>2</sup> For anyone growing up in America, odds are good for having been trained in self-reliance. There is nothing wrong with a strong work ethic. However, self-reliance, the belief that it ultimately depends on oneself to live effectively, drives an attitude that is contrary to God-dependence. A Christian classic well-summarizes what needs to be understood to bring about a paradigm shift from self-reliance to surrender: “To grow in grace means being planted in the very heart of (God’s) divine love, to put ourselves in His hands and leave it with Him; to grow as lilies and babes, with neither care nor anxiety... What the flower is by nature, we must be by an intelligent and free surrender.”<sup>3</sup> So to begin, a first good step involves choosing to exercise our terrible/wonderful gift of free will by relinquishing to God our right to live unto ourselves.

A second step involves abandoning ourselves to the will and care of God. This we do by intelligent and free declaration of choice, preferably out loud and daily. God is not hard of hearing, but there is a helpful reinforcement of choice as we hear the words ourselves. This declaration of relinquishment may take many forms of expression. The following is one proposed expression: “Lord, You are holy and merciful. Thank You for having designed and redeemed me in Christ to be your holy, surrendered vessel of blessing. Please empty me of self and anything hidden that is opposed to you, your will, and your way. (Include confession of all known sin as well.) Please fill me with your Spirit that I may be moving in your stride into all that you appoint for the fulfillment of your kingdom purposes. Enlarge and enliven my mind with an eternal perspective. I

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<sup>2</sup> Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1993), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* (Urichville, Ohio: Barbour, 1946), 65.

choose to obey you, trusting your Spirit's empowerment for all that you command. Thank you that I am secure in Christ. I depend on and praise you for any and all good that comes from this life that you have given and redeemed for Jesus' sake. Amen."

### **Unlearning**

In this process of surrender that is the threshold of formation, often the first requirement is unlearning. This applies to what perhaps well-meaning others have taught that carries more of the attitude of "should" passed on in the name of following Christ than the "get to" consistent with biblical Christianity. The "shoulds" have more to do with the empty religion that Lord Jesus was so critical of when he encountered it in the religious leaders, blocking as it does the way to the relationship he offers, and calls us to embrace. There are many voices that would purport to speak on behalf of God, and some are more faithful than others in this effort. Yet for those who are disciples, there must be a process of learning to tune out the voices of others to more carefully tune in to hear the voice of God. I am not describing audible communication, but we are certainly able to receive word from the Lord through the understanding of our hearts, consistent with the Scriptures, and confirmed by those in redemptive community, to be defined later.

It takes some time of training and "tuning" to comprehend the Lord's words. It begins with an acknowledged need that takes one step out of self-dependence and co-dependence and into God-dependence. Codependency is here defined as "a self-focused way of life in which a person blind to his or her true self continually reacts to others,

being controlled by and seeking to control their behavior, attitudes, and/or opinions, resulting in spiritual sterility, loss of authenticity, and absence of intimacy.”<sup>4</sup>

There is no earthly parallel to the kind of dependence on God that is called for in this process of surrender. To depend on any human relationship with this depth of abandon would result in a diminished life. To depend on God in this way of surrender leads to wholeness and the very freedom in which we are made to live.

As facilitator of a number of recovery and spiritual growth groups over the course of the past twenty years, I have found a very helpful tool in Nancy Groom’s material written to assist people in a process of “escaping codependency [toward] embracing biblical love.” In it, she provides her understanding of the process of surrender. She writes, “Surrender means a person enters life through faith in Christ’s atoning death and sustains life by daily abiding in grace (i.e., God’s acceptance, forgiveness, and empowerment through the Holy Spirit), resulting in spiritual vitality, a sense of place and worth, and the potential for intimacy.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Buried Treasure in Suffering**

In his book, *Everything Belongs*, Richard Rohr makes the point that prayer and suffering are two major paths of transformation.<sup>6</sup> The chaos or loss of control that comes with the brokenness of suffering is a crisis that becomes redemptive in the Spirit’s work of transformation. The chaos born of crisis is a very useful tool in the Lord’s good and

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Groom, *From Bondage to Bonding: Escaping Codependency, Embracing Biblical Love* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1991), 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 115.

necessary refining of His people. The problem for us is pain. It is often only as we humans encounter a depth of pain and loss of control that we come to relinquish the demand that life be on our own terms. Here, then is where we may find opportunity to abandon ourselves to the trustworthy Lord God. We need a theology that understands the biblical depiction of suffering to be in the normal course of following Christ. (cf. John 16:33; 1 Peter 4). In the acceptance of the normalcy of suffering, there is then increased potential for the response of drawing near to Jesus rather than reacting in disappointment that leads to disconnection and bitterness.

### **Key Components in Spiritual Formation**

In Ecclesiastes we read, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (4:12) Let us look at a “threefold cord” of Scripture, a framework for comprehending and applying Scripture, and community as a safeguard for growth in faith. Following abandonment, our growth begins as we take in the Living Word. (Hebrews 4:12). New life in Christ is to be nourished for growth by regular study of the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture as the living, active word is the foundation by which God shapes us into authentic followers. Most of us who read the Bible do so in a way that seeks to be informed by what we read. Certainly there is a place for informational reading. There is also another approach that helps us in growth.

### **Formational Reading of Scripture**

Over the course of training in the Scriptures, we grow as we move from reading the Word for the purpose of informing us, to engaging with it in a way that is formational



(Romans 8:29, 12:2). Formational reading can be described as an engagement with the Scriptures such that one progresses from learning and coming to know God’s Word to being challenged, changed, and known through God’s Word. Mulholland emphasizes: “as far as the role of scripture in spiritual formation is concerned, you ultimately need to arrive at a disciplined development of the formational mode of approaching the text. Only in the formational mode, where that shift of the inner posture of our being takes place, can we become listeners...can we become receptive and accessible to be addressed by the living Word of God.”<sup>7</sup>

In *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell shares, “As one of my friends often says: ‘If you study the Bible and it doesn’t lead you to wonder and awe, then you haven’t studied the Bible.’”<sup>8</sup> Bell continues with a description that offers a beautiful formational regard for the Scriptures, “The rabbis spoke of the text being like a gem with seventy faces, and each time you turn the gem, the light refracts differently, giving you a reflection you haven’t seen before. And so we turn the text again and again because we keep seeing things we missed the time before.”<sup>9</sup> Bell models an approach to the formational reading of Scripture as follows:

I just wrote a phrase from the Bible on the wall of the room I am writing in right now. It’s from John 11 where a man named Lazarus dies. Jesus meets up with Lazarus’ sisters who are complaining that Jesus got there too late to save their brother. When Jesus tells them to roll away the stone in front of where Lazarus is buried, one of the sisters, Martha, complains that there will be a terrible odor, ‘for he has been there four days.’ The King James Version reads like this: ‘He stinketh.’ For some odd reason, I have not been able to get that phrase out of my head lately. ‘He stinketh.’ It’s working on me. It’s teaching me. I’ve been

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<sup>7</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, rev.ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2005), 62.

<sup>8</sup> Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 34.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

meditating and reflecting on it and turning it over and over in my head and my heart. Inspired words have a way of getting under our skin and taking on a life of their own. They work on us. We started out reading them, but they end up reading us.<sup>10</sup>

Quite simply, formational reading involves interacting with the text in a way that critical questions emerge to challenge our own lives. We bring ourselves into the Living Word in a way that invites it to read us.

Rather than reading Scripture to know what it says, the focus in formational reading is “meeting God in the text.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, while reading for information is linear, formational reading is “in depth.” You seek to allow the passage to open you up to its deeper dimensions, its multiple layers of meaning. At the same time, you seek to allow the text to probe deeper levels of your being, disclose deeper dimensions of your flawed ‘word,’ disturb the foundations of your false self.”<sup>12</sup> This way of reading has much to do with motive and approach. The intent is to enter into the living Word, open to having impediments dislodged from our lives for the purpose of communing with the Living God, meeting together in His Word. We are helped toward reading formationally through the use of critical questions. For example, we come to the text ready to probe deeper with questions like, “God, what are you seeking to say to me through this? What is your Word of address to me?”<sup>13</sup> The need is to be both open and patient as we wade into God’s Word, waiting there in a posture of rested readiness for His response.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. *Shaped by the Word*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2005), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 57.

## Framework for Comprehension

We need some framework for comprehension, some means of support or assistance in the taking in and living application of God's Word. There are a number of excellent resources useful for training in Christian living. In addition to face-to-face mentoring relationships, we may be mentored through discipleship materials as well as Christian conferences, retreats and workshops. There is certainly no "one size fits all" approach or program for spiritual formation. Nor are there books that come with a guarantee to fit the condition and readiness of each individual believer. The bibliography lists some excellent resources for understanding and engaging in discipleship.<sup>14</sup> The specific Christian discipleship books that figured most prominently in the beginning steps of my journey are *Inside Out* by Dr. Larry Crabb, *My Utmost for His Highest* by Oswald Chambers, *The Believer's Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray, and *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. We have ample available sound Christian classics as well as excellent contemporary discipleship materials. What is important is to start somewhere, and to proceed in a way that provides a disciplined approach, preferably with fixed times of study if progress is to be experienced.

## Community

I include the context of community as it has always been God's way with God's people to transform individuals in the community that is the Body of Christ. What I have come to recognize as well is that God has many creative expressions of community

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<sup>14</sup> See especially, Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image*; Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*; Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*; Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*.

beyond simply the local church gathered, and that these are all potentially useful places of formation. Community can be provided in a variety of forms, including mentoring and prayer relationships, so long as there is high commitment and regular times to meet together. A redemptive community is one comprised of individuals committed to be both safe and honest who are also committed to learn to both know and be known by others in Christ. This is to be the place to ask honest questions and to come to struggle well to know more deeply the love of Christ, and what it means to begin to live this out.

There really is no substitute for redemptive community. We see this model in the twelve individuals Jesus called together as his small group during the few years on earth of his public ministry (cf., Matthew 4:18, 9:9, 10:2-4; Luke 6:12-16), and with the inception of the church (cf. Acts 1:12-14; 2:41-42). We see in the passage in Luke 9:51-10:42 the description of the committed followers of Jesus, his disciples, engaged in both hearing and heeding—hearing the Lord’s instruction and heeding the instruction by doing the work he had appointed. It is in the context of redemptive community that we are both transformed and then released into participation in God’s mission of transformation in the world.

One of the challenges to fostering healthy community is the need for patience in this process. Even as we endeavor to find opportunities to connect with safe and honest others, not everyone deepens in relationship with the Lord or others in the same way or at the same pace. Intimacy is not to be forced in community life any more than it is in any relationship. In fact, any attempt to force intimacy would create a vulnerability to harm. Flora Slosson Wuellner observes, “For some of us the great transformation from the inside out comes gradually. For some of us it comes swiftly. But for all of us it comes

inevitably as we unite more closely to the One who brings the yeast, salt, wind, and fire of the new creation—the deep self we have always longed to be.”<sup>15</sup>

While there is a need to be patient in and with the process of formation, there is also the need to challenge the cultural pull of spiritual apathy. It is necessary to see our busy lifestyles as “givens” which need to be regarded and addressed in creative ways—both by the leadership and those who are participants in any process of discipleship. There is no possibility of genuine engagement in discipleship apart from taking the initiative to seek until found the individual “fit” of what one finds truly helpful, given lifestyle factors like season of life, family responsibilities, work, and/or vocational demands. Leaders in discipleship need to anticipate the level of commitment from others will be commensurate with their own. We cannot lead others where we, ourselves have not gone.

Whereas everyone in our group had a church background when my husband and I went through the “Navigator 2:7 Discipleship Training” more than 30 years ago, now more and more of the attendees of our churches have little or no church or theological background. This just serves to plead the case for providing a way of common grounding in the Christian faith. In addition to a group offering, meeting together in a mentoring capacity with one who is longer and stronger in the faith can provide the practical framework for comprehending the Word and the ways of God. There seems to be no substitute for allowing oneself to be known—often including a process of being broken—while in relationship with at least one safe, honest other who can serve as a reflection of

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<sup>15</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, “Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing,” *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 24, no. 3 (May/June 2009), 23.

the love and grace of Lord Jesus. I have witnessed the Spirit work of transformation often coming in just this way.

### **How Do We Get There?**

In response to the three key components of *Scripture, A Framework for Comprehending Scripture*, and *Community* as my spiritual formation model, authors M. Robert Mulholland, Peter Scazzero, Marjorie Thompson, and Hands and Fehr lend their own unique perspectives. Mulholland defines spiritual formation as “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”<sup>16</sup> He would advise honoring of the particular personality type, identifying and utilizing disciplines to match one’s type. Mulholland would also advise attending to the shadow side of one’s preference pattern to develop a holistic spirituality.<sup>17</sup>

Scazzero defines spiritual maturity as it relates to emotional health, which is primarily revealed in how we love others. He advocates making incarnation (following the dynamics found in the life of Jesus) the top priority. Since emotional health is inseparable from spirituality, it is essential to attend well to the emotional components of discipleship. In summary, Scazzero would instruct the need to adopt a discipleship model that integrates emotional and spiritual maturity by incorporating these 6 principles: (1) Look Beneath the Surface, (2) Break the Power of the Past, (3) Live in Brokenness

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<sup>16</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-56.

and Vulnerability, (4) Receive the Gift of Limits, (5) Embrace Grieving and Loss, and (6) Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well.<sup>18</sup>

Marjorie Thompson declares her preference for the term “spiritual life” in the discussion of formation. “Scripturally speaking, the spiritual life is simply the increasing vitality and sway of God’s Spirit in us.... When we are ‘clothed with Christ,’ the truth of our humanity is restored to us and the image of our Creator begins to emerge with clarity. In Christ we are reshaped according to the pattern we were created to bear. This reshaping is the basic meaning of *spiritual formation* in the Christian tradition.”<sup>19</sup> She elaborates:

In one sense spirituality is simply the *capacity* for a spiritual life—the universal human capacity to receive, reflect, and respond to the Spirit of God. But in a more practical sense, spirituality is the *way we realize* this spiritual potential. It involves conscious awareness of, and assent to, the work of the Spirit in us. Spirituality points to a path—to choices of belief, value commitments, patterns of life, and practices of faith that allow Christ to be formed in us.<sup>20</sup>

Thompson proposes a process of discipleship that includes a number of disciplines she has found to be effective in Christian spiritual formation. Like Mulholland, she advocates the reading of Scripture formationally, including the practice of *lectio divina*. She offers guidance through the practices of the following: prayer as listening and candid speaking, contemplative prayer, journaling, intercession, communion, worship, honoring tradition, fasting and repentance, self-examination,

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 69-193.

<sup>19</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

confession and awareness, meeting with a fellow pilgrim, hospitality, adopting a Rule of Life, and living the Christian life as a joint intention of the personal and the corporate.<sup>21</sup>

Hands and Fehr advocate the need for the development of spiritual health through a process of uncovering, discovery, and recovery. The essential needs cited include appropriate self-care born of genuine self-appreciation with humility, having a circle of peers in which to live and grow, work outside church group, intimacy with God, integration both of one's public and interior self and body with self, and poverty of spirit.<sup>22</sup>

In *Conformed to His Image*, Kenneth Boa's facet of "Nurturing Spirituality" presents this as "a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship."<sup>23</sup> His description of this philosophy of formation is one that captures how I experience the Spirit-appointments of life. Moreover, it expresses well Jesus' citation of the greatest commandments as loving God and others with all we are and with all we have (my paraphrase of Matthew 22:36-40, and John 13:34). As expressed by Dan Allender in *Bold Love*, "A stunned and grateful heart is free to love because it has been captured with the hilarious paradox that we are unlovely but loved, and unable to love but free to try without condemnation."<sup>24</sup> The development of a "stunned and grateful heart" is the mysterious and divine work of the Spirit in transforming the heart of flesh. Once changed, it is the process of Christian formation in community that seeks not simply to "do what's right" or "fix what's wrong"

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: a New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (New York: The Alban Institute: 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 367.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Dan B. Allender and Dr. Tremper Longman III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 43.



in a person's life, but to "release what's good" as it is resident in the human heart by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

### **Perspective Counts**

Sadly and unnecessarily, too many Christians perceive salvation as a type of fire insurance against hell. In the perspective of Boa's "Nurturing Spirituality" that sees discipleship and evangelism as a lifestyle, the emphasis is on helping people to mature so as to live for Christ, not just to get to heaven. Too many Christians live well-informed of their spiritual riches, but not sufficiently well-formed to bear lasting fruit for the kingdom of God. The riches God gives are intended to be given away or shared with others.

We need only be *willing to try* a new way to benefit from the additional disciplines of fasting (from any of a number of things, not simply food), periods of silence and solitude, contemplative or wordless prayer, and increasing simplicity—one aspect of which is more faithful stewardship and care for all that God has created. Any of a number of books have been written to assist in the development of these disciplines, and Christian spiritual directors have become more accessible for guidance here as well. These are practices that are most counter-cultural, therefore more help may be required in any attempt at development.

The express purpose of any spiritual discipline is that of seeking to draw more closely to the Lord, of attending to *being with* and *listening to* the Lord more fully. Rohr writes, "We desperately need some disciplines to help us know *how* to see and what is

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<sup>25</sup> Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships, A Radical New Vision* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 39.

worth seeing, and what we *don't need* to see.”<sup>26</sup> This is a good description of what can develop as we walk in these disciplines of fasting, silence, solitude, contemplative prayer, and increasing simplicity. We need only be willing to ask the Lord and others for the help we need, then take the first step, ready even to risk failing in this process, as well as determined to not take initial struggle and failure as the final word. We must be willing to try again and again to develop a discipline that helps form our lives in a way that begins to produce fruit that lasts.

My weekly counseling and care schedule has for a dozen years been dominated by what I can only see as Spirit-appointments. I live with the anticipation of calls and appointments according to the will of God. These appointments come free from any ability I have to control them. As I have *intentionally placed myself and my vocation as an offering before the Lord*, I have repeatedly experienced times of God's provision of additional appointments into openings in the schedule. I have also experienced God's grace in cancellations on days when I inadvertently overscheduled myself. These are ways in which I have truly lived myself “into new ways of thinking.”<sup>27</sup> Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest* contains an entry that conveys the following wisdom regarding spiritual formation, “You can't give another what you have found, but you can make him homesick for what you have.”<sup>28</sup> I believe this, and have chosen to live intentionally looking to see and respond to those who express the hunger for God that can lead to more mature faith. This means that the most significant strategy I can employ in

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 39.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1963), 118.

helping others to become spiritually formed is to continue to engage well in my own ongoing process of Christian spiritual formation.

### Going Deep

Richard Foster writes in *Streams of Living Water*, “that when Jesus taught he did far more than what we think of as teaching. He spoke life into each heart and soul.”<sup>29</sup> Like Jesus, the Spirit-filled, mature follower has the same capacity to speak what is life-giving or reviving into the lives of others. As the psalmist declares, “I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free!” (Psalm 119:32 [NIV]). In *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster writes, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”<sup>30</sup>

Imagine you are in a lecture hall filled with honest people. The lecturer invites, “Whoever wants to be a shallow person, raise your hand.” Would you raise your hand? Do you want to be a shallow person? No, you want to be a deep person! Well, how is that going to transpire? How are we to become deep people? In *Deep-Rooted in Christ*, Joshua Choonmin Kang proposes, “The answer is rather simple. Deep people are those who practice spiritual disciplines in depth. Deep people have close relationships with God who is Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> Kang observes that, “unless we abide in the Word and under the

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Choonmin Kang, *Deep-Rooted in Christ: The Way of Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 48.

power of the Holy Spirit, we can't know the depths that God intends for us."<sup>32</sup> The answer is, by the twin engines of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The Spirit will not do for us what we are to do for ourselves. And we cannot do what only the Spirit can accomplish. We must avail ourselves to the Word through reading, memorizing, and meditating on this "living and active" Word. The Spirit will not do this for us. Likewise, we cannot transform ourselves in the simple acts of reading, meditating, and memorizing—this is the work of the Spirit of God. We are to do what only we can do, and trust the Spirit to do what only the Spirit can do. As Foster emphasized, "God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors."<sup>33</sup>

In a compelling presentation uniting the spiritual and human, Robert Webber argued that, "Spiritual growth is not divorced from ethics. Human values are spiritual values. All growth in love, justice, honesty, morality, wisdom, and knowledge is spiritual growth."<sup>34</sup> Webber continued his common sense description of the logical harmony between the two:

True spirituality does not cultivate habits of prayer, Bible reading, and witness, and at the same time disregard time, money, or neighbor. There is only one person—body and soul—and the refusal to regard persons as whole is a failure to recognize the full implication of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man. The only hope for a truly biblical and historic evangelical spirituality is that we affirm

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>33</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots, A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 249.

the whole Christ, the whole incarnation, the human and the divine in our spirituality.<sup>35</sup>

Webber provided the following conclusion of what he posited as his “argument for an incarnational view of spirituality that recognizes the validity of the divine and the human in our struggle to be a spiritual people.”<sup>36</sup> He wrote:

There is both a negative and a positive side to spirituality. Through the negative, we assert the necessity of rising above life to reach God through self-abandonment and quiet. In the positive, we meet God in the responsibility of life, in the process of history, in the issues of the day. One without the other is incomplete, although at times an individual or the church is called to lay greater stress on one than on the other.

We must learn, then not to *have* a spirituality, something 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 the hubbub of life...<sup>37</sup>

In *Addiction and Grace*, Gerald May writes, “The messages carried by a specific neurotransmitter may *stimulate*, *inhibit* or *facilitate* a cell’s activity.”<sup>38</sup> What I find so striking is that this description of what occurs at the cellular level is what we are designed to be about in the life of the body of Christ. We are to “*stimulate* one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24, [NAS]), relating to one another in ways that *inhibit* a life lived according to the flesh (Hebrews 10:26; 12:1, [NAS]), and *facilitate* growth in faith and life in the Spirit (Hebrews 10:39, 12:2, Galatians 5:16, [NAS]).

In *God Still Speaks*, Webber added his definition of spiritual growth. He defined it as “the transformation of the person in at least the following four areas: knowledge,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>37</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots, A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 239.

<sup>38</sup> Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 71.

attitudes, behavior, and skills.<sup>39</sup> Webber described the pattern for us that continues today, “Christians have modeled themselves after Paul in Thessalonica where he ‘reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead...’” (Acts 17:2, 3)<sup>40</sup> The goal that is to be the aim of the church, according to Webber is, “knowledge that leads to understanding, wisdom and action....It is the kind of knowledge that leads to growth.”<sup>41</sup>

Webber pointed to such passages as Romans 8:28 and 1 Peter 4:12, 13 to help describe a Christian attitude that is both “biblical and universal.” As for behavior, what is evidenced corresponds to what Paul advocates in Romans 6:19, “present your members as a servants to righteousness for holiness... They are those who ‘walk in the Spirit’ and not in the ‘lust of the flesh’ (Gal 5:16; see also vv. 17-26). They put off the old and put on the new (cf., Col. 3:1-17).”<sup>42</sup> The importance of our focus is reflected in Webber’s challenge to us, “to emphasize the freedom and power and righteousness we have in Christ to become the persons we were born the second time to be. This emphasis sets us free from legalism and places the accent on growth in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>43</sup> Consistent with Webber’s presentation of the behavior that evidences spiritual formation is “the more deeply biblical view of the newly created order in which

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<sup>39</sup> Robert E. Webber, *God Still Speaks: A Biblical View of Christian Communication* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 166.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>42</sup> Robert E. Webber, *God Still Speaks: A Biblical View of Christian Communication* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 168.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the values of the kingdom are lived out.”<sup>44</sup> Taking Acts 1:8 as our mandate, Webber has described the responsibility of the body of Christ “to witness and to function as a body... each one with his skill contributes to the continued growth of the entire body for mutual profit... The discovery and implementation of skills (whether teaching, preaching, counseling, administration, helping the needy, ministering to the sick or the dying, caring for the widows and orphans) must become a priority...”<sup>45</sup>

### **Worship**

The Celebrate Recovery Program that developed in 1991 out of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, has taken the twelve-step recovery approach of Alcoholics Anonymous and acknowledged AA’s “higher power” to be the true and living God, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>46</sup> CR is the biblically-based, Christ-centered counterpart of AA. Another distinctive of CR is its centerpiece of worship. Dallas Willard captured the essence of worship in the following description: “In worship we are ascribing greatness, goodness, and glory to God. It is typical of worship that we put every possible aspect of our being into it, all of our sensuous, conceptual, active, and creative capacities.”<sup>47</sup> Worship involves the whole of our being, with Christ at the center. Worship is central to our God-design; truly what we are made for. The spectrum of “hurts, hang-ups, and habits” to addictions is the counterfeit that promises fullness of life, but can never deliver,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>46</sup> John Baker, *Life’s Healing Choices: Freedom from Your Hurts, Hang-ups, and Habits* (NY: Howard Books, 2007), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 363.

as the self—not God—is at the center. C. S. Lewis observed, “Wickedness, when you examine it, turns out to be the pursuit of some good in the wrong way.... Goodness is, so to speak, itself; badness is only spoiled goodness.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, if you trace any evil back to its source, you will find that it is perverted goodness. In reclaiming negative patterns, worship is a central, life-giving, life-affirming pattern. God is the source, and in worship, we relate to God as we were designed to do. Never stop worshiping. It is what we are made to do with the whole of our lives, a vital, living rhythm.

### **From Rumination to Meditation**

The first chapter of Ephesians enumerates the many spiritual blessings which are ours in Christ: **predestined** adoption (God’s choosing of us), **prizes** (spiritual gifting), **purchased** out of sin (through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross), **privileged** information (God’s Word), **purpose** (God’s shaping of us through all the relationships and circumstances of life to uniquely participate in His kingdom work), and the **promised** Holy Spirit (to indwell and continue God’s ministry in and through our lives). (Ephesians 1:1-14). It is recommended that we meditate, or think continuously about, these riches that are entrusted to each of us in Christ, regardless of our earthly circumstances. It is also recommended that we cultivate the practice of giving thanks to God for them. Most of us have experienced negative rumination. The experience is one of feeling assaulted or plagued by thoughts that seem resistant to our attempts to cast them off. We may think of meditation as the opposite of this negative rumination. Most simply, meditation here is to “think on” as described in Philippians 4:8. Negative rumination can stall life and steal fruitfulness of thought and action. It prevents us from vital engagement with life each and

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<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: Macmillan, 1960), 49-50.



every day. Meditation on these riches of God can bring the motivation to reengage and more fully participate with the stewarding of these riches. A helpful prop in beginning the practice of meditation is the journaling or writing out all the negative thoughts, then deliberately relinquishing these to the Lord. On a separate page, write thoughts fitting the description provided in Philippians 4:8 to assist in the process of redirection into meditation. Writing out verses or brief passages on index cards, placing them in the line of vision and referring to them throughout the day is another helpful tool in developing a practice of meditation.

### **Transformation, Not Change**

Seeking to clarify the distinction between change and transformation, Flora Slosson Wuellner understands change to be about, “adaptation, reaction, without necessarily involving any *newness of being*.” In contrast, “transformation involves much more than mere adaptation to our manipulation. Transformation implies new being, a new creative energy flowing from the center which acts with creative power upon surrounding events.”<sup>49</sup> Looking more closely at what she cites as “God’s way of transformation,” she names four major characteristics. “The first of these is the scriptural witness that God’s transformation does not deny our humanity or wipe out our identity.”<sup>50</sup> Instead, Wuellner points to the witness in both the old and New Testaments for “God’s passionate interest in and concern for our human condition,” harkening back to the great second century church father Irenaeus of Lyons who declared, “The glory of God is the fully alive human

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<sup>49</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, “Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing,” *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 24, no. 3 (May/June 2009), 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

being.”<sup>51</sup> This is one presentation of what has been termed incarnational spirituality.

Wuellner writes, “In this way of spiritual experience, we are invited more deeply into the rich challenge of the flesh, the earth, and the human personality. The transformation God brings us is seen supremely in Jesus, always involved with the encounter, healing, and release of our full humanity.”<sup>52</sup> Wuellner continues enumerating the characteristics of incarnational spirituality as follows: “Secondly, God’s transformation of us unites us with our deepest longings...God’s transformation at work within us brings us increasingly closer to the person we have always (perhaps subconsciously) longed to be. How could it be otherwise if, indeed, ‘the kingdom of God is in the midst of you’ (Luke 17:21)?”

Wuellner recommends a type of “digging deeper” practice whereby we may discern the will of the Lord for our lives. It consists of asking, “What is my longing?” The follow up question is, “What is the longing that underlies *that*?” If we keep asking this question, each time deeper, longing below longing, we begin to understand who we are and for what purpose we were created. We begin to know that we long for this purpose because it already exists within us, far below the surface, at our very core. We begin to know that God, even more than we, longs for this fulfillment to unfold within us.”<sup>53</sup>

As she comes to the description of her third characteristic, she touches on what is often the impasse for those who are in pain. The want is for relief of some sort before they will trust God in the way forward. Yet this perspective is absent the understanding of God as our Healer. Wuellner continues, “A third manifestation of God’s transformation

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>53</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, “Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing,” *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 24, no. 3 (May/June 2009), 20.

within us is that it always involves our deep healing...but God's full healing seems to wait for our longing and consent. Is this because we are not helpless puppets, but created to be children, heirs, spouses, partners, co-creators with God, our free consent a crucial part of the creative wisdom of growing?"<sup>54</sup>

Writing of the foundational connection between relationship and formation, Wuellner completes her characterization of transformation: "The fourth great sign I see of God's way of transformation, and perhaps this is the greatest, is that our inner unfolding rises from a living relationship with God rather than from laws and commands."<sup>55</sup>

In the classic yet ever relevant, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, Hannah Whitall Smith described the essential need for this firm foundation:

We cannot bring forth the full fruits of the Christian life unless we are rooted and growing in the Source of that life. We all know that growing is not a thing of effort, but is the result of an inward life principle of growth. All the stretching and pulling in the world could not make a dead oak grow; but a live oak grows without stretching...the essential thing is to get within you the growing life... 'hid with Christ in God,' the wonderful divine life of an indwelling Holy Ghost....Abide in the Vine. Let the life from Him flow through all your spiritual veins.<sup>56</sup>

When we think of spiritual disciplines, we need to think of these in terms of helpful tools in the process of coming to assist us in allowing the Spirit to have more sway in our lives.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>55</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, "Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing," *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 24, no. 3 (May/June 2009), 22.

<sup>56</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1952), 183.

## Solitude and Silence

I well remember my first attempt at the discipline of solitude and silence. I had become so accustomed to adrenaline that simply working to sit still for one hour became an exhausting experience. As Dr. Archibald Hart points out, “The high level of adrenaline sparked by stress reduces our ability to rest.”<sup>57</sup> After that first experience, I quickly concluded that silence and solitude were not for me. I was wrong.

It is only in the intentionally carving out times of silence in solitude that we can sufficiently quiet ourselves to be able to tune into the voice of the Lord. What has He to say to me in my present circumstances? What do I bring to the silence? What do I need from it? What do I take away? Our ability to be still in the silence in a way that is free from negative thoughts, with a capacity to meditate on God’s Word is paradoxically one of those indicators of readiness for active participation in formation.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Morton Kelsey discloses what it is to attend well in the silence:

There is another, equally important way of praying in which a person becomes silent and tries to listen instead of speaking. Instead of picking up a familiar lead and speaking about the things that all of us feel are needed, we try to become still. Our effort is to be silent enough to hear, first, the deepest needs of our own hearts and, then, the prompting of the creative Spirit in whatever direction it may indicate.<sup>58</sup>

He rightly points to the biblical accounts of God’s appointed ones seeking Him in the silence. The Gospel narrative as well shows Jesus as the model for the discipline of silence, recalling the many accounts of Jesus moving into times of silence and solitude.

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<sup>57</sup> Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *Adrenaline and Stress* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Morton Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence: Meditation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 120.

We forget that silence is ...important in the Christian tradition, starting with the long history of experiences of the Hebrew people. These experiences go back to the solitude of Abraham when God's covenant was first given. They are found in the lonely receptivity of Moses on Mount Sinai and in Isaiah's willingness to listen alone in the Temple, as well as in the fact that one day out of every seven was set aside as the Sabbath, which was a day of quiet and rest for all Hebrews. Still, we do not always see how many similar experiences were present in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Many of the major events of Jesus' life took place when he went off by himself. After his baptism he went alone into the desert for forty days to meet and deal with himself. There in silence, where Satan appeared to him, he was prepared for his ministry (Mt. 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). It was in the silence of a lonely mountain that the experience of the transfiguration was shown to Jesus and three of his disciples (Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-10; Lk 9:28-36). After the Last Supper, Jesus prepared for the ordeal ahead by taking his followers into the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed alone and in quiet while the disciples slept (Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:41-46).

Again and again, he went away to some solitary place, away from the activity of people. These times are mentioned so often in the Gospels that there is but little question that this was Jesus' regular practice, and several of the references show that these were times of prayer (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35, 6:46; Lk 5:16, 6:12, 9:18; Jn 6:15). He told his followers to go into the closet and shut the door to pray (Mt 6:6-13). He understood and supported Mary, the sister of Martha, in her quiet attention to him (Lk 10:39-42), and he commended her for not getting involved in household busyness. In Luke's version, the Lord's Prayer was given after the disciples had watched Jesus apparently praying in silence and asked him to teach them how to pray (Lk 11:1-4). Evidently Jesus, even though he was the Divine incarnate, tried to keep his relationship with Abba in good order and wanted his followers to know how their own channels to Abba could be kept open through silence.<sup>59</sup>

We need to see this habit that was a regular rhythm in the life of our Lord as consistent with the way we, too have been shaped to live. We honor the Lord's design as we seek to cultivate the disciplined practice of solitude and silence.

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<sup>59</sup> Morton Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence: Meditation for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 122.

## Prayer

Kenneth Leech asks and answers, “So what is prayer? It is a ‘sharing in the divine nature’.... At its simplest, prayer is longing, desire, the expression of our deepest aspirations, joys, or sorrows...Christian prayer is a specific kind of prayer: it is prayer *in Christ*. And this prayer is rooted in, and arises out of, the Christian understanding of God.”<sup>60</sup> In the pages of Scripture, we are invited to “let our requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6), but too many of us stop there. Far more than this being a description of the whole of God’s purpose for prayer, it, too, is to become the process by which we continue to place all before the Lord, and as we do, we come to more fully know and live in loving response to this God to whom we pray. In Leech’s description, “Prayer is...the movement of God to man, and of man to God, the rhythm of encounter and response.”<sup>61</sup>

So much of the process of Christian spiritual formation is indeed finding and living in this rhythm. In the process of formation, in the way that negative patterns must be identified and disrupted, so the patterns that lead to healthier rhythms must be identified, duplicated and cultivated and practiced. We are ever in need of enlarging our perspective in the process of formation, always seeking to move from our limited, human “seeing” to more habitually beholding from the viewpoint of the eternal. Leech remarks, “In this sense, all Christian life, all discipleship, is prayer. But this continuous ‘practice of the presence of God’ depends upon cultivation.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kenneth Leach, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Leach, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 8.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

When we speak of the disciplines useful for serving as catalysts in developing the spiritually formed life, we are really describing tools or practices that help us to become who we most truly are by God's creation and redemption. According to Leech, "The disciplines of regular times and concentration points in the life of prayer are intended to provide a framework for cultivating a life which becomes all prayer, a life in which the division between 'prayer' and 'work' becomes blurred and unreal. For prayer is a living encounter with a living God."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

We have become *consumers* of religion rather than *cultivators* of a spiritual life.<sup>1</sup>

### **Something Has Gone Very Wrong**

On a Sunday morning in November 1980, at my husband's church in Michigan—an approximately 500-member church—the pastor delivered the Gospel message I readily recognized as what I had been longing to hear my whole life. Despite my habitual involvement in my local church, other pastors had fallen short of this biblically faithful, convicting presentation. I responded to the Spirit's call, approached the pastor, and asked to be baptized. We spoke privately, and as he was assured of my genuine repentance and conversion, he made a plan to baptize me at the church the following March.

I had become engaged to be married the weekend of my conversion; my fiancé and I set a wedding date a year from the date of our engagement. We agreed that it was most appropriate to ask his pastor if he would come to Illinois to officiate our wedding ceremony at the church where I grew up. He did so in November of the year I was baptized, again beautifully sharing the Gospel message at our wedding.

Less than five years later, this beloved pastor drove to his church on his day off, entered his office, and committed suicide by hanging himself. He left no note for his wife and two grown children.

All were left to wonder what had gone so wrong that he chose to end his life, betraying the very life-giving message used to set my own heart free. How had his own

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Okholm. *Monk Habits for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2007), 35.



faith failed to inform his life? While any understanding of how or why he came to make this tragic choice remains a mystery, other, far better options were available then as they are now. When our functional theology matches our formational theology, that is, when our inside-out lives are congruent with our Christian beliefs, we make life-giving choices.

### **Survey Says...**

I asked clients who have presented themselves as committed Christians seeking biblically based counsel to answer the following survey questions:

1. How would you say your Christian faith informs/influences your relationships?
2. How do you see your relationships affecting your faith?
3. What do you see as the primary hindrances to healthy relationships?
4. What do you identify as the primary hindrances to robust Christian spirituality?

The responses of the fifteen participants reveal the correlation between the prevalence and intensity of struggle in the flesh and a failure to examine the health and influence of one's relationships on one's spiritual condition. Despite a variety of responses, I note the absence of identifying the lack of discipline(s) as a hindrance to robust Christian spirituality. Instead, the words used range from listing a lack of fruit of the Spirit, e.g., "lack of patience, hope, wisdom..." to blaming "insincere leaders" and "getting bogged down in man's doctrine as opposed to God's doctrine" for one's diminished Christian spirituality. Only one in fifteen named lack of spiritual disciplines of, "not praying together, lack of church group and involvement..." as primary hindrances to robust Christian spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Our Christian faith informs our relationships.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix II: Client Surveys, 2010 - 2012.

Our relationships influence our faith. We do also live with the temptation depicted in the book of James, of being “a hearer and not a doer...one who...has looked at himself...and has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was” (James 1:23-24). We must take deliberate steps to guard against this natural inclination toward disconnection between seeing truly and living authentically by developing healthy practices along with healthy patterns.

### **Patterns of Redemption**

A redeemed heart provides no accommodation for despair, envy, hate, bitterness, and the like. There is an essential need for the Christ follower to view herself or himself consistent with what the Word of God declares to be true, and to be active in the process of renewing one’s mind (Romans 12:1-2). This work of renewal of mind involves intentionally taking thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) and replacing what is false and/or life-diminishing with what is true, right, excellent, etc., according to the counsel of Philippians 4:8.

The economy of success in the world is knowledge and power. The economy of effectively following Christ is obedience to his commands (cf., John 3 love/obey). A Christian’s desire for a successful life requires that one learn to love well. So how do we grow to become people who love well? Volumes of books written on the topic are still best-sellers, presumably because we still seek the know-how to become people who love well. Whatever we do not know about loving well, we may be certain it will be personally costly. Having previously identified the need to begin with surrendering our lives to Christ, we can offer a description of what shape this begins to take in a life. We

know Jesus allowed Himself to be misunderstood, consistently resisting both defending Himself, and attacking in kind (Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 23: 8-11; John 7:3-9). We may grow in becoming free of defensiveness, a step in growth and health, as we choose to allow Jesus to be our defense.

Embracing Jesus as our defense is like choosing to have the perfect defense attorney representing us—one who never loses a case. Far from leaving us living defenseless, we live perfectly, completely defended every day. One example of living free of defending oneself includes having specific knowledge or training and resisting being drawn into an argument with someone who is absent the same knowledge or training yet has just refuted information one has shared. This is freedom. Coming to have a “big picture” perspective helps with this—that is, asking what this particular exchange will mean from an eternal perspective. We can become free from needing to win arguments as we instead seek to live in honesty and humility. There may be multiple opportunities in any given day to engage in argument with others over non-essential differences, where there is no potential benefit to defending our position. Jesus did not call us to go and argue the Gospel message. Rather, He called us to go and be witnesses, and to preach the Gospel, and to make disciples.

What makes for healthy relationships? Who are the healthy people who have such relationships? How do we know? Here we may begin to consider character qualities that cannot be absent in a healthy human, and cannot be known apart from a relational context. As Andrew Murray has observed, “Humility before God is nothing if not proved in humility before men.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Murray. *Humility* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 44.

## The Plan

A biblically corroborated triad of qualities emerges as essential, since without them one cannot expect to have healthy relationships. These are humility, honesty, and having a teachable spirit. We find these in the biblical call for all Christ followers. What is advocated here is done so on the evidence and belief that, resident within an individual, these qualities would directly affect the capacity within said individual for readiness for formation. Nicholas M. Healy asserts that Christians do not even agree on the meaning of “God”, let alone have universal agreement on what it takes to live the Christian life. He comments, “We do not even agree on the level of enthusiasm needed to be a good Christian. Not all of us think we need to be highly motivated, however much others insist that we should be.”<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Healy’s point, J. Heinrich Arnold has declared, “If we grasp in our hearts that Jesus died for us, it will change us completely; it will mean revolution; it will make something new out of us to the destruction of our sinful self so that we will no longer be slaves to it.”<sup>5</sup> Humility allows us to see ourselves and our true need for transformation in the light of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, and of his claim on our lives.

There are, as well, several Christian practices helpful in contributing to the growth of these qualities. Some practices are related to more technical or specialized training, for instance, that of healing. I will advocate for the use of several practices available without the need for specific training, therefore available to all, irrespective of specific gifting,

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, “In and of the World,” *The Christian Century*, May 16, 2012, 26.

<sup>5</sup> J. Heinrich Arnold, *Discipleship: Living for Christ in the Daily Grind* (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing, 1994), 19.

calling, or inclination. These will be discussed following the presentation of the essential competencies of humility, honesty, and a willingness to learn.

### **Humility and Honesty**

Humility is one of three chords needed to have a healthy knowledge of self.

Kenneth Boa explains, “Humility is the disposition in which the soul realizes that all of life is about trust in God, and that ‘from Him and through Him and to Him are all things’ (Romans 11:36).”<sup>6</sup> When joined by honesty and a willingness to learn, we find the fertile ground to begin not only to fear the Lord and to know oneself, but to begin a process of growth with roots that go down deep in the Lord Jesus Christ. Writers abound in presenting the need for humility in the life of the Christian. The biblical record itself calls for this quality so clearly demonstrated in the life of our Lord. In the writings of Paul, as well, we have ample advocacy for humility:

To the Philippians: ‘Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem the *other* better than themselves’; ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and humbled Himself’ (Philippians 2:3, 5, 7-8). And to the Colossians: ‘Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, even as Christ forgave you’ (Colossians 3:12 – 13).<sup>7</sup>

Practically, how is humility verified in one’s life? It is an attitude that proceeds from an intentionally chosen way of regarding others and oneself. Here is another place where we experience that truly a quality cannot simply be resident within a person, but its presence must evidence itself in the context of relationship. Murray’s description

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 454.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 45.

continues, “It is in our relationship to one another, in our treatment of one another, that the true lowliness of mind and the humility of heart are to be seen. Our humility before God has no value, except that it prepares us to reveal the humility of Jesus to our fellow-men.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the potentially unwelcome pathways to the development of humility for the uninitiated is loss. We learn experientially through loss that we do not ultimately possess the power to control outcomes in ways we most desperately desire. Rightly regarded, understanding this truth is a gift from God in disguise. As Peter Scazzero learned, “Limits are behind all loss. We cannot do or be anything we want. God has placed enormous limits around even the most gifted of us. Why? To keep us grounded, to keep us humble. In fact, the very meaning of the word *humility* has its root in the Latin *humus*, meaning ‘of the earth.’” Humility is a necessary safeguard against the objectification of other humans. Consider the description offered by Milton Mayeroff:

...a broader meaning of humility as the overcoming of an attitude that sees others as existing simply to satisfy my own needs, and treats others as if they were merely obstacles to overcome or clay for me to mold as I please. It includes overcoming the arrogance that exaggerates my own powers at the expense of the powers of others, and blinds me to the extent of my dependence, in anything I accomplish, on the cooperation of various conditions over which I have little or no control. Humility also means overcoming pretentiousness: I am able to present myself as I am without self-display and concealment, without posing and indirection. And since I do not pretend to be what I am not, I am not humiliated by having others see me truly: in being open there is nothing for others to see through.<sup>9</sup>

One can glean from the above the mutual interdependence and reinforcement of humility and honesty. Honesty as an essential character quality may be defined as

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Murray, *Humility* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 24.

habitual truthfulness, both with self and others. Dennis Okholm has highlighted the interplay between the two qualities: “Humility breaks down our egoistic fantasies and our need to be in control—our need to be the exception.”<sup>10</sup> He continues, “Humility is not selling ourselves short. Nor is it selling ourselves at an inflated price—which is pride, the opposite of humility. Humility requires... ‘radical self honesty.’”<sup>11</sup> Okholm reveals the importance of the quality in the context of relationship by providing its contrast: “The one who believes that the rules do not apply to her is the one who cannot respect or deal gently with the rest of the human race.”<sup>12</sup> Dennis Morgan notes the essential nature of humility by pointing out that, “Humility toward God is an aspect of the relationship we have with Him as our Heavenly Daddy.”<sup>13</sup> He adds, “Humility is a choice. It is ultimately an act of will once our emotional connections with pride are resolved. Pride never worked, and it never will. It must be abandoned.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Teachability**

In consideration of the quality of being teachable, I do not refer to innate capacity. Rather, what is asserted is a character quality. It is most accurately described as an attitude shaped by humility and honesty by which a person comes to be able to learn truth about God, herself or himself, and others. To be teachable is to be willing to be disciplined, the most basic of needs for the follower of Christ. Scazzero observes that discipleship

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<sup>10</sup> Dennis Okholm, *Monk Habits for Everyday People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007). 69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis D. Morgan, *Life in Process: Moving Beyond the Things That Hinder; Moving Toward the Love That Heals* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 87.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

includes, “the putting off of the sinful patterns and habits of our biological families and being transformed to live as members of Christ’s family.”<sup>15</sup> He continues, “Every disciple, then, has to look at the brokenness and sin of his or her family and culture. The problem is that few of us have reflected honestly on the impact of our family of origin and other major...events in our histories.”<sup>16</sup> Examining longings and losses from our family of origin is a helpful exercise, one that can be a doorway to healing. Learning to grieve the losses from our family of origin, while never appealing, may also reveal some surprising discoveries of unidentified strengths. Here is a place to examine the family secrets as well. Secrets hold power over us, and create distortions to health. We will discuss family secrets more in Chapter Five.

Being teachable shows itself through discovering from His Word what God has to say, including what He has to say about those who are in Christ, and then, through a process of discipleship, “working these truths into our practical, everyday lives.”<sup>17</sup> Boa asserts, “Those who finish well maintain an ongoing learning posture through the seasons of their lives.”<sup>18</sup> He continues to emphasize the importance of this quality, “In our youth, we have a problem with foolishness and lack of focus; in our middle years, we struggle with double-mindedness and entanglement; when we reach our later years, our great challenge is teachability. Those who maintain a childlike sense of wonder, surprise, and awe do not succumb to rigidity and hardening of the categories.”<sup>19</sup> Here we see how

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 103.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 454.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



these qualities are foundational to the cultivation of the practices of paying attention, wonder and humor, to be discussed later in this chapter.

The truest things about any of us have to do with what God has to say. To begin, we must learn these truths, and actively embrace these until they replace the identity we had before being in Christ. We come to live our true identity as we take God at His Word, discarding what was once true of ourselves—just as we would discard old clothing that has become worn out or that no longer fits—with the new clothing in Christ, i.e., what He declares about our identity that has become true from the time we received His gift of salvation.<sup>20</sup>

Once we begin to live from the sense of security based on an identity in Christ, we become more open to accept truth on every level. Inherent in a teachable attitude is the willingness for self-examination. Marjorie J. Thompson provides a description of what may be termed graceful self-examination: “Self-examination is an occasion for spiritual refreshment, whatever we discover within ourselves at the time of review. Its purpose is always to bring us into greater intimacy with the Lover of our souls, so that we can learn to walk according to God’s path for us. Indeed, the practice of self-examination will only blossom out of a *desire* to belong more completely to God and to love as God loves.”<sup>21</sup>

Thompson’s presentation includes naming the fruits of self-examination. As we consider some of those fruits in her presentation below, note the interweaving of humility, honesty and a teachable spirit:

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>21</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: an Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 97-98.

There are many benefits to daily self-examination. Exercised under the penetrating gaze and guiding grace of the Spirit, it leads to healthy self-awareness. Tradition tells us that knowledge of self and knowledge of God go hand in hand. We only know who we really are in relation to God, and knowledge of God leads us to perceive our true status. Since it belongs to the work of the Spirit to reveal us to ourselves, we are incapable of clear self-knowledge apart from grace. Examination of consciousness is a means to self-awareness in relation to God's love.

A result of increasing self-awareness is increasing truthfulness. Humility allows us to be real. We no longer have to put on a good face or a false front. There is no need to impress or to hide. We are not trying to protect or advance ourselves in God's eyes. Truthfulness gives us the freedom to let go of pretense and start living in simple honesty. This is one expression of Jesus' promise, 'you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' (John 8:32)<sup>22</sup>

Let us further consider the life that God calls us into as we function in humility, honesty and self-examination. Here again we must look into God's Word to understand His design.

### **Shalom and Sozo**

Continuing to seek integration of relational and spiritual health, we turn now to God's design for the life of His beloved as revealed in the Old Testament presentation of shalom. Tammy R. Williams explicates the fullness of what is encompassed in this Hebrew word: "The Old Testament concept of *shalom* best captures the concept of health. It suggests the idea of completeness, soundness, well-being, and prosperity, and includes every aspect of life: personal, relational, and national. Because shalom entails living in covenantal relationship with God and others, holiness and righteousness are inherent in it."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>23</sup> Tammy R. Williams, "Is There a Doctor in the House? Reflections on the Practice of Healing in African American Churches," In *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 100.

Williams follows this understanding of the comprehensiveness of health into the New Testament as she looks at the meaning of the Greek word *sozo*, writing,

This view of shalom is reflected in the New Testament, where healing consistently involves not only physical recovery from sickness but the renewal of relationships with God and others. The New Testament term *sozo* ('to save' or 'to heal'), which is used for both physical healing and soul salvation, has a similar range of meanings. Therefore, from a Christian perspective, the aim of healing is the complete well-being of the person. It entails being in right relation to God, oneself, others, and the rest of creation. In light of its scriptural dimensions, healing can be understood as 'a process of bringing or restoring wholeness and sound functioning to every aspect of human life, which includes bodily integrity, emotional balance, mental well-being, and spiritual aliveness.'<sup>24</sup>

Let us look at one New Testament example of this comprehensive restoration to health from the Gospels. Note how expansive is this understanding of healing versus our contemporary Western view of healing as understood only in the limited, physical sense of the word.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?' He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.' (Mark 5:25 -34. See also Luke 8:44-48).

Jesus' healing of the woman encompassed a restoration to physical, social and spiritual health. Physical health is confirmed by both the words of the woman and Jesus. Jesus' healing of her within her society is a bit more subtle to the Western reader, yet can be understood by how this encounter between the woman and Jesus as Rabbi penetrated

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

the established norms of the day. Given that her disease involved an issue of blood, she should not even have been in public. (cf., Leviticus 15:25-33). Prohibitions in the Law based on her “unclean” condition may account for her approaching Jesus “in fear and trembling.” As we repeatedly observe in the life of Jesus, the conventions of the day were turned on their heads by Jesus’ radically loving approach to people. Spiritual healing is conveyed in his one word public address to her as “Daughter”, pronouncing her healed, and that, now “well” (healthy), she was to “go in peace.” (Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8: 43-48) This is the peace made possible from the whole person healing and health she found in Jesus the Christ. What the woman received from Jesus is still available to us today. We turn now to the discussion of practices each of us can cultivate to come to live more consistently in *shalom* or *sozo* that is His by design and ours by His redemption.

There are numerous Christian practices by which the practitioner may derive the benefit of growth in grace through usage. Here we will introduce practices that are easily begun and readily developed with little instruction and a simple determination to practice. The point of these practices is a deeper knowledge of God and self in relation to others. All “Christian practices...involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing: they are activities imbued with the knowledge of God and creation.” And it is believed that “by participating in Christian practices...we truly come to know God and the world, including ourselves.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” In *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedmans, 2002), 24.

### **Paying Attention and Savoring**

It is never true that nothing is happening. Something is always happening, and whatever it is, it is worth noting. Paying attention can be regarded as a spiritual practice to be cultivated, one that has the potential benefit of helping to shape in the Christian childlike faith that is so delightful to Lord Jesus (Matthew 18:1-5).

Here is one writer's presentation of paying attention, quoted here for the portrait it provides that enables the reader's application:

Typing the phrase 'pay attention' just now immediately takes me back to the innumerable times when, as a child, I was told to do exactly this by my parents and teachers. This would happen when I was caught up in some interior world of imagination or preoccupation and was not sufficiently heedful of what was being said to me. However, the kind of attention that spirit and soul require is quite different from this effortful focusing of our thoughts and constriction of our imagination. In many ways it is the exact opposite. Paying attention as a practice of soulful spirituality is not scrunching up your willpower and tightening your focus but simply opening yourself to what you encounter. This makes it much more an act of release than an act of effort. What we release is any attempt to control attention; instead, we allow it to be absorbed by our present experience.

This sort of attentive awareness is sometimes described as contemplation. Contemplation is an apprehension of existence that is wide awake and uncluttered by thought. Suppose you are standing on the edge of a deciduous forest in spring and suddenly notice the variety of shades of green in front of you. Contemplative knowing of that sea of variegated green is simply allowing your attention to be absorbed by it—being fully present to it, not simply to your thoughts about it.<sup>26</sup>

The child engrossed in play becomes our model here. Benner observed, "This sort of paying attention is something at which young children excel. Their capacity to be absorbed by a single thing is immense. Imagine, for example, the young child engrossed with a snail, or ripples on a puddle, or the texture of the food he or she is fingering instead of eating."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> David G. Benner, PhD, *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Another practice that in the spirituality of other religions has been referred to as mindfulness is here described as noticing. Readily available to the Christian, it is a practice that assists us in being more fully present in every life context. It is to seek to see with the eyes as if with the lens of a camera, taking still shots in the mind's eye, more astutely observing what one notices. Similarly, savoring has to do with fullness of sensory engagement. It requires us to slow down, and give rapt attention with all of our senses to all persons and provisions in our lives. Savoring as a discipline leads us into deepened gratitude and wonder.

As we have already seen the interrelatedness of qualities necessary to spiritual formation, so we find the intertwining of simple practices to foster formation. Benner notes, "Awareness never travels alone. Once it arrives and finds a welcoming home in our soul, we discover that it has brought along other guests. Wonder is often among them."<sup>28</sup>

### **Wonder**

When I host a mentee on a day retreat, I invite the participant to take "wonder walks" and to journal about the discoveries one encounters along the way. It is a simple practice to help lead toward a more integrated, holy life. Cultivating wonder brings us to discover the world through the eyes of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins as "charged with the grandeur of God."<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning presented a very similar picture in this often quoted poem:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>29</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: W.H. Gardner, 1985), 27.

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
 And every common bush afire with God;  
 But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
 The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.<sup>30</sup>

As image-bearers of God, each of us is capable of cultivating wonder, from the simplest to the most erudite. Hindrances may emerge in the forms of cynicism or busyness, but here, too, intentionality with chosen perspective is needed to take a step into fostering a greater sense of wonder. Benner offers the following: “Wonder will only emerge in the presence of reverence. If nothing is sacred, nothing worthy of reverence, then nothing will evoke wonder....Reverence for life encourages openness and awe. It makes room for each person or thing to be encountered in their own uniqueness. When all of life is treated as sacred, it becomes possible then to experience it as sacred, and as this happens, wonder begins to burst upon us.”<sup>31</sup> What comes naturally to the child may require the adult to relinquish negative thought patterns of critique and dismissal of what one notices, allowing oneself to simply be more fully present in one’s environment, whatever that may be. Increasing our capacity for wonder provides a path of living with greater optimism leading to hope. We are given a glimpse of the difference wrought by wonder through Benner’s lens: “Wonder allows us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, the sacred in the profane.”<sup>32</sup> As Margaret Feinberg pondered how to keep from losing a sense of wonder, she identified what she termed the following “simple but transformative” advice: 1) Work with good people you enjoy 2) Stay grounded in community 3) Stay rooted in Scripture 4) Surround yourself with people who love you

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<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 265.

<sup>31</sup> David G. Benner, PhD, *Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

enough to say “no.”<sup>33</sup> She maintains that, “Wonder reignites our faith. Wonder asks us to live with eyes wide open to God. Wonder invites us out of the shallows and into hallows of the divine.”<sup>34</sup> Feinberg began praying for wonder, and notes that, “God answered in unexpected and startling ways.”<sup>35</sup> In the absence of an identified capacity for wonder, pray. Ask God as Margaret Feinberg asked, and prepare to be “wonderstruck.”<sup>36</sup>

Following are summaries of two exercises Benner provides to help in the cultivation of wonder:

Select a loved one’s photograph to look at contemplatively, opening yourself to the person it represents. Attend to the impressions that emerge and allow them to flow over you. Seek to see with fresh eyes. Look at their eyes. Dare to stare, perhaps longer than you ever would if they were before you. Allow their eyes to be a doorway through which you can enter the mystery of their being. You may feel like you know them well, but allow yourself to enter their life through this photograph. See if you are able to encounter the stranger that is there in the midst of the familiar and intimate. Be open to the mystery that is, or was, their life.

Take a walk in a garden or forest. Walk slowly and draw in each breath intentionally and fully, allowing each to fill you up with the sensations of this place. Have within you a willingness to wait for one thing to draw your attention. Give your full attention to what emerges, be it tree or water drop. Focus as if through a camera lens. Notice it. Reflect on it. Ponder it in your senses, imagination, emotions, and thoughts. Again, open yourself to seeing it as if you have never seen anything like it before. And open yourself to its mystery—to the elegance, simplicity, and beauty of its being.<sup>37</sup>

In short, approach your wonder walk as you would a day at an art museum filled with works of your favorite artists. Attend to what you encounter in nature on your walk as you would attend to taking in the artists’ pieces, including the use of all senses by

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret Feinberg, “Don’t Lose the Wonder,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2013), 88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 117-118.



attending as well to sounds, smells, the feel of leaves or blades of grass to the touch, and, if one should be so fortunate, the taste of honeysuckle nectar. Think of how the cultivation of wonder in these ways may be drawn upon and transferred to God's image-bearers, affording a greater kindness and gentleness in one's approach to others.

### **Humor**

Where there is humor, there is laughter. And yet, according to Daniel Pink, humor is far more than “mere entertainment.” In fact, both laughter and humor have their place as key elements that help us to live in fullness of health. Pink asserts, “It’s time to rescue humor from its status as mere entertainment and recognize it for what it is—a sophisticated and peculiarly human form of intelligence that can’t be replicated by computers and that is becoming increasingly valuable in a high-concept, high touch world.”<sup>38</sup>

Pink’s research took him to Bombay to meet with Dr. Kataria, who had begun a unique application of his understanding of laughter. Dr. Kataria, who began a laughing club in Bombay in 1995 in the interest of promoting health, points out that “humor is not a prerequisite for laughter.”<sup>39</sup> Kataria distinguishes happiness from joyfulness: Happiness is conditional; joyfulness is unconditional, explaining, “When you depend on something else to make you laugh, the laughter doesn’t belong to you. That’s a conditional laugh. But in laughter clubs, the source of laughter is not outside the body; it is within us.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2005), 199.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-203.

Observing that children “don’t really grasp humor...yet they laugh from the time they are infants,” Kataria’s efforts went to “help people reclaim their childlike playfulness.”<sup>41</sup>

Pink, who even experienced a session in one of Kataria’s laughter clubs, admits that, “the science mostly backs up Kataria’s claims about laughter’s virtues. Laughter won’t cure tuberculosis, but this odd human activity—emitting pulsating paroxysms of air and sound through our piehole—is undeniably good for us.”<sup>42</sup> The research is in, and the evidence shows that, “laughter can decrease stress hormones and boost the immune system.”<sup>43</sup>

Neuroscientist Robert Provine notes, “The scientific record offers modest but growing support for the analgesic properties of humor and laughter.”<sup>44</sup> Pink points out the aerobic benefits, noting, “It activates the cardiovascular system, increases the heart rate, and pumps more blood to internal organs.”<sup>45</sup> Laugh researcher William Fry “found that it took 10 minutes of rowing on his home exercise machine to reach the heart rate produced by one minute of hearty laughter.”<sup>46</sup>

Parker Palmer insists, “Laughter can be as helpful as silence in bringing us closer to the sacred.”<sup>47</sup> Recalling the experience of children sneaking peeks at one another and setting off ripples of laughter in the company of adults who have bowed their heads in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> L. Berk, S. Tan, W. fry, et al., “Neuroendocrine and Stress Hormone Changes During Mirthful Laughter,” *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, vol.298, no. 6 (1989), 390-396. L. Berk and S. Tan, “a Positive Emotion: The Eustress Metaphor. Mirthful Laughter Modulates Immune System Immunocytes,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, vol.19, no. D009 (1997 Supplement).

<sup>44</sup> Robert R. Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (Penguin Books, 2001), 202

<sup>45</sup> Pink, *A Whole New Mind*, 203.

<sup>46</sup> Provine, *Laughter*, 193.

<sup>47</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 154.

prayer, Palmer writes, “In these lovely moments, the laughter of children always strikes me as a form of prayer—easily as valid as what we adults do in silence, a celebration of life’s sacredness in which children dwell so deeply.”<sup>48</sup>

### **Keeping Sabbath**

Sabbath-keeping has gone by the wayside. As Christians currently under the dispensation of grace, many have discarded what has come to be seen as legalism in any literal adherence to the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately, many have gone so far as to dismiss all that is in keeping with God’s good design that came through the Law. At the conclusion of the first creation account in Genesis, we read, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.” (Genesis 2: 1-3, [NRSV]).

As we have previously considered the presenting patterns in human behavior and in relationships, here the Lord God by design established the pattern of rest from work, of the setting aside and hallowing a day following the work of creation. By and large our culture is antagonistic to rest in the biblical sense. Play is approved in the form of sport and physical fitness, but it is counter-cultural to simply stop and be. What would we *be* doing? We do well to consider God’s design of us as human beings, rather than human doings. Once again, God’s wisdom and understanding of human design and needs supersedes cultural norms and trends.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

In advocating for reclaiming Sabbath, what is intended is to begin with a perspective that seeks to find what the soul—made by and for God—needs. First and foremost we are made to worship the Lord. Sabbath-keeping will always be consistent with the Lord's design. If we can continue to choose the perspective of seeking to keep faith with God's design, we will be helped to discover what activities or lack thereof will comprise personal Sabbath-keeping. We must recall Jesus' words, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27).

There is much in our culture that would chafe against purposing to find the rest and renewal intended in the Lord's design for Sabbath-keeping. To begin, we may reconsider how we view recreation. Let us begin to see it as *re-creation*, asking what it means for us to attend well to our design, and then seek to identify what activity, endeavor or way of engaging in life can be named, that when present causes us to be essentially re-created or reinvigorated. For example, an introvert, or one who is energized by the internal world of thoughts and ideas, would likely be re-energized by some quality time in quiet, perhaps even in solitude and silence, with activities that may include writing, reading, or study. An extravert, or one who is energized by the external world and people, will most likely find replenishment in activities that include spending time with other people. Keeping Sabbath in this way may be regarded as engaging ourselves in ways that, consistent with the Spirit of God and the biblical record, help us to discover and stay the course of living most authentically as who God designed and redeemed us to be.

## Margins

The biblical pattern of setting aside one day can be reclaimed as we begin to take steps to simply live with better margins in our lives. This involves taking intentional steps to decrease the self-induced stress of rushing from one activity or commitment to the next. It begins by taking a serious look at the big picture, then attending well to the details involved in that big picture.

For example, I have two new commitments beginning this fall that will be added to a schedule that already involves a full day of care-giving and several days of counseling appointments along with the numerous habitual responsibilities of family, church, pet, and home care. Preparation that includes looking at the duration of these commitments, as well as the weekly requirements in terms of time, attention, energy, and actual work is necessary in advance of the start of these commitments. It also includes a plan for structuring blocks of time during specified days for the work required to follow through with these commitments. While I often encounter resistance to structure, both within myself and others, I have found that, paradoxically, providing a detailed plan with a helpful structure both enables completion and reduces pressure, thereby preserving living “freely and lightly,” as we who follow Jesus are invited to do. (Matthew 11:28, *The Message*).

As a practical first step to develop better margins in one’s life, simple tools can be used, such as setting and synchronizing clocks ahead by ten minutes or more, then making a commitment to adopt this as real time. In doing so, there is a step taken to reduce rushing from one point to the next, as well as reducing the commensurate stress potential that comes from driving too fast and/or arriving late. Another tool is planning

the night before for all that is involved, e.g., financial needs, apparel, travel. Advance planning anticipates potential hindrances, allowing additional time and protected margins to problem-solve, thereby increasing the likelihood of being able to follow through on one's commitments.

Several essential qualities along with chosen perspective and practices have been presented. We turn now to the introduction of assessments and resources that can be seen as significantly helpful tools useful to enable us to more fully engage in the process of spiritual formation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“He who knows others is learned; He who knows himself is wise.”  
- Lao-Tzu

“Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”  
- William Faulkner

In this chapter, we will provide a description and recommended use of two assessments that can lead to increased self-understanding, along with helpful suggestions to improve relationships. We will highlight the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Emotional Intelligence Appraisal, due both to their ready accessibility and to their helpfulness in improving self-understanding and relational competence. Discussion will also include some important cognitive-behavioral steps for emotional regulation and some fundamental tenets of Family Systems Theory, all with the goal of adding to knowledge that leads to practical application. All “tools” here provided are done so ultimately to increase one’s capacity to live and love well.

### **MBTI**

My own introduction to the MBTI instrument, used “to help people determine their personality types,” came in 1996, during my educational training in pastoral counseling.<sup>1</sup>

Following the completion of my own inventory, I had my husband complete his. At that time, I had been married for fifteen years. I had become aware that I would most likely be assessed as an “introvert,” and that my husband would assuredly be shown to be

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<sup>1</sup> Renee Baron, *What Type Am I?* (New York: Penguin Group, 1998), 5.

an “extravert.” What I had not known, however, was that the way in which we process information is a dominant factor in determining whether or not we size up as an introvert or an extravert. As an introvert, at any given time, there is either a party or a convention going on in my head. I process internally, being drawn to the internal world of thoughts and ideas. An extravert is oriented to the external world, including people, so will often be verbal in the decision-making process. Before I learned this introverted/extraverted difference in how information is processed, I had wrongly interpreted my husband’s extraverted style as being unsure of what he thought, or worse, “a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8). What I viewed as double-mindedness was in fact extraverted processing. Once understood, I was able to view our ways of processing information as legitimate differences, and my anxiety was alleviated. My experience of having been so tremendously impacted by the benefit of this tool has since convinced me of its helpfulness for others. According to Amy Simpson, “In real life, introversion and extroversion are not polar opposites, but points along a spectrum.”<sup>2</sup> Simpson relates a metaphor used by interviewed psychologist Olsen Laney:

Introverts are like a rechargeable battery. They need to stop expending energy and rest in order to recharge. This is what a less stimulating environment provides for introverts. It restores energy. It is their natural niche. Extroverts are like solar panels. Being alone, or inside, is like living under a heavy cloud cover. Solar panels need the sun to recharge—extroverts need to be out and about to refuel.<sup>3</sup>

The MBTI renders what emerge as different “preferences” based upon the answers one provides to simple questions on the assessment. When used properly, the MBTI can be a tool of reconciliation. Along with learning one’s temperament type based

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<sup>2</sup>Amy Simpson, “Confessions of a Ministry Introvert,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2013), 80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



on preferences, strengths and weaknesses of each type are identified. This information allows for us to build on the strengths and to attend to weaknesses or blind spots as opportunities for growth leading to improvement in relationships.

Simpson cites the science behind these “preferences,” stating, “Emerging brain science tells us introversion and extroversion show in our neural pathways. One study found that...introverts’ and extroverts’ blood follows a different pathway through the brain.” She goes on to identify more specifically, “In introverts...blood flows to the portions of the brain involved in internal experiences like remembering, problem-solving, and planning, whereas extroverts blood...goes to the parts of the brain associated with sensory processing.”<sup>4</sup> Neuroscience verifies these as differences by design, therefore to be accepted, even honored.

Renee Baron summarized the historical underpinnings of the MBTI as representations of the convergence of two distinct ways of categorizing personalities—type and temperament theory. She points out that, despite the distinct evolution of type and temperament, “they have been found to overlap and complement each other in ways that make studying them together very beneficial. They both offer an approach to personality that explains things in a helpful, practical, and often profound way.”<sup>5</sup>

Type system originates in the overlapping work of Carl Jung and Katherine Briggs and Isabel Myers; temperament theory in the work of David Kiersey. Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung posited that “the reason we may be classified or ‘typed’ by our

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<sup>4</sup> Amy Simpson, “Confessions of a Ministry Introvert,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2013), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Renee Baron, *What Type Am I?* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 5-6.

particular preferences is that they are characteristic of our basic nature, meaning they are a fundamental part of who we are.”<sup>6</sup>

American Katherine Briggs adopted Jung’s system after finding it to bring clarity in her own work on personality theory. It was in the 1940s, in partnership with her daughter, Isabel Myers, that the questionnaire on preferences was developed. This is what is now known as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Designed to help people make a personal identification from sixteen possible personality types, the assessment renders a finding based on preferences. The MBTI is still the most widely used psychological instrument in the world.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the origins of temperament theory can be traced back twenty-five centuries to Hippocrates. He conceived of four basic types based upon observed human behavior. These he labeled temperaments: choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic, and sanguine.<sup>8</sup> In the more recent past, others have added their own contributions to temperament theory, including Adickes: Four world views; Adler: Four different makes; and Spranger: Four human values.<sup>9</sup> Baron provides a brief summary of Kiersey’s contribution:

In 1978, American clinical psychologist David Kiersey brought his own observations to temperament theory. He had been writing about the patterns he observed when he learned about the sixteen types. He outlines his contribution of four temperaments and correlates them to the sixteen types in his book *Please Understand Me*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Renee Baron, *What Type Am I?* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 6.

One can complete the MBTI in a number of contexts, some providing greater depth and breadth of feedback, such as if one were to be assessed through a ministry or career development center. The assessment can also be accessed online. Even if taken in this way, it is recommended to follow the different links provided regarding additional information about the preference patterns and how they factor into relationships, attending in particular to the identified “blind spots” usually rendered “suggestions for improvement.”

The benefit of the MBTI comes through increased understanding both of self and others. This potential advantage relates to the discovery of differences that can be complementary rather than divisive. The opportunity for improved understanding that prompts a paradigm shift from *good/bad* to God’s good design of *different*, therefore to be accepted and even celebrated, leads to identifying the MBTI as a recommended tool for improvement in both self-awareness and, in turn, relationships.

## EQ

EQ assessment is included in our discussion because, unlike the relatively fixed IQ, we can increase our emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman has coined the term, “emotional intelligence,” based on his study of behavior and research that has provided relatively new understandings yielded by neuroscience of how the brain works.<sup>11</sup>

Goleman explains:

In a sense we have two brains, two minds—and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both—it is not just IQ, but *emotional* intelligence that matters. Indeed, intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence. Ordinarily the complementarity of

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 15-20.

limbic system and neocortex, amygdala and prefrontal lobes, means each is a full partner in mental life. When these partners interact well, emotional intelligence rises—as does intellectual ability.<sup>12</sup>

Qualities that emotional intelligence encompasses are self-awareness, impulse control (considered the master aptitude), persistence, optimism, self-motivation, empathy, and social deftness.<sup>13</sup> Bradberry and Greaves point out, “Emotional intelligence skills change as you do. Unlike regular intelligence and personality, your emotional intelligence is a flexible skill that you can choose to improve.”<sup>14</sup> In four broad categories, the skills that comprise emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.<sup>15</sup>

Here is a succinct description of what specifically is meant by emotional intelligence:

Our sensations enter the brain in one place at the back near the spinal cord. Complex, rational thinking happens on the opposite side of the brain, at the front. When the electric signals enter your brain, they must travel all the way across it before you can have your first logical thought about the event. This chasm in the mind between the entry of our senses and reason is a problem because between the two rests the limbic system. This is the area in the brain where emotions are experienced. Signals passing through the limbic system create an emotional reaction to events before they reach the front of the brain. The front of the brain can't stop the emotion 'felt' in the limbic system. Instead, the two areas communicate constantly. This process of communication is the physical source of emotional intelligence.<sup>16</sup>

Thanks to neuroscience, we now know that the limbic system, the part that governs both memory and emotion, and where our fight/flight response originates,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 43, 78-120.

<sup>14</sup> Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 66.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

comprises about 15 percent of our brain. It is hard-wired for reactivity. It is helpful to think about this in terms of God's design. God designed us for self-preservation. The fight/flight reaction that originates in the limbic system is designed to keep us alive. The fact that the limbic system can signal the frontal cortex to react at times when there is truly no need does not diminish the genius of God's design, as the remaining 85 percent of our brain has the capacity to override the reactive limbic system signals.

The limbic system is the headquarters (pun intended) for both emotion and memory. An event may happen today that reminds one of a previous event, thereby instigating an emotional reaction not only attached to the current event, but also to the past. Whenever we experience an intense emotional reaction that seems disproportionate to the activating event, this is our clue to limbic system reactivity.<sup>17</sup>

An example of how this functions in daily living is basic cognitive-behavioral work in anger management. This is a learned process that requires a small bit of training and regular practice. It is helpful as well to choose the posture of a researcher, determined to attend well to both the emotional intensity noted and the behavior to follow. When we first feel the rush of intense emotion, we internally take note, then proceed through cognitive steps governed by the frontal cortex as it is drawn on to effectively override the firing in the limbic system. The process is as follows: (First noting the felt intensity: Wow, that's an intense feeling!) (1) What am I feeling? / Why am I angry? (2) When have I felt this way before? (3) What do I want to happen? (4) How do I get there? (5) Work my plan.<sup>18</sup> Anger is most basically a readiness to act and is considered a secondary

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<sup>17</sup> Brian E. King, PhD., "How the Brain Forms New Habits: Why Willpower Is Not Enough." Seminar for health professionals, Joliet, IL, September 7, 2011.

emotion. We need to both healthily manage our anger and attend to the primary emotions that drive anger, helpfully identified by the acronym GIFT, guilt, inferiority, fear, or trauma.<sup>19</sup> These primary emotions carry within them the message that something is out of balance or in need of healing. Stream-of-consciousness journaling can be helpful in coming to determine what lies beneath—what are the primary emotions driving the anger. Especially where grief over losses exists, journaling regarding both longings and losses in one’s personal history can be a therapeutic endeavor, particularly when accompanied by a safe and honest spiritual companion, pastoral counselor or mentor. We can only find consistency in living responsively as we live in both honest self-awareness and in practiced response.

Another example relates to the category of self-awareness. “A high degree of self-awareness requires a willingness to tolerate the discomfort of focusing directly on feelings that may be negative. It is essential to address and understand your positive emotions as well.”<sup>20</sup>

An example of parental modeling of embracing a child’s feelings with empathy would be something like, “It hurts to lose your favorite blanket” instead of “Stop crying. We can get another one.” The first statement models emotional awareness. Empathy is

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<sup>18</sup> Neil Clark Warren, *Anger Management*, The American Association of Christian Counselors’ Counsel Tapes, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Beverly and Tom Rodgers, “How to Work Effectively with Highly Volatile Couples,” *Christian Counseling Today* Volume 8, no. 2 (2000):14.

<sup>20</sup> Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 28.

expressed along with the message that “feelings are normal and important.” A parent shapes a child every day by teaching how to deal with feelings.<sup>21</sup>

Goleman describes two Life Skills exercises utilized in a class of fifth graders—one that involved practicing reading emotions from facial expressions with the goal of helping to develop empathy, and another for impulse control, a “stoplight” process comprised of six steps:

- |              |                                               |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Red light    | 1. Stop, calm down, and think before you act. |
| Yellow light | 2. Say the problem and how you feel.          |
|              | 3. Set a positive goal.                       |
|              | 4. Think of lots of solutions.                |
|              | 5. Think ahead to the consequences.           |
| Green light  | 6. Go ahead and try the best plan.            |

The stoplight notion is regularly invoked when a child, for example is about to strike out in anger, or withdraw into a huff at some slight, or burst into tears at being teased, and offers a concrete set of steps for dealing with these loaded moments in a more measured way. Beyond the management of feelings, it points a way to more effective action.<sup>22</sup>

An adult version of this exercise to develop critical thinking/problem solving skills is SOCS, the acronym for Situation, Options, Consequence, Solutions—a four step method: say what the situation is and how it makes you feel; think about your options for solving the problem and what their consequences might be; pick a solution; and execute it.<sup>23</sup> Given that impulse control functions like a master cylinder of emotional regulation, these two exercises provide some structure for practicing to greater proficiency for anyone who struggles with unregulated impulsivity.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 275-276.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 281.

Bradberry and Greaves point out that “descriptions of emotional intelligence are as old as accounts of human behavior in both testaments of the Bible...the emotional aspect of reason has been discussed as a fundamental element of human nature.”<sup>24</sup> Biblical descriptions that cohere to emotional intelligence can be found in several passages, among them, Proverbs 6:14-16; Colossians 3:5-10, 12-14; and 1 Peter 1:13-15. Where others flounder, people who improve their emotional intelligence have the unique ability to flourish.<sup>25</sup>

Charles Klein relates findings from a study of men having reached the age of 65. The article, appearing in the *New York Times*, “found that one of the most constant predictors of well being at that age was ‘the ability to handle emotional crises maturely.’”<sup>26</sup> The study followed 150 men from the time they graduated college in the early 1940’s. What the researchers learned was that, “handling life’s blows without becoming bitter and living without collecting injustices contributed significantly to the emotional well being of the men who were studied.”<sup>27</sup> The research revealed: “people who live their lives warehousing the wrongs done to them suffer emotional scars which affect their long-term ability to find happiness, contentment and satisfaction in life.”<sup>28</sup>

Taking the EQ profile assessment provides “an overall emotional intelligence score,” comprised of scores for personal and social competence, and scores in each of the four emotional intelligence skills—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

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<sup>24</sup> Bradberry and Greaves, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Klein, *How to Forgive When You Can't Forget* (NY: Liebling Press, Inc., 1995), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



and relationship management, providing results that, “highlight specific actions that are most critical to increasing your emotional intelligence.”<sup>29</sup> Following through on the resulting plan of action provides the process necessary to increase one’s EQ, which will translate into both increased self-management skill and relational proficiency.<sup>30</sup>

### **Listening for the Good Desire behind Complaint**

Let us use a stereotypical example to illustrate something about communication. Alice observes her husband, Ralph, heading out the door for another work-related meeting and, with some frustration in her voice remarks, “You’re never home anymore!” Ralph reacts to the accusatory words and the frustration he detects in her voice and responds defensively, “What am I to do? Would you rather I just quit my job and apply for unemployment insurance?! And out the door he goes. Reactivity begets reactivity. That is, until and unless one person takes the step to shift the pattern. Jim Keenan has proposed that, “when a person is angry, he or she is really asking for love,” illustrated in his model below.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Jim Keenan’s Anger Model**

Mad.....sad.....need is comfort.....Love

Mad.....scared.....need is safety.....Love

Mad.....hurt.....need is reassurance.....Love<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bradberry and Greaves, 62.

<sup>30</sup> The Emotional Intelligence assessment can be accessed through the purchase of Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Brynn C. Colling, M.A., L.P., *Emotional Unavailability: Recognizing It, Understanding It, and Avoiding Its Trap* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 52.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

In the above example with Alice and Ralph, the good desire hiding behind the complaint is this: “I want to spend more time with you.” What a difference it will make in the outcome of such exchanges if “Alice” and “Ralph” could train themselves by practicing to listen for the good desire behind the complaint, then purpose to respond to that “good desire,” rather than reacting to the words themselves.

### **Importance of Approach**

Many unresolved conflicts begin with a seemingly insignificant little three letter question: *Why?* Brynn Colling has observed that, rather than being innocuous, “Why” is often a gateway for blame.<sup>33</sup> When a partner leads in with the question, “Why”, it injects into the dynamic the wielding of power by the asking partner. Colling explains, “Instead of being solution focused, it becomes gratification focused for the asking partner. Even when the explanation is negative, the asking partner acquires power because she is attempting to put her partner in a one-down position.”<sup>34</sup> Rather than leading with *Why*, Colling suggests, “Help me understand...,” or, “I wonder if you know...?”<sup>35</sup> The point here is to use language that invites a mutual meeting together as at a dining table, rather than using language that conveys more of a superior calling an underling “on the carpet” for a scolding. The latter approach understandably creates an increased potential for defensiveness and, along with it, a decrease in the likelihood of resolving conflict. No one wants to receive a summons to appear in court. Most of us want to receive an invitation to a good party. The words we use, the tone in our voice, our non-verbal

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.,221.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 222-223.

expressions—all factor into whether what we say comes to be heard more like one or the other. Words are important; they wield influence and impact. In pursuit of healthy relating, it is both necessary to attend well to the words we use, and to seek to listen well to hear the heart behind the words.

### **Non-Anxious Presence and Differentiation**

We turn our attention now to a brief introduction to a few important elements of “family systems” thinking. In our process of improved relational health and spiritual growth, “family systems” thinking provides some excellent “tools.” Most basically, this thinking involves an understanding of the importance of interrelatedness. None of us functions in isolation, and the relationships within the contexts of functioning are themselves systems, such that one part’s behavior is to be understood in relationship to the other parts. Foundational to the understanding of family systems thinking is the concept of the non-anxious presence. The non-anxious presence is another type of “master cylinder,” for it provides the “emotional atmosphere that is calm and positive,” thereby making it possible even for difficult, divisive issues to be “handled objectively.”<sup>36</sup> First, and most basically, it is helpful to recognize that relational units function as systems, whether in family, church, or work. In any system, when one part changes, change can be affected throughout the system. It is imperative to recognize both one’s own capacity –and need—for change (better, transformation), and one’s power of influence. The key to change any dysfunctional pattern in a family system is to sustain positive individual change. It is important to understand the systems in which one

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<sup>36</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 241.

functions. It can be especially helpful to solicit input from others in the system to corroborate one's impressions. In a family system, this would include siblings or extended family members. The goal is knowledge of true patterns, not labeling family members, or building a case against one's family. It is also important to name one's own level of anxiety in the system, including a review of situations and relationships in which one's anxiety has been a factor, and the effect this has had. Careful and honest examination of one's family system and one's own anxiety at play within this system is necessary in a process of increasing differentiation, that is, coming to live more consistently responsible *to* but not *for* other adults.<sup>37</sup> Differentiation has to do with taking personal "responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being."<sup>38</sup> Both non-anxiousness and differentiation are fostered as we choose the perspective of a researcher when encountering conflict. As Boers has observed, "The very process of trying to understand, 'a research stance,' calms down the whole system. Simply asking questions helps everyone to get away from emotionality and reactivity. The purpose is to move us away from our instinctual and unthinking emotive reactions."<sup>39</sup>

### **Triangles: Beyond Geometry**

Friedman provides a clear description in his introduction to emotional triangles: "The basic law of emotional triangles is that when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will 'triangle in' or focus upon a third person, or

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<sup>37</sup> Arthur Paul Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999), 105.

<sup>38</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 129.

issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another.”<sup>40</sup> My own experience with this includes a living situation after college and in my early twenties in which I had allowed a friend to convince me that I had promised to share an apartment with her. She had found a reasonable place, and came to convince me that now was the time to move in and begin contributing to the rent and other expenses. I foolishly ignored the internal resistance I felt, packed up my belongings, and arrived at the flat only to discover that her notoriously irresponsible elder sister had been installed into the third bedroom. Had I known then what I know now, I hope I would have turned around and gone back home. Instead, I stayed, enduring an unhappy and emotionally draining year and a half in the flat. I had been triangulated in to help stabilize the relationship between the two sisters, as well as to provide some relief for the weary parents who apparently needed a break from having their irresponsible daughter under their roof.

As this example illustrates, the typical best course of action when one finds oneself in a triangle, is to de-triangle. In the above situation, I was triangulated in to help solve a problem without my consent. The healthy response would have been to return the problem I had unwittingly received to its rightful owners. Stepping out of the triangle would have allowed those family members to be responsible to address what was truly theirs to address. I have since learned the helpfulness of, “No, thank you,” and “Sorry, I’ve changed my mind about that.”

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<sup>40</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 35.

### Playful Paradox

The element of playful paradox is born of practiced non-anxiousness and healthy self-differentiation. When discussing playfulness, what is intended is neither cleverness nor sarcasm, both of which often have more to do with defending as coping behaviors or mismanaged anger. Playfulness is relational, and therefore has a focus that is other-centered. Friedman points out, “The antidote to seriousness is the capacity to be playful.” He adds, “What gives to any playful response its remedial power is its relational effect and not its cleverness.”<sup>41</sup> I once heard a description that helps to illustrate the playfulness of paradox. Following a presentation by a Christian psychologist and author, a line of people formed waiting to ask questions of the presenter. In the line was a man who posed the following question to the presenter, “What must I do to feel better fast?” The presenter answered by suggesting the man gather some willing female travelers along with a good supply of an intoxicating beverage of choice and head to a tropical island. To this, the stunned questioner posed an additional query, “Are you a Christian counselor?” “Yes,” came the reply, “but given the parameters of your question, this is the best answer I can offer.”<sup>42</sup> Here, the playful response serves to help expose the inadequacy of the goal of “feeling better fast.” It does so without lecturing or shaming, and so effectively eliminates the felt need to react defensively.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>42</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Larger Story* (Presentation at Moraine Valley Church, Palos Heights, IL, 1995).

### A Word about Homeostasis and Secrets

Friedman defines homeostasis as, “the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence.”<sup>43</sup> In a word what is described is balance. Homeostasis is about our natural pull within our relationships to keep to patterns, even if these are less than healthy. We need to be mindful of this tendency that can provide resistance to even positive change. Taking a good look at family of origin issues, including what was modeled, what messages were conveyed, both verbally and non-verbally, its secrets (as they have the power to distort communication and create divisions in relationships<sup>44</sup>), and its organizing principles is an important step in coming to discover one’s own relational strengths and vulnerabilities.

Over time, most of us come to be aware of our family secrets. Friedman has described these as “the plaque in the arteries of communication.”<sup>45</sup> Along with the family of origin work of journaling the examination of childhood longings and losses, it is wise to prayerfully expose secrets to break the power hold they have to keep us bound in negative, repetitive patterns. Of the harm done by secrets, Friedman summarizes, “In short, secrets create and perpetuate triangles; they are always on the side of the existing homeostasis, the labeling process, and the chronicity of symptoms. They are never on the side of challenge and change. Secrets are very serious stuff.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

### Freedom to Practice

We are living in a culture that places a premium on instant gratification. We are, many of us, able to number ourselves with the man who wanted to “feel better fast.” I want to encourage choosing a perspective of gratitude for the freedom to practice. The destiny of all Christ-followers is a process of growth in coming to love like Jesus (John 15:12). It takes a lifetime, so we’re given a lifetime... whatever that turns out to be in terms of days, months, or years. Some catch on faster than others. No matter—no other human is our standard. I find resonance with Ann Voskamp’s view of practice, as expressed in her lovely book, *One Thousand Gifts: Finding Joy in What Really Matters*. She writes, “Learning requires practice—sometimes even mind-numbing practice. This is why I had never really learned the language of ‘thanks in all things’! I had never practiced. Practiced until it became the second nature, the first skin. Practice is the hardest part of learning, and training is the essence of transformation.”<sup>47</sup> I would add that we have the freedom to practice. Viewed in its best light, practice itself—even the “mind-numbing” kind Voskamp describes—is itself a gift!

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<sup>47</sup> Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts: Finding Joy in What Really Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 23.



## CHAPTER SIX

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.  
-Aristotle

We began by identifying the problem of compartmentalized living, noting the resulting strain in relationships, both human and divine. We attended to the ways we humans live in patterns, advocating for the need to identify and examine one's lifestyle patterns to determine whether these are consistent with one's beliefs and values. Ultimately, our need is radical transformation, not simply re-patterning. As Morgan observes, "Our transformation is more than identifying patterns of behavior that keep recurring, however unhealthy or unproductive. Transformation is more than using tools to keep out of the sick and sinful, old-story patterns. Transformation is a more fundamental change. It is moving out of the death of the old story and moving over to the true life of the new story."<sup>1</sup> It is in newness of life, as one is indwelt and empowered by the Spirit that one is free to challenge the patterns and embrace tools leading to growth. Noting one's life patterns, and challenging those that are negative to replace with the positive are rhythms on the path to a healthy life, congruent with professed faith. As discussed earlier, transformation is beyond change, as it involves "newness of being."<sup>2</sup> (John 5:24; Galatians 2:20) We discussed core relational competencies consistent with this newness of being and observed to be essential in the way of growth and Christian spiritual formation, those of humility, honesty, and teachability.

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis D. Morgan, *Life in Process* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Flora Slosson Wuellner, "Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing," *Weavings: a Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 24, no 3 (May/June 2009), 66.

In Chapter Two, we addressed the need to know both God and oneself, and in this knowledge to choose an eternal, Trinitarian perspective. It is this perspective that honors God's design for His image-bearers to fulfill the longings of security and significance by living in abandonment to and vital dependence in our relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Recognizing that central to what it is to be made in the image of God is the quality of relationality, we fulfill our purpose as we grow in our love relationship with the Lord, and in the demonstrations of this love flowing into our human relationships. We made the case that in this growth process, it is essential both to know God and to know oneself. We are aided in the process of becoming more self-aware by safe, honest community and by intentionally seeking feedback in this kind of community.

This kind of community has multiplied benefits: "When people are involved in mutual, growth-enhancing relationships they feel vital, and that vitality inoculates them against the anxieties, depressions, and despair born out of isolation."<sup>3</sup> It is on this premise that the small group community is the basic structure of every known growth and recovery ministry.

We recognized the need both to be Spirit-filled and to do our part by exercising our terrible, wonderful gift of free will to participate in the work of the Spirit in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. The importance of cultivating gratitude has been highlighted, as neither resentment nor bitterness may coexist in the heart filled with gratitude. Of the many practices we need to cultivate, perhaps none is more important to healthy relationships than genuine apology, which is first to be developed through one's own patterns before the Lord of self-examination, confession,

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<sup>3</sup> Maureen Walker and Wendy B. Rosen, ed., *How Connections Heal: Stories from Relational-Cultural Therapy* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 107.

repentance, receiving forgiveness, then behaving consistent with being a redeemed, forgiven offender.

Chapter Three focused on the postures of abandonment, unlearning and intentionally placing oneself and one's life as an offering before the Lord as early movements in the process of spiritual formation. We touched on suffering, recognizing it as part of the normal course of life on earth, as well as a means that God, in ever redemptive ways, shapes us more clearly into the image of Christ. How important it is to choose the perspective of a treasure hunter, one who seeks to maintain an eternal perspective, and to be open to discover the good that is often shaped in the crucible of suffering.

Next we turned to key components in spiritual formation, including the movement from informational to formational reading of Scripture, a structure or framework to aid in the comprehension and application of Scripture, and life-giving community as a place to begin practicing living the Christian life. We looked as well into several other models for spiritual growth, emphasizing the need to exercise one's will in beginning any new discipline. The importance here is on choosing to try, and to give sufficient time for development of new, healthy habits. Far too often, the natural, undisciplined human nature with which we struggle becomes the strongest influence, and we prematurely conclude that we are not fit for such discipline. We need to commit to a set period of time, ideally at least 30 to 90 days. This is part of the foundational approach to treatment of a spectrum of needs for healing from substance abuse addictions to eating disorders to

codependency, as this is the period that has been shown to be necessary for sustainable patterning of new behavior.<sup>4</sup>

We then turned attention to developing depth in Christian spirituality, which is accomplished only as we practice spiritual disciplines fully. Of utmost importance is attending well to our thought life, replacing life-diminishing ruminations with life-giving meditation in the Word of God to renew our mind. Intentional practice to develop disciplines of prayer and being silent in solitude before the Lord is essential to the follower of Christ as we see these rhythms in the life of Christ. We engage all practices, disciplines and habits for the purpose of transformation into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as is our mission during our earthy sojourn. Wuellner's contribution from Chapter Three bears repeating: "God's transformation at work within us brings us increasingly closer to the person we have always (perhaps subconsciously) longed to be."<sup>5</sup> This is to say that in the process of transformation, we are becoming exactly who we have been designed and redeemed—who we are meant—to be. Do we need more motivation than this?

In Chapter Four, we began by looking at a personal illustration of the apparent dissonance between professed belief and its practice, providing specific examples of actions and responses that flow from compartmentalized spirituality. Defensiveness was identified as a negative pattern. It is particularly insidious as it can feel so justified, yet it causes a distortion of all core competencies, therefore is an obstacle to health and

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<sup>4</sup> New Life Recovery, <http://www.newliferecovery.net/InPatientAddictionTreatmentRehab.htm> (accessed June 10, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Wuellner, "Transformation: Our Fear, Our Longing," *Weavings* (May/June 2009), 20.

spiritual growth. Practicing depending on the defense of Lord Jesus in place of the coping mechanism of defensiveness has become personally impactful.

Surveys collected revealed responses showing an overall lack of regard for the benefit of spiritual disciplines in enhancing both one's faith and relationships.

We looked more thoroughly at the development of those core competencies of humility, honesty, and teachability. The Apostle Paul offered a perspective that positively correlates to these identified core competencies. To the Corinthian Church he wrote: "You are not your own, you have been bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20). When we take to heart that we are redeemed captives, rescued and set free from the mastery of sin and spiritual death, and adopted into the loving family of God, any notion of deprivation fades into non-existence. Our personal, human purposes become caught up into the eternal purposes of God. We rehearse this privilege not by "practicing random acts of kindness," as has made its way into the common vernacular, but by intentional, purposeful practice of kind actions, the tender touch, the encouraging word, the nurturing act.

The life-giving biblical rhythms of shalom and sozo were presented as God's ongoing design for his people. Paying attention, wonder, humor, keeping Sabbath, and adopting margins in our lives were discussed as helpful practices to move us toward more healthy, holy living.

Discussion of the Lord's design has run throughout this work. A foundational understanding of the goodness of God's design is the goodness of God. Until this is a settled matter in the heart of the believer, it is more likely that any attempts to grow will follow a frustrating pattern of starts and stops, with no true transformation. We simply

cannot trust, love, or serve a God we do not believe to be good. Our view of God must be informed by the biblical narrative, including, and most prominently the Life of Christ. Too often we view God through circumstances of life; this will only provide a skewed and perhaps ever shifting view. Our life circumstances are to be viewed through an accurate view of God—all good, ever merciful, perfectly just, and eternally holy. God alone can be trusted in and beyond all the circumstances of our lives.

Consideration of God’s design can begin to open up conversation with others whose relationship with the Lord has been stifled or diminished, often due to trauma or pain in primary relationships. The need is not to live by roles but by design and redemption. In Christ, God reclaims our previously abused or squandered gifts, and is able to bring something of eternal benefit and beauty even from trauma.

Chapter Five provided an introduction to the assessments of MBTI and EQ, both of which are accessible to the general population through public libraries or the internet. These are useful as tools for increasing in intra-personal awareness and in inter-personal adeptness. Of particular interest in the course of this discussion was the discovery of how both the path and the volume of blood flow differs from the introvert to the extrovert.<sup>6</sup> This serves as another reminder of the creativity and variety in God’s design, and reaffirms a high regard for its demonstration in and through our humanity. We also advocated for adopting the perspective that includes choosing to listen for the good desire behind complaint, noting Jim Keenan’s Anger Model. The point here is improving in both listening skills and in the ability to move more readily from reactivity to healthy response.

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<sup>6</sup> Amy Simpson, “Confessions of a Ministry Introvert,” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2013): 80.

We looked at several obstacles to healthy relating: the approach we use in beginning a conversation or asking a question, anxiousness, lacking in differentiation, emotional triangles, the pull toward homeostasis and the power of secrets, with discussion on movements toward health. Playful paradox was introduced as a tool to diminish conflict and an aid in creative communication. We ended with the invitation to a perspective that sees having the freedom to practice developing new patterns of thoughts, words and disciplined actions as a gift that is given. We can be people who reject the false belief that people never change, and that nothing we try will ever make any positive difference, choosing instead to keep learning and growing, free to practice again and again each new day, one day at a time.

If it is our goal to become more loving, then a reasonable path of pursuit begins with intentional kindness and gratitude. Set the course of each new day by an intentional act of kindness or service as soon as possible after awaking as a practical means of living oneself into becoming a more loving person. Express thanks to God at the beginning, throughout and end of each day. Our example from Chapter Two of Mar Zutra who forgave all who hurt him each night before retiring is a wonderful way to end the day. His example has become a practice I have personally adopted.

Most of us are familiar with Christians acting very un-Christian. If we are honest, most of us have our own personal experience in both categories. If we are to leave a godly legacy, that is, if we are to end well, we must learn to live well. If we are to live well, we must learn to love well. In sum, the previous chapters have been intended to help the reader to do just that, and to do so in very practical ways.

We encountered Dallas Willard's clear diagnosis of the problem of compartmentalized living in Chapter One: "human beings can honestly profess to believe what they do not believe" resulting in "soul dissonance...when we try to live as functional secularists in the public domain."<sup>7</sup> In Chapter Two, we presented a response to this problem of soul dissonance through Richard Rohr's, "We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking."<sup>8</sup> As I have considered this perspective, along with Jesus' teaching of the coupling of loving God in the totality of our lives with loving others as ourselves, I have been deeply impacted by the truth and challenge that we simply cannot do one without the other.

The need for both an eternal perspective and godly actions—that is, aligning our view and our actions with the Word of God—has emerged as essential. I have both experienced and observed in the lives of humble, honest, teachable others the positive difference that putting both perspective and action to work in following Christ is transformative. Cultivating gratitude and living daily in forgiveness are safeguards for our hearts and lifelines to living in grace and peace. Of utmost importance is renewing one's thought life, replacing life-diminishing ruminations with life-giving meditation in the Word of God.

I have endeavored to answer the questions, "What do we need to do to live well? How can we better participate with God's design? What helpfulness can the Scriptures offer to address the problems of conflict and disconnection?" Each of our journeys has the potential to intersect with others such that we may be catalysts in the process of the

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<sup>7</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 308.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 19.



spiritual formation of others, while we, too, are being transformed. As Friedman points out, our individual spiritual formation is “a lifetime project.”<sup>9</sup> The good news is: each of us is given the measure of a lifetime. Martin Marty has observed, “After the [Christian] story is learned and character has been nurtured, the Christian does not come to the point of saying, ‘Now I have reached the realm where I do only good.’ Rather, growth in grace, works of love, and freedom to do good improve the eye by which believers examine themselves and can see human need beyond themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

One final exhortation is to *write it down!* We are not able to chronicle our spiritual journeys in a recorded video. As humans, we are prone to forget. When we write down the story, including the inside story of beliefs and thoughts, we have the opportunity to trace places of change leading to transformation. The reminder this serves regarding progress made can provide motivation to stay the course of faithfulness during times of future struggle, or days that just feel dreary when we may be tempted to believe that nothing of any eternal good is happening. Writing it down also provides reinforcement for learning and then remembering what we have learned.

In my mid-twenties, I was taking classes at a Chicago Seminary. I was assigned to work in a group that included a brooding fellow who revealed that he “had a Good Friday Christology,” and that he prayed best by staring at a freckle on his arm.

Our challenge is to thrive in living rhythms as Easter Sunday Christians who never lose sight of Good Friday and who come to live well with the silence of Saturday. This will take daily practice, and the doing of all, in love.

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<sup>9</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Being Good and Doing Good* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 106.

O Lord, you have taught us that without love, whatever we do is worth nothing:

Send your Holy Spirit and pour into my heart your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Pocket Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007),

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### **Internet Resources**

Website: Psychology Today. Includes online articles by topic.  
<http://www.psychologytoday.com>

Website: Mental Health help. Includes Perspectives, an online mental health magazine.  
<http://www.mentalhelp.net>

Website: Mental Health site for diagnoses, research, Internet links, and includes its own magazine. <http://www.mentalhealth.com>

Website: Self-help and psychology magazine. Includes late-breaking mental health news.  
<http://www.shpm.com>

Website: American Association of Christian Counselors. Includes AACC eNews & cNotes , a monthly electronic newsletter for members. <http://www.AACC.net>

Website: Real Relationships. Resource produced by relationship experts Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott with articles. <http://www.realrelationships.com>

Website: NewLifeRecovery,  
<http://www.newliferecovery.net/InPatientAddictionTreatmentRehap.htm>

## APPENDIX I

### IN CHRIST

*I renounce the lie that I am rejected, unloved, dirty or shameful because IN CHRIST I am completely accepted. God says...*

Jn. 1:12	I am God's child.
Jn. 15:5	I am Christ's friend.
Rom. 5:1	I have been justified.
1 Cor. 6:17	I am united with the Lord and I am one spirit with Him.
1 Cor. 6:19, 20	I have been bought with a price. I belong to God.
1 Cor. 12:27	I am a member of Christ's body.
Eph. 1:1	I am a saint, a holy one.
Eph. 1:5	I have been adopted as God's child.
Eph. 2:18	I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.
Col. 1:14	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
Col. 2:10	I am complete in Christ.

*I renounce the lie that I am guilty, unprotected, alone or abandoned because IN CHRIST I am totally secure. God says...*

Rom. 8:1, 2	I am free forever from condemnation.
Rom. 8:28	I am assured that all things work together for good.
Rom. 8:31-34	I am free from any condemning charges against me.
Rom. 8:35-39	I cannot be separated from the love of God.
2 Cor. 1:21, 22	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
Phil. 1:6	I am confident that the good work God has begun in me will be perfected.
Phil. 3:20	I am a citizen of heaven.
Col. 3:3	I am hidden with Christ in God.
2 Tim. 1:7	I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind.
Heb. 4:16	I can find grace and mercy to help in time of need.
1 John 5:18	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

*I renounce the lie that I am worthless, inadequate, helpless or hopeless because IN CHRIST I am deeply significant.  
God says...*

Matt. 5:13, 14	I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
Jn. 15:1, 5	I am a branch of the true vine, Jesus, a channel of His life.
Jn. 15:16	I have been chosen and appointed by God to bear fruit.
Acts 1:8	I am a personal, Spirit-empowered witness of Christ's.
1 Cor. 3:16	I am a temple of God.
2 Cor. 5:17-20	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
2 Cor. 6:1	I am God's co-worker.
Eph. 2:6	I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.
Eph. 2:10	I am God's workmanship, created for good works.
Eph. 3:12	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Phil. 4:13	I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME!!
	I am not the great "I Am" (Exod. 3:14; Jn. 8:24, 28, 58), "but by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:19). <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), 248 – 250.

APPENDIX II  
SURVEY OF INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS

The intention of this informal research was to seek to assess the perspective and understanding of those having experienced relational conflict regarding awareness of an interconnection between experience in relationships and one's relationship with the Lord. Of the 25 – 30 surveys distributed, 15 were completed and returned. The survey was comprised of four questions preceded by the instruction, "Please answer the following with no more than two or three sentences." The respondents were asked to omit names to assure anonymity, thereby helping to insure honest responses. Listed below are the questions along with responses, followed by a summary of my observations. The surveys are numbered 1 to 15 and responses are reported in numerical order for each of the questions, so as to attend to any patterns.

**1. How would you say your Christian faith informs/influences your relationships?**

1. I want it to influence it more than it has. It seems my desire in talk does not always match my walk and can harm or influence it in a negative way.
2. I believe my Christian faith helps me to form closer relationships with solid Christians. It really hinders work relationships, because I feel I am very different than those I work with.
3. My Christian faith has improved my relationships by helping me to forgive, yet not accept mistreatment by others. This has helped me to love without any resentment and without trying to control others.
4. Depends on the friendship/relationship. Tami, Jodi & Andy, Children.
5. My faith has made me more discerning about the people I choose to be in relationship with. I want to surround myself with people who live in a Godly way.
6. I seek to see people as the Lord sees them, beloved, fallen, saved or not. I seek to extend mercy to others and feel a tension, conflict, when I don't obey the Lord in this way.
7. I think it's like a checker – I can be attracted and start a relationship and can evaluate if that relationship is good or bad based on my faith. It always influences how I treat/react to people.
8. Positively. Try to see others through Christ's eyes. Conscious of Him as I relate to others, so I may try to discern what the Spirit is telling me. Ask Spirit to bring

Jesus Christ's love, light and kindness to others. He works through me (in faith) as I let Him.

9. My faith in Jesus teaches me how I should act and love in all of my relationships. Every interaction within each of my relationships is an opportunity to learn from the other person, and to extend love and grace to them. My relationships would probably be more about me if I did not have a relationship with Jesus.

10. Christ in me is who I am and I am and that influences relationships. Sometimes people reject me because of my faith. That is ok.

11. Helps me to be patient and non-judgmental. Draws me towards people that are confident yet humble and full of compassion.

12. I usually spend my time with other Christians. I have also tried to witness to my sons about the joy I find in knowing God.

13. My Christian faith has made many of my relationships stronger and more positive. In some of the difficult relationships, I have been more forgiving and accepting of others' differences.

14. I am no longer confident of saying the right words/answers. When I do not speak about the awesome love of God, I feel I have done a disservice to whomever I am talking.

15. I have been a Christian for 27 years. Over the years my circle of friends has changed as I grow and mature in the Christian faith. My closest and dearest friends are now Christians as well. It's what we have in common. I still have some contact with old friends who I believe are not in the same place spiritually as myself. Some of them have written me off saying things like, "Oh, you are one of them." Others, I have chosen not to have so much close contact with because they choose behaviors and a lifestyle that I do not wish to participate in because they are contrary to the lifestyle I wish to live as a Christ follower.

## **2. How do you see your relationships affecting your faith?**

1. A desire for a Christ-filled and focused relationship is present in my life. The struggle of working together to make this happen is very tough and can affect positively or negatively.

2. I feel the more Christians I am around, I and my faith grow stronger.

3. My relationships have strengthened my faith because I have witnessed forgiveness and grace in difficult relationships in which I never thought that could happen. The Lord never ceases to amaze me.

4. They pull me away, not bring me closer. Tami – baby Christian, Jody & Andy – unbelievers.

5. My relationship with God is the most important relationship in my life. Without that, no other relationship can be in my life. Nothing and no one can take away my God.

6. When I receive love and encouragement from others, I feel more positively toward the Lord. I recognize I am loved by the Father regardless of how others respond to me, but other peoples' positive or negative responses to me affect my feelings re: the Lord's heart toward me.

7. I can be influenced if I don't surround myself with Godly people – have to make conscious choices. My faith can also grow in Christ with a good community.
8. My relationships stretch it, encourage it, question it, and doubt it. I need more faith in “difficult people” times. Once I felt I had lost my faith in God in a difficult marriage – which I felt the Lord had brought us together as a Christian couple. It didn't survive – the marriage.
9. Having relationships with others challenges my beliefs and values and has given me the opportunity to grow and change my faith over time. Overall, I believe a person's relationships can grow and change faith or the relationships can hinder faith. It depends on how influential and substantial the relationship is.
10. My relationships, good or bad affect my walk with Christ because they cause me to draw near to him.
11. We encourage and remind each other that God has a master plan which keeps our focus on God's will, not our own.
12. My friends I have made in Bible study at Church have brought me great joy and peace at being with such holy people. They encourage and teach me about God.
13. My relationships have strengthened my faith because I have needed to trust the Lord to help me with some broken and difficult relationships. In the past, I sometimes would just let go of some difficult relationships.
14. I see my relationships being a by-product of my growing faith. God is growing my faith and my relationships are being challenged to a higher standard of holiness.
15. I am attracted to people who are Christ-followers and I look for opportunities to share what we have in common. I have some very close relationships with Christ-followers and as we share our experiences of our faith journey, it helps grow my faith at times. Other times, I believe God uses my experiences to help someone else in their faith journey. As for my friends who do not have this same thing in common with me, the issue may or may not come up in conversation. I just try to be who I am in Christ and if the subject comes up I see it as an opportunity to just tell what I believe, pointing at Christ and not myself.

### **3. What do you see as the primary hindrances to healthy relationships?**

1. Not being accountable to others. Not setting boundaries. Lack of real communication.
2. My idea of healthy relationships may be different because I'm not sure what a healthy relationship looks like.
3. One of the primary hindrances to healthy relationships is not being honest about how someone may have mistreated you. Another hindrance is to try to control someone rather than trying to be kind and caring about their feelings.
4. My husband is unhealthy and has no interest in growing. God has not brought me relationships that are healthy in spite of many prayers.
5. One thing that hindered healthy relationships in my life were the unclear boundaries or lack of boundaries I had.
6. Selfishness, pride, self-centeredness.

7. Desire to surrender or be rescued – codependence. Idol worship – putting people on a pedestal or seeing them in black and white.
8. Self-centeredness, not empathizing, unforgiveness, selfishness, putting too high expectations on people, not listening well, not responding, poor communication skills, lack of trust and fear because of old relationship disappointments and issues, trying to control and own people: friends, family, neighbors that became an addiction for me.
9. Personally, the biggest hindrance is myself. At times I can become obsessive, possessive, prideful and arrogant, and play the victim in a relationship. From what I have seen in other peoples' relationships, there is most often a disconnect because of lack of common values and a lack of effective communication.
10. Past, judgments, trust.
11. Lack of grace and kindness toward others, insecurity, selfishness.
12. Not sure...haven't had much success at marriage, but both my husbands were not Christians. I'd have to see not telling the truth in actions, deeds and words would be a hindrance.
13. The primary hindrance to healthy relationships is the absence of forgiveness and open communication.
14. One or both of the people involved taking their eyes (or ears, hearts, strength) off of God and His will for us.
15. I believe the main hindrance to a healthy relationship is self-centeredness. Expectations versus reality is another thing that can hinder a healthy relationship.

**4. What do you identify as the primary hindrances to robust Christian spirituality?**

1. Not praying together, lack of church group and involvement, interest more in your current life state than on what God is doing with it.
2. My husband not being the spiritual leader of the home.
3. One of the primary hindrances to a robust Christian spirituality is to be judgmental and resentful toward others. Another important hindrance is to refuse to offer forgiveness and grace to those we feel don't deserve it. We are all flawed and the Lord has forgiven us and given us grace and we should do the same to others.
4. Strong Christian friendships abandoned and left me feeling that God has forgotten me and God's Word seems empty and has no life when I read it.
5. Me! I have to keep putting God first and at the center of my life. I need to be humble, pray and keep looking up. His way is the only way and it's my choice.
6. Pride, refusal to acknowledge our own sin and utter dependence on the Lord. Absence of confession and repentance.
7. Fear.
8. Fears, "what-if's", doubts, laziness, anxieties, waiting for the Lord to change me first, show me how to have a robust Christian life. Not hanging out with people who are soaring with Him. Forgetting I am standing on holy ground in the Lord, near others.
9. I think the largest hindrance is how I think people will perceive me if I were to live a very outspoken and "robust" Christian life. I become fearful that some people will not love or accept me if my values are different from their values.



10. Like the weeds, choking off the good grass, life!
11. Too busy, priorities out of whack, insincere leaders (former “pastor” named in criminal case named).
12. Accepting the way God is changing you even though it hurts sometimes.
13. The biggest hindrance to robust Christian spirituality is not living the Word of God. Another hindrance is trying to live according to our own plan and not His plan.
14. Lack of patience, hope, wisdom; because Christian spirituality is by definition “full of life” in Jesus Christ. What can be more robust than that? The more I grow in Jesus, the less I am concerned about me. God takes such good care of me, I should pinch myself as a reminder that I am still “in” this earth. I long to use every opportunity to be a witness “of” God’s love.
15. First and foremost, being a Christian is not about religion or religious behavior. It is about a relationship, a relationship and union with God. It’s all about our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. Jesus said, “Love God, and love other people.”

I believe that one of the main hindrances to robust Christian spirituality is getting bogged down in man’s doctrine as opposed to God’s doctrine. Jesus said in Matthew 15:9, “They worship me in vain, their teachings are but rules taught by men.” In context He was referring to the teachers of the law at that time (The Pharisees), but it certainly applies today as well to teachers who focus more on adhering to the law in a strict sense without any Grace. It’s the mentality of “you must do this or that, OR ELSE”, whereas Grace says, “I know your heart wants to do right, even if you sometimes fail.” God says, “My grace is sufficient.” Who are we to add anything to that? If we add something to it then we are calling Him a liar.

I believe a misunderstanding of Grace or lack of teaching of Grace is a hindrance to robust Christian spirituality. We need to understand Grace because an understanding of that is what gives us the real freedom to live as God called us to. We then will conform our lifestyle to godliness because of our love of God and what He has done for us, rather than conforming our lifestyle to godliness because of legalism.

False teaching is another hindrance. We must study the Scriptures and use them as the “plumb line” of truth that we measure what is being taught or said.

#### Observations/Comments

The respondents are all self-described as Christians who have intentionally sought Biblically-based Christian counseling. All were given no time limit, but were simply asked to return the survey after each had completed the four questions.

A greater respondent self-awareness is evidenced with consistency through responses, e.g., Respondent One compared to Respondent Four. The more self-aware, the

greater the likelihood that one will be able to see the connection between one's own choices and the impact on one's faith and relationships.

Respondent Ten came closest to referencing Spirit-filled life in the answer given to the first question. Only Respondent Six referenced with specific use of the word "sin" in answer to the fourth question, identifying what is seen as responsible for the lack of "robust Christian spirituality," although several identified the specific sins of selfishness and unforgiveness as hindrances. One set of responses (Respondent Four) particularly stands out for the emphases of focusing blame on others, thereby evidencing not only low self-awareness, but also cognitive distortion (i.e., blame-focus vs. self-examination).

With the exception of Respondents Five and Ten, none noted a correlation between the strength of their relationship with the Lord and the health in their human relationships. Respondent Eight added the comment, "Interesting questions. I benefitted also!" This serves as a reminder of the helpfulness both of being open to and of asking good questions in assisting others in God's process of transforming lives.