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Faith Development Theory and a Developmental Approach to Spiritual Formation for the

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH
TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION FOR THE CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Church, through whom Jesus continues to bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to give thanks to Ruby, my wife, who has shown me the love of Christ through her faithfulness to me throughout over two decades of gain and loss. What has been formed in me has been witnessed and supported by you. You've constantly given me permission and encouragement to be and become the best I could be—and you've always believed in me more than I've believed in myself.

To my children—Conner, Chloe, and Christian. I have a better glimpse into the love of God the Father through the gift of being your dad. I better understand how much you ache for the best in those you love, how you hope for them to become everything they could be, and for the pride of simply calling them 'yours.'

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ABSTRACT

The Church has a strong vision of the beginning of a life of faith as men and women come to Christ, but it lacks a framework and language to articulate the continued development, growth, and formation of faith over a lifetime. The result is a group of leaders and followers who lack direction to facilitate a deeper participation in and formation of life with God. The external tools provided by the church do not quench the questions of their inward reality. This leads to identifying faith as doing and believing the right things, on one hand, or becoming disillusioned on the other. This paper will explore the work of James Fowler's Faith Development Theory as a way to understand how faith develops over time, through a series of transitions and stages, inviting a deeper embodiment that is supported by the larger community of faith. Embodiment believes everyday realities of life are the very place to participate in and with God's work. This was the conviction of Saint Benedict of Nursia in the formation of his Rule and monastic communities, as well as in the formational and theological writings of N.T. Wright and Dallas Willard. The goal of this dissertation and the subsequent artifact is to help readers participate with God in the ongoing development and formation of their faith. Four companions of formation are offered to assist in this effort and awareness: engaging story, silence and solitude, understanding symbols and spiritual direction, and the place of community. The artifact for this dissertation is a curriculum designed to provide a process that honors different stages of faith and aids those in the local church to participate with God in their ongoing development and formation.

SECTION I:
THE PROBLEM

Two Stories

Eric's Story

“Questions can be a form of resistance. Do you feel you’re resisting God?”

I asked this question of Eric during a session of spiritual direction, after several months of meeting, and after a personal relationship of more than eight years. It was a more direct question than what is typically asked in spiritual direction, but the purpose of asking was to open the doors to reflect on how God graciously responds to resistance. Instead, the Spirit guided Eric back to his childhood dining room on the family farm, around the table with his mother, who had asked him the same thing decades before.

Eric’s experience of this question, once as a teenager and now again in his mid-thirties as a married professional and father of two, illustrates the dynamic ebb and flow of faith development. As a teenager growing up in a conservative home where the activity of faith was understood as Bible reading, prayer, church, and living a moral life, this question was a litmus test. It was asked by a loving mother with the intention to encourage Eric toward a vibrant relationship with God, but the question was received in a way that set a high bar of expectation of what it meant to follow Jesus. Now the question, asked again decades later in the same phrasing, was heard by a heart weary from years of wrestling with large, existential questions. One difference was the safety Eric had found in a community of faith encouraging such exploration. Instead of being received as condemnation, he could hear it as an invitation.

Eric is representative of countless people whose faith presents a challenge to the Church. The challenge is not that these women and men are lacking faith. It is their fierce desire for a vibrant, spacious faith that can withstand the asking of hard questions and holding the heaviness of doubt that cannot find a place within the perceived constraints of the local church. Fortunately for Eric, he was part of a local church that was intentionally making efforts to cultivate the continued formation of his faith. However, this is not the experience for everyone, and the result is an exodus of a group of people from the local church who could ignite a blaze of faith, but whose ember has been intentionally extinguished by a system of ministry and a structure of leadership built to “defend the faith” and maintain the status quo. Chris Shirley describes this exodus, saying, “...many of these ‘revolutionaries’ are leaving the local church in an effort to experience purposeful spiritual growth outside the structure and authority of what they consider to be an ineffective model for achieving God’s purposes in contemporary society.”¹

This leaving is both ancient and modern, found in the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Benedictine spirituality, the Reformation, and the Radical Reformation. It can also be seen through Nicodemus, who, while a historical person, can also become for the present Church an icon of someone who has tired of religion but is awakened to a dynamic faith.² Frederick Bruner describes him as such when he introduces Nicodemus by saying, “Initial believers in Jesus...are now joined and are perhaps even represented by an almost

¹ Chris Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (2008): 207.

² An *icon* is a piece of art typically depicting a person for the sake of communicating something about that person. For instance, numerous icons have been made of Saints, Jesus, or even the Trinity, such as the infamous Rublev icon. Icons are not ends to themselves, but a means of grace, tools through which to meditate on or meet with God.

classic Teacher of the people of God and an (at least partial) believer in Jesus.”³

Exploring the interaction between Jesus and this gospel icon will set the stage for this paper’s guiding conviction that faith is something that develops over time, through a series of transitions and stages, inviting deeper embodiment supported by the larger community of faith.

The Nicodemus Story: The Icon of Dynamic Faith

Nicodemus is first mentioned in the third chapter of John’s gospel. This is how John recounts the initial meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:1-7).

Dallas Willard gives this caution: “We have a serious problem within our usual evangelical hermeneutic of reading passages that are *not* about forgiveness of sins as if they were, when they are really about *new life* (that is, foundational spirituality) in Christ.”⁴ Treating the “born again” experience as a moment rather than a movement is an

³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 165. Emphasis in original.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: Harper One, 2014), 47. Emphasis in original.

obstacle for faith development in the church. It is not a one-time occurrence, but the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit, who continues to breathe into the life of the follower of Jesus. Treating being “born again” as a moment rather than a movement lowers the expectations of new disciples and confines a sense of assurance to a single decision rather than initiating a life of ongoing maturation. Nicodemus’ searching out of Jesus was the result of the stirring of God in the life of this particular teacher, beginning with his membership as a part of God’s people, continuing through his immersion in scripture and tradition, and wrestled with through the signs he had seen and the teaching he had heard from Jesus.

The activity of being “born again” has come to be understood as the moment of “crossing the line” from a person of non-faith to a person of faith in Christ.⁵ This understanding would categorize Nicodemus in the column of one who “has not yet been saved,” which is useful only in the context of attempting to guide a person to an initial confession of faith. As such, this particular interaction is usually left unexamined as the beginning to a *lifelong* process of transformation into Christlikeness. New Testament scholar Gary Burge writes, “I firmly believe that there are men and women in the church today who have not really heard the Nicodemus story. They have grown up in their tradition, they have taught it and defended it, but it has become a tame and predictable

⁵ This treatment of born again is influenced by the writings of Arthur McGill, Richard Beck, and Bradley Jersak. Beck helps bring an Eastern Orthodox perspective to the work of Christ—emphasizing the enemy being death, not sin. McGill follows by providing a critique of an American theology obsessed with preventing death. Jersak provides a larger, biblical framework speaking of salvation inclusively as opposed to the black and white delineation of who’s in and who’s out. These patterns of belief shape what followers of Jesus emphasize in their life of faith—as well as what it is they’re seeking from a life of faith.

thing.”⁶ The spirit of this conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, used as an icon, can help the church understand many of its members who are coming to Jesus with a similar experience.

Bruce Milne describes the historical Nicodemus this way:

As a devout, orthodox Jew he presumed that his place in the coming kingdom was assured, by virtue of his race and circumcision. Besides that, he was a leading religious professional, and moreover, a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council. There could be few Jews, if any, in the entire city that night whose credentials were more impressive as far as acceptance with God was concerned.⁷

This description bears more in common with a long-time church attender or pastor, steeped in religious tradition, than it does a person newly converted.⁸ However, the story is used as a guide for the latter rather than the former, losing its potential to act as an icon for those searching for deeper life with God who are faithful to the church.

Alongside the credentials of Nicodemus resides a curiosity propelling him toward this nighttime rendezvous with Jesus. Tradition, history, knowledge, and lineage were not enough to satisfy the hunger of his soul. Again, Burge suggests, “There is a link between spiritual receptivity and the degree to which we are ‘settled’ into a system of life and belief. The greater our comfort, the less our chances to receive a new word, a transforming word from God.”⁹ There are many in the church today, in pews *and* pulpits,

⁶ Gary M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2000), 131.

⁷ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John (Bible Speaks Today)* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 75.

⁸ The writings of Eugene Peterson, regarding the pastoral vocation, often provide a prophetic critique of those in ministry and likening them to this kind of reading of Nicodemus—as someone who is part of God’s people or leads God’s people, and yet is still searching.

⁹ Burge, *John*, 130.

who join Nicodemus, settled in a system of faith, but increasingly dissatisfied, disappointed, and desperate for there to be something more. Men and women, young and old, are venturing into their own dark night of the soul in search for faith beyond the one offered by a given system.

What Narrative Is Being Written?

Systems produce narratives. For example, the majority of Eric's story comes from the narrative of a gospel message defined by an initial conversion and subsequent adherence to a set of beliefs and moral practice(s), exemplifying a common understanding and experience of being "born again." The love of God is proclaimed in the message drawing one to conversion, then muted or forgotten entirely as it is replaced by the dualism of heaven and hell and the intellectualism of right belief and doctrine. Both the heaven/hell dualism and the intellectualism of right belief are dis-incarnate—detached from the realities of everyday life where spiritual formation takes place. Of great detriment is their disembodiment, which is contrary to the incarnation of Christ itself. Dallas Willard writes, "History has brought us to the point where the Christian message is thought to be essentially concerned only with how to deal with sin: with wrongdoing or wrong-being and its effects. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message, or it is included only marginally."¹⁰

¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 1998), 41.

Said another way, “the truncated gospel eventuates in seedlings whose shallow roots produce withered and worthless fruits devoid of the biblical gospel: life without love that is not true life at all, words without works, function without freedom.”¹¹ The lack of guidance given by the Church beyond conversion has resulted in a library of stories like those of Eric and Nicodemus. New Testament theologian Scot McKnight describes a vision of conversion as “a complex affair involving transformation at the level of personal identity. What mattered most was what happened at the level of one’s own self-perception and identity formation.”¹²

This paper will explore the work of James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory to understand how faith develops over time, through a series of transitions and stages, inviting a deeper embodiment that is supported by the larger community of faith. Interacting with Fowler’s stages will help individuals and leaders alike identify what is taking place at a developmental level. This understanding invites participation and, following the interaction with Fowler’s Theory, I will present four “spiritual companions” as ways to participate in and cooperate with faith as the response to God’s ongoing work in all things. These spiritual practices make up the core of a curriculum taking a developmental approach to discipleship created for use by the local church—or by leaders for other leaders. Before interacting with Fowler’s work, I turn to three challenges facing a developmental approach to faith.

¹¹ Samuel R. Schutz, “The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33, no. 4 (October 2009): 294.

¹² Scot McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christofromity in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 137.

Hindrances to Faith Development

Faith as Belief

Faith is not belief, and belief is not faith. The apostle James says as much when he states, “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:18-19). James points out the dissonance that occurs when faith is equated with belief. One can hold a set of beliefs, intellectually giving assent to a truth or proposition, without the truth or proposition having any authority over how one lives. Hence, demons can *believe* in God without having *faith* in God. This distinction is not made within western Christianity. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an authority on comparative religion and the author of *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them*, states, “Belief and faith have been linked by Western Christians more closely, more deliberately, more emphatically, than by any other group.”¹³

In order to understand the consequences of the marriage of faith with belief, it is important to understand exactly *what* is being believed. What is the object of belief? James Fowler suggests, “Belief, in the modern period, has come increasingly to mean the giving of intellectual assent to propositional statements that codify the doctrines or ideological claims of a particular tradition or group.”¹⁴ The impact of the intellectual rationalism of the Enlightenment on the Church is an increased emphasis on affirming

¹³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 13.

¹⁴ James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 55.

doctrine and ideology as means of proving one's faith. This is improper and damaging to those pursuing faith in Christ. The proper place for belief in doctrinal frameworks is subordinate, only *part of* what it means to have faith. This is not an argument to eliminate doctrine as an element contributing to faith, but it must be stated that faith is not dependent upon doctrine. Theologian Paul Tillich argues, "Knowledge of reality has never the certitude of complete evidence. The process of knowing is infinite. It never comes to an end except in a state of knowledge of the whole. But such knowledge transcends infinitely every finite mind and can be only ascribed to God."¹⁵

Tillich contends that faith is "the state of being ultimately concerned."¹⁶ Faith is not dependent upon belief in doctrine because doctrine is finite and *is not* an object worthy of ultimate concern. There is only one object of ultimate concern. That object is transcendent, not finite, and cannot be captured or controlled by dogma. "The Bible is not a list of dogmas. Jesus did not sit the Apostles down and give them a list of truths to teach. Throughout salvation history God helped people to discover the reality and meaning of his presence and action in their lives."¹⁷ The object of our faith is God, revealed not in a set of doctrines, but in the *person* of Jesus Christ. Faith, therefore, has a personal and relational nature, representing the holistic nature of creation and humanity, and cannot be confined only to the intellectual aspect of existence. Mere intellectual

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 40.

¹⁶ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 4.

¹⁷ Francis J. Buckley, "The Catechism of the Catholic Church: An Appraisal," *Horizons* 20, no. 2 (1993): 310.

adherence to a set of finite principles, no matter how true and good those principles may be, is not worthy of being termed “faith.”

Cantwell Smith writes, “faith is explicitly ‘more than’ belief but includes it: that is, intellectual belief is requisite but is ‘not enough,’ and faith ‘goes beyond it,’ faith is ‘belief plus.’”¹⁸ Contrary to this argument of subordination of belief to faith, a look at the ministry, practice, and language of the Church illustrates a clear emphasis on an intellectualized understanding of faith. Again, Smith cogently states: “Doctrine has been a central expression of faith, has seemed often a criterion of it; the community has divided over differences in belief, and has set forth belief as a formal qualification for membership. No other religious community on earth has done these things to the same degree; and some have not done them at all.”¹⁹

Regrettably, there are multiple examples of the divisions that have taken place over differences in belief. Even more regrettable is the destruction coming from those divisions, causing those thirsty for faith to all but die from dehydration as the guardians of faith defended the fountain of living water against all perceived unorthodox or heretical claims. For example, biblical scholars and professors, such as Dr. Peter Enns, have found themselves embroiled in controversy for not towing the “believing line.” In 2007, “Westminster Theological Seminary’s board voted to suspend tenured professor Peter Enns after a two-year theological debate over his 2005 book, *Inspiration and*

¹⁸ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 101.

¹⁹ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 14.

*Incarnation.*²⁰ More recently was the dismissal of Bruxy Cavey, Brian Zahnd, and Greg Boyd from Fresno Pacific University over a conflict of presenting more than one theory of atonement.²¹ The irony? Those who follow and listen to these writers and teachers are represented by the icon of Nicodemus.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*, writes,

These people not only feared being shunned for their unorthodox narratives, they also feared sharing some of the most powerful things that had ever happened to them with people who might dismiss them...If it is true that God exceeds all our efforts to contain God, then is it too big a stretch to declare that *dumbfoundness* is what all Christian have most in common? Or that coming together to confess all that we do not know is at least as sacred an activity as declaring what we think we do know?²²

Brown's statement is en fleshed by the often-referred-to authoritative summary of biblical faith in Hebrews 11. Here the author describes faith as "sure hope" leading to rather illogical activity: ark building in desert lands, pilgrimage from the safety of homelands to unknown places, childbearing from a barren womb. The writer of Hebrews provides texture and depth to Brown's description of dumbfoundness: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (Hebrews 11:13).

²⁰ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Westminster Theological Suspension: Professor's View of Biblical Inspiration Draws Reaction from the Seminary Board," *Christianity Today* 52, no. 6 (June 2008): 17.

²¹ Samuel Smith, "Mennonite Seminary Demotes President, Ousts 3 Megachurch Pastors Serving as Lecturers," *Christian Post*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/mennonite-seminary-demotes-president-ousts-3-megachurch-pastors-serving-as-lecturers.html>.

²² Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 110-111. Emphasis in original.

Before leaving the subject of misidentifying faith with belief, something affirming must be said regarding belief and doctrine.²³ Cantwell Smith affirms the role doctrine by pointing out the following:

Any given theological statement or doctrine or system arises first of all as the expression in verbal or conceptual form of someone's religious faith. Assuming that it is sincere, it is first personal and indeed individual; insofar, however, as it is accepted, either formally by the Church or in modern times informally by many Christians, it expresses the personal faith of many men and women.²⁴

Doctrine, at its best, is a response of worship. It is the building of an altar made of pen and ink, born of the marriage of heart and mind, bearing witness to the initiative of God in the life of a person and in the community of faith.

*The Dismissal of Mystery, Doubt, and Struggle*²⁵

Spiritual formation has a mysterious quality, but it does not lack structure. In this way, our formation finds itself at home within the mystery of God, who is both beyond knowing and able to be known. Returning to the initial imagery of Jesus, being born again is a developmental idea anticipating continued growth and maturation, containing elements of both structure and mystery. Beth Stovell writes, "If crisis and even pain and death were part of the common experience of birth in the ancient world, we cannot see

²³ Doctrine is indispensable. As discussed in section two of this paper, a person's relationship to doctrine will be different in stages 3, 4, and 5 of Fowler's Faith Development Theory. Beyond the specific doctrine or belief, a good question to observe is the *relationship* of the individual to doctrine itself.

²⁴ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 18.

²⁵ This section is personal. In addition to faith being equated to belief, I also experienced an unspoken expectation that faith is absent of mystery, doubt, or struggle. As a pastor it was especially difficult to find conversation partners because of the potential ramifications. My dialogue partners became authors such as Rob Bell, Brian McClaren, Rachel Held Evans, Barbara Brown Taylor, and Peter Enns—who gave me the space and permission to ask questions. This does not affirm everything these authors have to offer, but it does affirm the space they provide to ask questions.

being born again as straightforward and painless simply because it is spiritual rather than physical.”²⁶ Faith undergoes a certain dynamism because a Christian faith, grounded in the incarnational revelation of God in Christ, can never be divorced from the flesh and dirt of daily existence. This mixture of flesh and dirt is gospel—the good news of God, who is Spirit, revealed in flesh, in order to be known. In doing so, God presents an invitation to both embrace both God’s known and unknowable qualities. As David Benner points out, “true knowing of God demands that we know God not just as an abstraction or as objective data but in and through our lived experience.”²⁷

Lived experience leads through a maze of transitions, both physically and spiritually. These transitions are what initiate enormously challenging seasons in the life of faith, where what was previously known and held as a certainty is called into question. These seasons can come as the result of a challenge to a presently held structure of belief. This challenge is sometimes existential in nature, but more commonly caused by the very “dirt of life” spoken of previously. Often these new encounters with the deeper mystery of God are inaugurated by a significant life event—the birth of a child, a divorce or a time of relational turbulence, the movement into a new stage of life, the transition to a new job or place, a death, and so on. Ronald Rohlheiser describes the precarious times of transition, saying,

For all of us there will come a time when everything that is precious to us religiously will get crucified and we will find ourselves discouraged, shattered religiously, and tempted to walk toward some place of consolation. God, Christ, and church will still be very much alive in our lives, but we will not be able to

²⁶ Beth M. Stovell, “The Painful Drama of Being Born Again: What if We Took Jesus’ Famous Metaphor More Seriously,” *Christianity Today* 61, no. 9 (November 2017): 57.

²⁷ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 17.

recognize them because our eyes and hearts will have been trained to see God, Christ and church only in the way that they were integrated into our lives *before* the crisis beset us.²⁸

Moving from what was known into the uncharted waters of the unknown is a journey accompanied by many biblical companions: Abraham's move to an unknown land, Israel's quest for the Promised Land, the exile of the prophets and times of intense disorientation. The challenge posed to the church is whether there is room to do the same.

The systems of modern church ministry are set up to provide answers, not questions—certainty, not struggle. As illustrated in the stories of Eric and Nicodemus, questions are largely unwelcome, and often are seen as a sign of doubt or disbelief. Because objective certainty is misconstrued with faith, doubt is believed to hinder a deeper life with God. Paul Tillich writes, “Sometimes certainty conquers doubt, but it cannot eliminate doubt. The conquered of today may become the conqueror of tomorrow. Sometimes doubt conquers faith, but it still contains faith. Otherwise it would be indifference.”²⁹ Doubt is not the enemy of faith, but the fire of faith propelling the pursuit of more of God. It is not a weakness, but an invitation to experience the finiteness of one's humanity, enabling entry into a new and renewed knowledge of the knowable and yet beyond-knowing Creator.

Self-described ragamuffin Brennan Manning is a former Catholic priest whose ministry speaking of the love of God ministered to innumerable people in need of grace amidst doubt and struggle. He is revered (and rightly so) as a prophet testifying to God's

²⁸ Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* (New York: Image, 2017), 104. Emphasis in original.

²⁹ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 117.

love, but this was experienced in the dark nights and conflicts of abuse, family dysfunction, persistent alcoholism, and dismissal from priesthood. Manning created a space of confession for those in need of an elder voice giving permission to the doubts and struggles of faith—and to pronounce over them the love of God. John Blase, author with Brennan of his biography, describes this modern-day saint with these words: “While Brennan preached and taught of God’s furious longing for us and the joy that comes from the Abba experience, that message often seemed elusive to his own grasp. I have no doubt there were bright mornings and luminous afternoons for Brennan, but there have also been many, many dark nights.”³⁰ The Church is not only in need of people like Brennan, but the spaces Brennan, and others like him, have intentionally curated for the weary pilgrim traversing the valleys of the shadows of mystery, doubt, and struggle.

Gnosticism

One last hindrance to faith development must be mentioned: Gnosticism. Native American theologian Randy Woodley describes Gnosticism as “a way of perceiving reality within a framework of two opposing rudiments such as spirit and flesh, mind and body, mind and matter, or good and evil.”³¹ Jemar Tisby describes it as “dualities between physical and spiritual, moral and political, ecclesiastical and social.”³² He illustrates the outcomes of such thinking through telling the story of how, in 1667, the

³⁰ Brennan Manning, *All Is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir* (Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook, 2011), 200.

³¹ Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 101.

³² Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 86.

Virginia Assembly gathered to discuss whether or not to extend the English practice of freeing slaves when baptized. Tisby states that the response of “missionaries, ministers, and slaveowners encouraged African Christians in America to be content with their spiritual liberation and to obey their earthly masters.”³³

It is both unwise and untrue to think this kind of Gnosticism has lost its teeth in the present-day Church. Its strangling grip continues to be felt in the church’s complicity and silence in the areas of racism and white supremacy on one hand, and the church’s hypocritical deification of politics on the other. Yenny Delgado states, “I can confirm that many evangelical leaders are not only sympathetic to this evil ideology but also preach it as God’s truth. Meanwhile, other leaders and churches maintain silence, similar to the silence of their forebears during the era of segregation. Silence in the face of injustice confirms that a level of indifference exists.”³⁴

In addition to its contributions to injustice, Gnosticism has also forced Christians into false dualisms, requiring them to choose between two so-called opposites without considering the value in each. This kind of choice has led Christians to a partisanship of their own, settling into an echo chamber of like-mindedness and viewing brothers and sisters with divergent viewpoints as the enemy. Sexuality, politics, economics, and immigration are just some examples of this entrenchment in the societal realm. The Church also has its internal divisions in areas such as the ordination of women or women in ministry, theological positions such as atonement theories, diversity in leadership, and

³³ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 26.

³⁴ Yenny Delgado, “The Role of the US Christian Church in Supporting White Supremacy: Initial Reflections,” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 14, no. 1 (2019): 153–54.

fellow believers who desire a committed relationship in same-sex marriage. The byproduct of church partisanship is a patronizing moralism and graceless posture toward those who think and believe differently. Delgado continues by saying, “The shrinking of the mystery and journey of faith to only a personal spiritual journey or to a reductionist viewpoint that simplifies all action or activity to a handful of issues takes faith in Christ completely out of context.”³⁵ Gnosticism is a threat to an embodied faith, which is what we find in Jesus, the middle-Eastern-God-become-flesh, who holds all of this together.

Conclusion

Thomas Ashbrook writes, “The problem facing all Christians today is that the process of the spiritual life is not clearly understood or taught in most of our churches and seminaries. Followers of Jesus are left without clear reference points for spiritual maturity or processes to aid progress in their spiritual journey.”³⁶ Seminaries and churches have done well to train leaders and layfolk to believe and teach the right things, and this has been of both great benefit and great detriment to the church. From the beneficial angle, followers of Jesus have been presented with the well-worn paths of Orthodox beliefs and systems of beliefs shaped over millennia. Yet this has had a detrimental effect on these same followers, lacking guidance to the interior life. What is able to be known cognitively has been kept separate from the deeper knowing of the heart. This is because of the equating of faith to right belief, the overall dismissal of

³⁵ Delgado, “The Role of the US Christian Church in Supporting White Supremacy,” 134.

³⁶ Thomas Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 12.

mystery, doubt, and struggle within the life and ministry of the local church, and the ongoing persistence of gnostic thought.

The guiding conviction of this dissertation is that faith develops over time, through a series of transitions and stages, inviting a deeper embodiment that is supported by the larger community of faith. The product of this dissertation will be the presentation of a curriculum that creates spaces within the local church to address the problems examined above in order to help followers of Jesus navigate the ongoing development of their faith and life with God. Before discussing the curriculum, it is first necessary to articulate and illustrate faith from a developmental perspective.

SECTION II:
OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

A Tradition, Theology, and Philosophy of Formation

Saint Benedict's Emphasis on the Ordinary

Dallas Willard says that Christian spiritual formation is “the redemptive process of forming the inner human world so that it takes on the character of the inner being of Christ himself. In the degree to which it is successful, the outer life of the individual becomes a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus.”³⁷

Willard’s definition implies the activity of formation takes place in *the everyday moments of life*. All spiritual formation must be grounded in the reality of what *is*, with the conviction that God is present in all that is. The work of every follower of Jesus, then, is to grow in attentiveness to the present presence of God. The everyday nature of life and its complexities is not something to be endured, but is the very material used by God to remake us into the image of Christ.

The importance of a daily approach to spiritual formation finds roots in the Old Testament narrative of Israelites learning to live off of daily manna, and in the instruction of Jesus, who teaches his disciples to pray for daily bread.³⁸ A few centuries later, it would be followed by a monk who was disheartened by the state of the Church and who introduced an intentional way of living that would revolutionize participation in personal

³⁷ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 105.

³⁸ Exodus 16; Matthew 6:9-12.

and communal spiritual formation. In the late fifth century and into the sixth, Saint Benedict of Nursia introduced his Rule—a way of discipleship and formation lived out in the everyday realities of life and community. Author and Benedictine Sister Joan Chittester describes the daily nature of Benedict’s Rule by saying, “Benedictine spirituality deals totally in the here and now. Benedictine spirituality is made out of the raw material of the average daily life...The Rule of Benedict simply takes the dust and clay of every day and turns it into beauty.”³⁹ Benedict honors the activity of daily life, the most overlooked of places, as a holy space to encounter God.

Benedictine spirituality gifts a modern culture, rootless both physically and spiritually, a sense of place. With churches on every corner, it has become routine to move from community to community when things get difficult. He states in his fourth rule that “the workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks in the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community.”⁴⁰ There is no room for idealism, only reality in the practicality of life in community. Formation into Christlikeness happens in the washing of the pots, the pulling of the weeds, the praying of psalms—or caring for the grounds, serving on the committees, and singing the hymns. Benedictine spirituality happens *among a particular people*—not as one would have them, but as they are.

David Robinson describes a call to stability by saying, “Taking a vow of stability does not preclude moving from place to place. It is more of an attitude that says, ‘I will

³⁹ Joan Chittister, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 7.

⁴⁰ *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. Timothy Frey (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 14.

not run away when difficult choices or situations arise.”⁴¹ Formation into Christlikeness comes by persevering *through* the difficulty, because it is the liminality of difficulty where maturity is birthed. Jesus says, “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”⁴² Principally, this is a cornerstone to formation. The difficult and painful places of life are the fertilizer of formation. With the encouragement of community, a person finds courage to face what is too daunting to confront alone.

Benedict’s Rule also offers the gift of silence and restraint in the midst of the present culture’s pull to noise and indulgence. Quoting the psalmist, he says, “I said, I have resolved to keep watch over my ways that I may never sin with my tongue. I have put a guard on my mouth. I was silent and was humbled, and I refrained from even good works.”⁴³ He then begins the sixth Rule on the Restraint of Speech by saying, “Here the Prophet indicates that there are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence...Indeed, so important is silence that permission to speak should be seldom granted even to mature disciples.”⁴⁴ Words can provide a false sense of security—saying and praying the right things when the very thing needed is to say nothing at all. Sometimes speech, even good and well-intentioned speech, is spoken as a means to distract oneself from what God desires to speak to the heart. As Mother Agnes Day

⁴¹ David Robinson, *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 135.

⁴² John 12:24.

⁴³ Psalm 39:2-3.

⁴⁴ *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 15.

writes, “The greatest enemy of such listening love is not exterior noise, but what goes on inside us. We need to silence our preoccupations.”⁴⁵ The presence of silence makes way for the attentiveness needed to recognize God in the daily.

The Rule of Saint Benedict offers a structure to the mystery of spiritual formation—one that has been practiced and tested for over a millennium in countless countries and contexts. Benedict’s Rule is tangible and practical. The Rule has lived through the rise and falls of empires and nations, and the principles of the Rule provide a clear path for monastics and non-monastics alike who desire to love Jesus and be formed into his image. Individuals and whole churches have followed his example by writing their own Rule of Life—a way to remain faithful to God in their particular context. Such a way of intentional participation in spiritual formation grounds and guides the efforts of those desiring to follow Jesus. Those who have a desire to know Jesus more deeply may lack a particular *way*; Benedict’s Rule, flexible for time and context, can provide a way and means.⁴⁶

Dallas Willard and N.T. Wright: The Kingdom is Now

Dallas Willard and N.T. Wright have both done work in their respective fields to provide a theological foundation to Benedict’s daily approach to participating in the life

⁴⁵ Agnes Day, “‘With Widened Hearts’: A Commentary on the Prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2016): 275-276.

⁴⁶ In addition to Benedict’s Rule, the Christian Year also provides a foundation to pay attention to the ongoing narrative of God’s larger story in the midst of daily life. Being from a non-liturgical tradition, the Christian Year was a new concept that has added much both pastorally and congregationally to a grounding of daily life in the story of God. Contributors to my thoughts on the Christian Year include Robert Webber and Joan Chittister.

of God through their writings on the Kingdom of God. There is no intentional connection between these authors/theologians and Saint Benedict, but their theological approach and articulation of the present reality of the Kingdom of God undergird Benedict's emphasis on the daily.

Willard gives the following critique of what has become the norm, saying, "Our usual 'gospels' are, in their effects—dare we say it—nothing less than a standing invitation to *omit* God from the course of our daily existence."⁴⁷ How often is the encouragement given to those entering the church or beginning a time of prayer to "leave everything at the door to focus on God"? Shedding the daily experience of life has become a normative practice. God has become an escape from the reality of daily existence rather than the Lord of it. To this end, Dallas writes, "If we are faithful to him here (in the little we truly have say over), we learn his cooperative faithfulness to us in turn. We discover the effectiveness of his rule with us precisely in the details of day-to-day existence."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 12. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 24.

Willard provides the following model⁴⁹ as a way to participate with Christ in the everyday activity of life. On one side, Willard suggests the need for endurance and perseverance through the faithful acceptance of everyday problems. The notion of accepting everyday problems is counterintuitive. Many use the idea of God as an *escape* from everyday problems, not as clay in the hands of God used for formation into Christlikeness. Interaction with the Spirit is so that “we experience the perpetual presence of the Lord not just as theological dogma but as radiant reality.”⁵⁰ The presence of the Holy Spirit continues the ministry of the incarnation nature of Jesus as “God with us”—and that means the here and now of what *is*. The practice of spiritual disciplines is a means of preparation to receive Divine grace.



Figure 1—Willard's Golden Triangle

⁴⁹ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 26-28.

⁵⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 25.

What is helpful about this model from Willard is the symbiotic relationship between each of the sides of the triangle. They are interdependent and keep a balance between the need to be grounded in the reality of everyday experience, the invitation to become open to deeper realities through seeking the Holy Spirit, and the effort needed to be exerted through the spiritual disciplines. Listen to one of Willard's most helpful pieces of wisdom encapsulating such a balance. He says, "Grace is not opposed to effort (action)—though it is opposed to earning (attitude). The way is open for us to 'work out' all that is involved in our salvation, not only with 'fear and trembling' but also with the calm assurance that it is God who is at work in us to accomplish all of His goodwill."⁵¹ The strength of Willard's model is the holding of this tension between effort/participation and grace with the conviction of the present presence and activity of the Kingdom of God.

New Testament theologian N.T. Wright is another voice who supports this notion of the present reality of the Kingdom of God and the call for followers of Jesus to participate with it. He writes, "It is because he [Jesus] inaugurated the kingdom that we can live the kingdom. It is because he brought the story of God and Israel, and hence of God and the cosmos, to its designed climax that we can now implement that work today."⁵² Wright grounds his understanding of the outworking of the Kingdom of God in God's activity in and through the historical people of Israel. The reality of God's Kingdom is at work within a historical people in an actual place and time, thus grounding

⁵¹ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 133.

⁵² N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 53.

not only Christian spirituality but Christian theology in human experience—or perhaps said differently, grounding the human experience in God. The human experience finds a purpose elevated beyond mere existence to participation in and with what God is doing in history, in the present, and into a climactic future.

Wright's theology of the Kingdom of God, like Willard's, joins the Way of Benedict in creating a vision of what it looks like to live in this world with and for Christ and Christ's Kingdom. Wright continues, "This is what the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit are all about. They are designed not to take us away from this earth but rather to make us agents of the transformation of this earth, anticipating the day when, as we are promised, 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'"⁵³ To clarify, in no way do Benedict, Willard, or Wright suggest the coming of the Kingdom will come *through* the Church. However, as God's people (the Church), we actively bear witness to God's Kingdom and cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to God's Kingdom—all the while waiting with anticipation for the Kingdom of God to come in its fullness. Wright summarizes, saying, "Jesus is the one who sends the Holy Spirit, his own Spirit, into the lives of his followers, so that he himself is powerfully present with them and in them, guiding them, directing them, and above all enabling them to bear witness to him as the world's true Lord and work to make that sovereign rule a reality."⁵⁴

⁵³ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 201.

⁵⁴ N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 204.

Willard and Wright provide a vision for God’s Kingdom and how a person can enter into the reality and participate in the Kingdom of God in the here and now. However, missing from their method is a nuance of *how* people develop and how the life of God is formed in a person over time. As intellectuals, Willard and Wright provide solid concepts—and even means to participate in the concepts they present. However, they don’t consider the varied levels of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development that every person must grow *through*.⁵⁵ The concepts of Willard and Wright should be experienced in varying degrees as individuals process through different stages of faith. Stages of faith is a concept created by James Fowler, and it will provide a way to understand how a person experiences spiritual formation as a process through different stages of faith.

James Fowler and Faith Development Theory

What Is a Stage?

Faith Development Theory and its subsequent Faith Stages were developed by psychologist James Fowler, whose influences include the cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget, the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, and the psychological development theory of Erik Erickson.⁵⁶ Fowler applies these theories,

⁵⁵ Willard’s framework works well for those who are disciplined and motivated. Occasionally he diagnoses what prevents people from going more deeply in life with God, but not as well as psychologist M. Scott Peck. Peck helps name and uncover what prevents people from participating in the discipline of the spiritual life.

⁵⁶ Beyond their contribution to the formation of Fowler’s Faith Development Theory, these authors do not act as further contributors to this dissertation.

creating his own theory of faith development that give structures to what many know to be true, but find difficult to articulate, regarding faith. Henri Nouwen describes the helpfulness resulting in being able to name something, saying, “Those who can articulate the movements of their inner lives, who can give names to their varied experiences, need no longer be victims of themselves, but are able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the spirit from entering.”⁵⁷ Understanding faith in developmental/stage terms can help bring clarity and understanding, leading to greater embodiment—aiding the spiritual formation of both individuals and communities. The following presents and interacts with specific Faith Stages in Fowler’s model that help illuminate to the varying experiences of faith found within the local church.⁵⁸

Fowler articulates the purpose of his Faith Development Theory and Faith Stages by saying that it tries to “describe the underlying patterns of knowing, valuing, and committing that constitute persons’ ways of being selves and in faith.”⁵⁹ This is *a tool* to help individuals discern and understand their self, the world around them, and their faith directed toward their object of ultimate concern. The use of Faith Development Theory and the subsequent stages can also be used by pastors and leaders to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of faith experienced in a given community. Incorporating an understanding of Faith Stages into the leadership of a community of faith can help honor

⁵⁷ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 42.

⁵⁸ Fowler presents seven different stages of faith, but in this dissertation, only stages 3-5 will be explored, as they are the stages most applicable to the faith development of adults in the local church.

⁵⁹ James Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 66.

differences and foster generosity and empathy—between members of the community, leaders and members, and leadership itself.

Fowler suggests that “to be ‘in’ a given stage of faith means to have a characteristic way of finding and giving meaning to everyday life.”⁶⁰ This could also be described as a mental map. Each stage is informed by age and life stage; however, it is important to emphasize age and life stage are contributive, not determinative, factors. “Persons may reach chronological and biological adulthood while remaining best defined structural stages of faith that would most commonly be associated with early or middle childhood or adolescence.”⁶¹ Stages are not to be treated hierarchically, as though numerically higher stages are better than numerically lower stages.

Transitioning Between Stages

Movement from one stage to another has little to do with self-initiation or self-determination. Instead, it is brought about by how a person *responds* to a time of transition brought about through a disorienting/reorienting experience. “Few of us ever make fundamental changes in the shape of our character or in the deep patterns of our personalities by elective choice alone. The need or imperative for deep-going change in our lives usually comes in response to some experience of shipwreck, of failure in love or work, or of spiritual struggle or illumination.”⁶² Transitioning from one stage to another can be, and often is, a painful experience requiring reorientation and a renewal of what a

⁶⁰ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 68.

⁶¹ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 57.

⁶² Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 103.

person holds to be true. While the circumstances initiating times of transition may be unavoidable, a person must determine whether or not to allow God to use the struggle to develop stronger character and resilience leading to growth. The pain of the transformative process is why many reject the invitation to character formation, and thus the potential of a transition and entry into a new stage altogether.

William Bridges, in his authoritative book on the subject, suggests transition consists of three experiences. “All stages are composed of (1) an ending, (2) a neutral zone, and (3) a new beginning.”⁶³ American individualism and the privilege of the majority culture typically focus on only the third experience—the green grass of opportunity on the other side of the present state. However, paying attention only to the new beginning ignores the formational invitations given by the difficulties of endings and the time of neutral zones. These two pieces of the transition process are ignored because they are the more difficult ones, where the old must come to an end and a time of grief, loss, and unknown begin. The first verse of Teilhard de Chardin’s poem *The Slow Work of God* says it well:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
 We are quite naturally impatient in everything
 to reach the end without delay.
 We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
 We are impatient of being on the way to something
 unknown, something new.
 And yet it is the law of all progress
 that it is made by passing through
 some stages of instability—
 and that it may take a very long time.⁶⁴

⁶³ William Bridges, *Transition: Making Sense of Life’s Changes* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2001), 4.

⁶⁴ “Prayer of Teilhard de Chardin,” Ignatian Spirituality, accessed November, 2019, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/prayer-of-teilhard-de-chardin/>.

Many move with clenched fists through the ‘stages of instability’, the endings and neutral zones of transition, and the result is the loss of a formational opportunity as unique as the ending itself. Perhaps shying away from this opportunity is because no ending is without its scars, and every neutral zone act as a waiting room where old wounds come to the surface.

Richard Rohr writes, “If only we could see these ‘wounds’ as *the way through*, as Jesus did, then they would become sacred wounds rather than scars to deny, disguise, or project onto others.”⁶⁵ No one just moves on to a new beginning. The fragments of the old are carried in their healed or festering forms. Parker Palmer writes, “If we are to cast less shadow and more light, we need to ride certain monsters all the way down, explore the shadows they create, and experience the transformation that can come as we ‘get into’ our own spiritual lives.”⁶⁶ Endings and in-betweens are the rare moments that invite a person into a new way of being, a new stage of faith.

Transitions are the most overlooked experiences of formation because of how difficult they are to bear, and because there are few who *have* borne them well and can bear witness. Thomas Ashbrook describes what typically happens when a person of faith encounters such a time: “More often than not, we don’t recognize this deep longing but feel its symptoms: frustration and dissatisfaction. Because our feeling is ‘negative,’ we often see it as a bad thing. Misunderstanding what is going on within us and then blaming

⁶⁵ Richard Rohr, “Transforming Pain—A Daily Meditation by Fr. Richard Rohr,” accessed July 19, 2020, <https://cac.org/transforming-pain-2018-10-17/>. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 85.

‘someone’ for it, we may actually become discouraged and back away from God and our Christian community.”⁶⁷ Between each of the following stages is the intricacy and complexity of a transition and a necessity to embrace the unique experience of the transition. Without exception, every life must endure times of transition, but *only some will be transformed by them*.

This has been an introduction to a developmental understanding of faith and James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory—as well as a brief explanation of the concept of *Stages and Transitions*. The remainder of this chapter will examine the three of Fowler’s Faith Stages most applicable to adult formation in local church, then illustrate them through Social Set Theory. In each stage, a simple image will be given, along with a summary of characteristics unique to the stage and what a time of transition between each stage might be experienced.

Fowler’s Faith Stages

Stage 3: Synthetic/Conventional

When I was eighteen, my homebody self left the safe confines of my mid-sized northern Pennsylvania hometown. Along with the town, I left the church and tradition I had known and that had shaped my spiritual identity. My destination was a college in the deep south, an unfamiliar Pentecostal tradition, and a group of 4,000 strangers—a place I chose for myself. Within the first year, I dove into the deep end of the Pentecostal waters, absorbing new expectations and realities of what it meant to be a Christian. On one hand,

⁶⁷ Ashbrook, *Mansions*, 100.

this opened me up to new understandings and experiences of God. On the other, these new experiences and the community stewarding these experiences gave me new standards of what it meant to belong. This experience illustrates entrance into, and participation in, the Synthetic/Conventional Stage. In this stage, a person leaves the community prescribed to them by their family of origin⁶⁸ and *chooses one of their own*, even if the community feels similar to the one the person left.

The following figure can be used to illustrate the Synthetic/Conventional Stage.⁶⁹

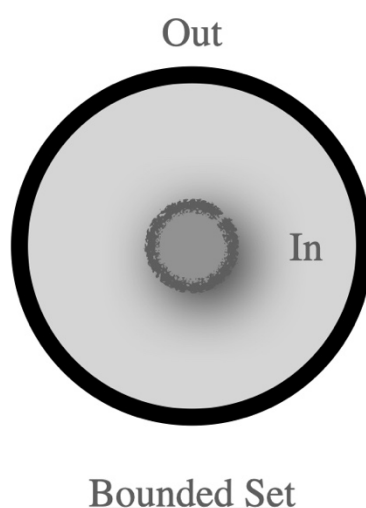


Figure 2—The Bounded Set⁷⁰

Missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch describe the Bounded Set as “a social system that has clearly delineated boundaries...usually moral and cultural codes as well

⁶⁸ This is Stage 2—The Mythical/Lyrical Stage.

⁶⁹ The figures used to illustrate Stages 3-5 come from the work of Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch and their exploration of social-set theory in relation to the Church.

⁷⁰ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 253.

as creedal definitions.”⁷¹ The Bounded Set is a set of ideas and ideals employed by the community to clearly articulate the expectations of the community, whether they be theological, moral, or structural. In Figure 2, the objective is not a relationship to the center, which itself remains largely undefined, but remaining within the defined boundaries of the outer circle. As Frost and Hirsch point out, “it doesn’t have much of a core definition besides these boundaries.”⁷²

Perhaps for these reasons, Fowler suggests “many religious groups reinforce a conventionally held and maintained faith system, sanctifying one’s remaining in the dependence on external authority and derivative group identity of Stage 3.”⁷³ He continues, “In many ways religious institutions ‘work best’ if they are people with a majority of committed folk best described by Stage 3...Much of church and synagogue life in this country can be accurately described as dominantly Synthetic-Conventional.”⁷⁴ Implied in these comments is a sad truth: the systems and structures of ministry within the local church in the West are set up to take people only halfway through the possible stages of faith development.

A person who finds themselves in the Synthetic/Conventional Stage is defined by the group. The belief and behaviors of the group are accepted by the person in a tacit, non-critical, and non-self-reflective way because these are capacities that are not yet developed in the person. Deborah Hirsch says that in the Bounded Set, “belief and

⁷¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

⁷² Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

⁷³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 178.

⁷⁴ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 164.

behavior define belonging.”⁷⁵ Eugene Peterson illustrates this ethos by stating, “Moralism is a moral grid that is set on life. Up against this grid, I can see exactly where I fit or don’t fit, where you fit or don’t fit, what actions are right and which are wrong.”⁷⁶ In an organizational sense, this can be illustrated through the ordination processes of a denomination or the more localized practice of church membership. In each case, there is a clear set of expectations of what it means to belong, and oftentimes these expectations act as the foundation of interpersonal relationships within the group.⁷⁷

The boundaries of the Synthetic/Conventional Stage and its partnership with the Bounded Set can eventually work together. While providing a well-defined community and clear expectations, when those beliefs and values become dogmatic and become the center of the community, the community becomes an obstacle to faith development. Pastor and author Greg Boyd notes, “Consequently, the center of the room we design is not a center of fullness but a center of emptiness. Without God as our center, we are not a source of life but a vacuum that sucks life.”⁷⁸ Rachel Held Evans, companion to those struggling against the boundaries of the Bounded Set, says, “we’re good at making mountains out of our theologies, and hills out of our screwed up notions of who’s in and

⁷⁵ Deb Hirsch, “Bounded Set vs. Centered Set,” Missional Church Network, accessed September 2020, <https://www.missionalchurchnetwork.com/blog/bounded-set-vs-centered-set>.

⁷⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in 10,000 Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 145.

⁷⁷ Deb Hirsch’s presentation is helpful in understanding the concept of Bounded and Centered Set; however, her suggestion is simply that church leaders move from one to another—in essence, choosing a more open approach. This suggestion is more complicated than she suggests because it does not take into account the development of a person enabling them to move from Bounded to Centered Set.

⁷⁸ Gregory Boyd, *Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 70.

who's out, who's worthy and who's unworthy."⁷⁹ Regrettably, this false center is not only prohibitive, but often acts as a weapon yielded by the community of faith, wounding those who begin wrestling with or asking questions about the content of the circle.

Ultimately the telos of all "religious" activity is life with God. However, the Synthetic/Conventional Stage limits the telos to *activity itself*—and this activity concentrates on mastering the material within the circle of the given Bounded Set. Describing the limitations of the Bounded Set, author and missiologist Carl Medearis says, "We communicate that having the right thoughts is the means of salvation. We're telling them that it's the stuff that happens between their ears that matters. When we focus on ideology, we're not touching thirsty hearts."⁸⁰ Developmentally, people in the Synthetic/Conventional Stage have difficulty receiving the invitation of God because of an achievement-oriented participation in their faith. Rather than fostering an attentiveness to the graces of God presenting themselves through daily life, people in this stage are busy performing the tasks and activities determined by the community deemed as necessary to be a "good" disciple.

The disconnection from daily life is a result of one's personal identity being found in the context of the community rather than in the self. Fowler writes, "One decisive limit of the Synthetic-Conventional stage is its lack of third-person perspective taking. This means that in its dependence upon significant others for confirmation and clarity about its identity and meaning to them, the self does not yet have a transcendental perspective

⁷⁹ Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2015), 39.

⁸⁰ Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2011), 67.

from which it can see and evaluate self-other relations.”⁸¹ Rather than aiding in the discovery of a person’s unique *imago Dei*, this type of community requires uniformity. “Bounded-Set thinking will insist on a radical displacement of all prior religious and cultural elements with new and Christian ones.”⁸² The displacement of previous experience or beliefs is detrimental to faith development because it is precisely in previous (and present) life experience the activity of God is found. The Synthetic/Conventional Stage is limited by pursuing what the community identifies as the ideal, defined by the authority of the community and its leaders.

There is certainly a time when faithfulness to God is the intention of the person living within this set. There can be little doubt the experience of community in this stage is a natural and necessary part of faith development. However, the limitation of this stage comes as the borders defining such faithfulness replace God and become a god of their own. When a community deifies boundaries, the experience of a person struggling with the boundaries set by the community may create a kind of conflict that acts as a gateway of transition to the next stage. Fowler describes the transition initiated by friction with the community this way: “Factors contributing to the breakdown of Stage 3 and to readiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes, by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable.”⁸³

⁸¹ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 62.

⁸² Michael L. Yoder, Michael G. Lee, Jonathan Ro, and Robert J. Priest, “Understanding Christian Identity in Terms of Bounded and Centered Set Theory in the Writings of Paul G. Hiebert,” *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 2 (2009): 179.

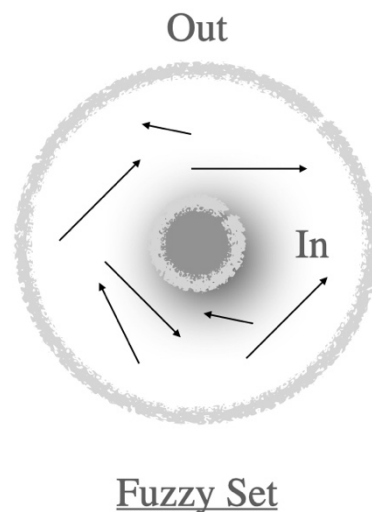
⁸³ Fowler, *Faith Stages*, 173.

Stage 4: Individuative/Reflective

By my mid-30s, I had been banging my head against the proverbial wall of the Bounded Set for a decade. I began to question what I believed—about God, the church, pastoral ministry, personal identity, and a host of other things. Still in the back of my mind, calling for my loyalty, was the moralism of my upbringing, the charismata of my college years, and the decade of ministry where leadership gurus and authoritative voices told me what it took to be a successful pastor. Simultaneously, I began questioning my community's prescribed understanding of hell. Was a person's eternity really dependent on their ability to make a proper confession of Jesus as Lord? Was it that dichotomous, or would Jesus consider other life factors such as abuse, struggles with mental illness, family dysfunction, intellectual capability, culture, addiction, and so forth? The Bounded Set of the Synthetic Conventional stage demanded my adherence to a theology of hell affirming eternal conscious torment, but I could not reconcile that with the God I was encountering through the person of Jesus or the new ways I was experiencing a more embodied faith in God.

This scenario, of a *personal wrestling* with what I believed, both experientially and theologically and in relationship to what my community believed, is an example of moving into Stage 4 of Fowler's Stages of Faith—the Individuative/Reflective Stage. The following diagram can be used to illustrate this stage of faith:

Figure 1.2

**Figure 3—Fuzzy Set⁸⁴**

Frost and Hirsch suggest that the Fuzzy Set “has no real ideological center or boundary.”⁸⁵ Here, “categories assume continuums and are not based on sharply divided either-or thinking” and “change or conversion is a process, not an instantaneous about-face.”⁸⁶ “Out” in the Fuzzy Set is the authority the community held in the Bounded Set—and “In” is the authority of the self. Fowler says, “The two essential features of the emergence of Stage 4 are the critical distancing from one’s previous assumptive value system and the emergence of the executive ego”⁸⁷—the executive ego representing the new authority and responsibility found in the self.

⁸⁴ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

⁸⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

⁸⁶ Yoder, Lee, Ro, and Priest, *Understanding Christian Identity*, 180.

⁸⁷ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 179.

In Stage 3, the development and identity of the individual was found through adherence to shared ideology and behaviors that defined the communal identity. Movement to Stage 4 does not take place by finding another source of authority outside of the self, but can only be entered into when a person takes responsibility for working out their own “meaning making.” In Stage 4, meaning making moves from discovering identity from the source of community to the source of self. Stage 3 told me this is what I *should* believe, whereas Stage 4 asks if this is something I *could* believe, and it is something I need to decide. Fowler describes it this way: “There must be, for Stage 4, a relocation of authority within the self. While others and their judgments remain important to the Individuative-Reflective person, their expectations, advice and counsel will be submitted to an internal panel of experts who reserve the right to choose and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices.”⁸⁸

The focus on self in Stage 4 might seem subjective and relative, especially in comparison to the *prescribed knowing* of Stage 3. This is why the term “Fuzzy Set” fits well. It is a stage where the content of belief is separated from faith, where the authority of leaders and communities is called into question, and where doubt and struggle are entered into intentionally as a result of wrestling with what was offered by the community. Subjectivity—or an individualistic feel—is almost unavoidable because this is *the* stage where a deeper wrestling occurs within the self. Psychologist and spiritual director David Benner articulates the importance of the self by saying, “Leaving the self out of Christian spirituality results in a spirituality that is not well grounded in

⁸⁸ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 179.

experience. It is, therefore, not well grounded in reality. Focusing on God while failing to know ourselves deeply may produce an external form of piety, but it will always leave a gap between appearance and reality.”⁸⁹ This illustrates the aforementioned problem of Gnosticism within Christian spirituality. Suzanne Ho writes, “Having correct self-knowledge helps one to connect with self and reality. It increases self-awareness and openness, making one available to be changed and transformed by God’s Spirit.”⁹⁰

The self in the Individuative/Reflective stage takes on the role of scientist and sleuth. Fowler writes,

In a way that parallels the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, we engage in critical analysis and reflection upon the symbols, rituals, myths, and beliefs that mediate and express our traditions of faith. Through such analysis we interrogate their meanings and try to translate them into conceptual formulations. In doing so, we gain clarity about our faith; we gain precision in our understanding and its articulation.⁹¹

Joshua Ryan Butler, writing to those asking hard faith questions, writes, “Refusing to look boldly at the parts of God’s story we fear intimidates us from following Christ without reservation and placing full confidence in his gospel.”⁹² Butler articulates the best of what Stage 4 can produce—a wrestling with and working through and making personal what it is that comprises a person’s faith. A growing faith means a deeper

⁸⁹ Benner. *The Gift of Being Yourself*, 21.

⁹⁰ Suzan Kam-Shan Ho, “Journeying with Jesus: A Transformational Discipleship for Canadian Chinese Churches in Toronto; A Paradigm Shift” (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2015), 8, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/92>.

⁹¹ Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation*, 109.

⁹² Joshua Ryan Butler, *The Skeletons in God’s Closet* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), xviii.

surrender to God, not because it is something a community of faith demands, but because of a growing trust in the God who is found.

The growing edge and gift of the Individuative/Reflective Stage is finding authority within the self, however self-deception is a real possibility as a person begins to claim this authority. The temptation is to forgo the historical wisdom of the community of faith, dismissing the long-term faithfulness of the church because of the present failure of a particular community. The work of gaining authority within the self may be done apart from previous community, but it cannot be done apart from community altogether. In fact, the role of a community is just as formational and perhaps even more important in Stage 4; its role is simply different. Fowler writes, “Whether a person will *really* make the move to an Individuative-Reflective stance depends to a critical degree on the character and quality of the ideologically composed groups bidding for one’s joining.”⁹³ The difference may lie in composition; the community may no longer be a “church” per se, but instead might be a person, or a combination of people, who walks alongside the person in this stage. Or, it may be a local church that has fostered a culture to encourage a person to enter into a Fuzzy Set to do the back-and-forth work of what it means to own faith in a more personal way.

Personally, I dealt with several complications with community in Stage 4 because I was serving as a pastor at the time. MaryKate Morse acutely describes the problem of my situation, saying, “when the reality and struggles of ministry press on developing

⁹³ Fowler, *Stages*, 178. Emphasis in original.

leaders, their need for companionship is mission critical.”⁹⁴ She adds, “Pastors and ministry leaders struggle because of the lack of ongoing, meaningful formation of their own inner journeys, the lack of friends who understand their journey, and the lack of emotional and physical rest.”⁹⁵ If what Fowler said is true, and most churches stay in the third stage of faith, could it be because the leaders of those churches lack the safe space and community to do their own faith development work?⁹⁶

The work of the Individuative/Reflective Stage is to do the work, wrestle with, and own what comprises one’s faith. However, this is not the end of the stage. The end of the stage is a coming to the end of self and all the constructions of self a person has made. The end comes when a person discovers the creation of their own formulations of faith are no better than the Bounded Sets and communities they left behind. Here, dissatisfaction and disillusionment drive a person past the point of self and ego and responsibility and into a larger reality of God. It is no wonder the pilgrimage of the church settles in the land of the Synthetic/Conventional Stage.

Stage 5: Conjunctive

I began each of the previous stages with a personal story; however, it would be presumptive to suggest I have come to a place where I am at the end of my self. I am only

⁹⁴ MaryKate Morse, *Lifelong Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2020), 35.

⁹⁵ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 14.

⁹⁶ The setup of the system and structure of the church is designed to grow only to Stage 3. Pastors are (often) unable to move into Stage 4 because it threatens the security of Stage 3, and they answer to congregational leaders who find themselves in Stage 3. This produces either burnout by pushing against boundaries, or suppression of spiritual yearnings for the sake of the status quo—thus only providing Stage 3 leadership to the congregation and reinforcing the system.

teetering on the age of what would qualify as mid-life, the time in life where a person enters Stage 5. Therefore, I must introduce this section through the story of someone further along the Way. I came to know Jeff through my doctoral program at Portland Seminary, as he served as my spiritual director during each retreat intensive. Jeff just retired from over thirty years pastoring the same church. His last Sunday came in the midst of a pandemic, and the church could not gather to celebrate and thank him as they would've otherwise done. Even so, Jeff and his wife, Janet, had a beautiful home in the Oregonian mountains they planned as using as a retreat center in their retirement years. And then the fires came.

A week or so following news of the destruction of their home, Jeff posted a video message on Facebook.⁹⁷ In it, Jeff said the following: “Some of you have heard me say my theology is a theology of AND. We hold things together, things that shouldn’t be and are, things that have happened and are unwelcome, and things that have happened that we welcome. It’s all part of it.”⁹⁸ The posture of Jeff’s comments, and the way he encourages a paradoxical holding of opposites to compose a whole, is emblematic of what it means to live into the Conjunctive Stage of Faith.

The Conjunctive Stage can be illustrated through the following diagram:

⁹⁷ I share this story as a way to honor Jeff’s story, and to give thanks for the how his story points me to Jesus.

⁹⁸ Jeff Savage, Facebook video, September 26, 2020, 6:39, <https://www.facebook.com/jeff.savage.583/videos/10221478079234866/>.

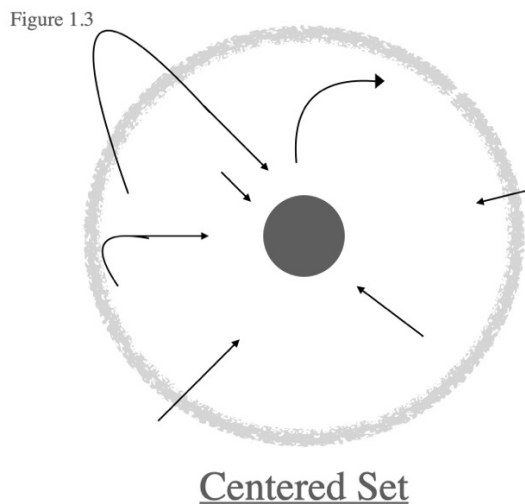


Figure 4—The Centered Set⁹⁹

Unlike the previous two diagrams of the Bounded and Fuzzy Sets, within the concept of the Centered Set, there are no ins and outs—there is only orientation to a solid center. The outer circle is soft at the edges, representing a still-held set of beliefs or convictions, but in this stage, they are no longer primary and determinative. What is determinative is the center, which is not a doctrine or a system or a behavior, but a person—the incarnate and enfleshed God revealed in Christ. Frost and Hirsch describe the Centered Set as “the Outback ranch with the wellspring at its center. It has a very solid ideology or culture at the center but no boundaries.”¹⁰⁰ The emphasis of this theory is *orientation*. Is a person directed toward the center (Christ) and, if not, how can a

⁹⁹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

¹⁰⁰ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 253.

person be helped to reorient themselves to the center? William Cantwell Smith describes the shift by saying,

To live religiously is not merely to live in the presence of certain symbols, but to be involved with them or through them in quite a special way—a way that may lead far beyond the symbols, that may demand the totality of a person’s response, and may affect one’s relation not only to them but to everything else: to oneself, to one’s neighbor, and to the stars.¹⁰¹

The Conjunctive Stage presents an alternative to the dualism of Gnosticism: the embrace of paradox.¹⁰² Ken Wytsma defines paradox as “an apparent contradiction, a statement about reality that seems antithetical.”¹⁰³ Catherine Skurja suggests,

One way that Christ invites us to know the true God, as opposed to our split views of God, is by embodying paradox perfectly. In taking on a fully human nature, Christ did not give up his fully divine nature. He is not *either* human *or* divine, but *neither and both*. In Christ, these attributes are never torn apart, but co-exist in the harmonious tension of paradox.¹⁰⁴

The very nature of God seeks to reconcile and renew that which humanity has torn apart. Followers of Jesus are invited into a new way of seeing the world in the form of paradox, where Christ “holds all things together.” As followers of Jesus find themselves deeper and deeper in Christ, they find themselves able to do the same.

Conjunctive faith, illustrated by the Centered Set, is not merely the work of orienting an individual toward Christ. It is also the work of the interior life—orienting the pieces and fragments of one’s life toward the healing presence of Christ. As this work is

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 3.

¹⁰² In Fowler’s work, this is supremely embodied in the final stage of Universalizing Faith (Stage 6).

¹⁰³ Ken Wytsma, *The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 2015), 10.

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Skurja, *Paradox Lost: Uncovering Your True Identity in Christ* (North Plains, OR: Imago Dei Ministries, 2012), 83. Emphasis in original.

done, a new integration occurs that no longer denies the work and presence of previous stages, but receives them and integrates them anew as part of a larger whole. Fowler writes, “In this stage, concern with selfhood becomes a matter of attending to deeper movements of the spirit within and of working at disciplines by which to discern and integrate elements from the unconscious structuring and wisdom of the self into consciousness.”¹⁰⁵ The work and expression of faith in the Conjunctive Stage involves orienting each fragment of life toward the presence of Christ, where the fragments are then weaved together into a kind of tapestry or mosaic. In this way, Christ becomes the artist, and the stuff of life becomes the material.

Integration, this reorientation, is facilitated by a different kind of relationship between the knower and the object being known. The Conjunctive Stage brings about a new relationship, which Fowler calls “dialogical.” He writes, “In dialogical knowing the known is invited to speak its own word in its own language...In a mutual ‘speaking’ and ‘hearing,’ knower and known converse in an I-Thou relationship.”¹⁰⁶ Within the context of the Christian faith, this kind of relationship and knowing is revelatory and incarnational. This type of conversation with God is strewn throughout the scriptures. A dialogue of this nature is not possible in the previous stages/sets. It is in the Conjunctive Stage a new relationship with the known is entered into—one no longer based upon the confines of a community or self-definition, but the revelation and trustworthiness of the known (God).

¹⁰⁵ Fowler, *Faith Development and Pastoral Care*, 93.

¹⁰⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 185.

The Conjunctive Stage ceases to fight and begins to embrace the possibility that truth can come from multiple traditions. In this stage, there is an embrace of a greater ecumenism—a recognition of other traditions and what they offer in their perspective and experience of faith and life with God. Fowler writes, “The Conjunctive stage begins to make peace with the tension arising from the realization that truth must be approached from a number of different directions and angles of vision.”¹⁰⁷ Using the imagery of the Centered Set, a person begins to ask, can—or how can—this tradition and their perspective and experience help point me to Jesus? Different religious traditions are come to be seen as gifts rather than competition or threat.

Richard Rohr’s “second half of life” has much in common with the Conjunctive Stage. Entrance into the “second half of life” comes only through death—death of the idealisms of the Synthetic/Conventional Stage, and the death of the (ego) self in the Individuative/Reflective Stage. He writes, “The bottom line of the gospel is that most of us have to hit some kind of bottom before we can even start the real spiritual journey. Up to that point, it is mostly religion.”¹⁰⁸ Religion is a conversation *about*, and this is the limitation of earlier faith stages. In the Conjunctive Stage a person enters into a conversation *with*—with God and with the non-egoic self.

¹⁰⁷ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 65.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 138.

Concerns Regarding Fowler's Argument

All theories have limitations, and Fowler's Faith Development Theory is no different. Here I will mention two, the first of which is the numerical nature of the developmental stages. Choosing to number stages introduces the likeliness of an achievement-oriented or comparison-related relationship to the stages. The numerical nature of the stages deters from the fact that a person can return to a previous stage—momentarily or for a prolonged period. Moving to a higher numerical stage is not a hard break with the previous stage, as is insinuated by using numbers. Much as typing is discouraged when using the tool of the Enneagram, it is also unhelpful to have the “what stage are you” conversation. A more beneficial conversation is talking about how a person experiences the different qualities or characteristics of each stage. A system using different shades or colors, along with the descriptive titles, may help resolve some of this concern.

The second issue I take with Fowler's stages is how he uses them categorially in his book, *Faithful Change*. In *Faithful Change*, Fowler associates the third stage with orthodoxy (or conservatism), the fourth stage with progressivism, and the fifth stage with postmodernism.¹⁰⁹ This use makes it easy to politicize and “type-stage” a person without consideration for the nuances of their faith and story. I found this to be a disappointing application for what I consider to be an otherwise helpful tool for the local church in discerning the process of spiritual formation and faith development.

¹⁰⁹ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 165-178.

SECTION III:

FOUR COMPANIONS IN FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION

The Vision of Jesus: An Embodied Faith

Vision of what life with God might look like for God's image-bearers finds no better source than the life of the incarnate Christ. A life opened and surrendered to God originates in the person of Christ, who does not embody faith simply as an example, but as reality itself. Embodiment—the bringing together of the inner and outer life—the marriage of flesh and spirit—*defines* what it means to be human. Embodiment can only be understood *through faith* because the spirit and flesh are reconciled to one another and brought together perfectly in Christ, the new Adam. Paul's describes this in his letter to the Colossians:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
(Colossians 1:15-20)

Paul's inclusivity is all-encompassing, reflecting the creational authority of Christ. He mentions things seen and unseen, concrete and conceptual, spiritual and physical. He speaks of the mystery of heaven and the dirt of earth, the tangible and intangible, the thrones sat on by kings and the powers and authorities of the unseen heavens. "All things" leaves no room for no thing outside of the scope of Christ's authority—the God-man who is the *physical* image of the *invisible* God. N.T. Wright

states, “From all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the ‘image of God,’ reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father. It was thus appropriate for him to be the ‘image of God’ as man: from all eternity he had held the same relation to the Father that humanity, from its creation, had been intended to bear.”¹¹⁰

Paul’s intention in writing this passage was not to address the Gnostic dualism mentioned in Section One, but this does not take away from how Paul’s words confront the problem of such dualism. Wright continues, “Redemption is not thought of dualistically, as though the created world were totally evil and salvation meant being rescued from it. Creation is still God’s work—Christ’s work: though spoilt by sin, it still belongs to God and God still has plans for it.”¹¹¹ Into the dualism and divorce of flesh and spirit enters the person of Jesus, who reconciles and renews each of these realms under his authority and Lordship. Anyone who expresses faith in Christ also receives the mandate to live in this reality of Christ’s lordship over *all things*.

This section will explore four essential companions to faith formation that lead to a greater embodiment of faith as seen ultimately in Jesus. The four companions suggested in this section are the core components of a cohort-based spiritual formation curriculum, called CULTIVATE, that has been implemented in my local church, Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, since September 2019. The work of James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory functions as a way to understand how each of the Four Companions may be experienced at different stages of faith. Faith is not static, and neither are the ways people

¹¹⁰ N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 74.

¹¹¹ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 72.

will experience or interact with each of these companions. These Four Companions provide a practical framework for individuals to participate in their spiritual and faith formation, while also taking into consideration the variety of ways each Companion may be experienced depending on the stage of faith.

The Companion of Story

An embodied faith must be grounded in reality, and reality is birthed in the substance of a person's story. Often, the substance of a person's story is filled with pain, disappointment, and failure, and thus it can make even the beginning steps of a faith journey daunting and difficult. This is why many reject the liminal space between Stages 3 and 4, choosing to remain in the pain they know rather than the freedom they have yet to find. Donald Miller writes, "The reward you get from a story is always less than you thought it would be, and the work is harder than you imagined. The point of the story is never about the ending, remember. It's about your character getting molded in the hard work of the middle."¹¹² The middle is the liminal, in-between space of transitions and transformation, where God takes the content of what was and begins molding it into what could be. It is anxiety producing. Not only must a person return to painful parts of their past, but they participate in the work of the Individuative/Reflective stage by naming and defining the story for themselves.

The apostle Paul writes: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our

¹¹² Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 177.

troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”¹¹³ Entering into the substance of personal story can be a healing process, wherein the Spirit broods over the chaos, recreating it into something new and beautiful, full of purpose and life. Growth and development of faith comes through the renewal of a person’s story. Their ability to live purposefully and also create a safe holding space for others is only birthed out of this transformation.

The CULTIVATE cohort had the opportunity to work with these concepts and identify points of renewal and transition through a Life Mapping Exercise.¹¹⁴ An activity of this nature is important to naming and re-familiarizing a person with their story. Tom Rath writes, “If you find it difficult to name all your talents, take a step back, and you’ll see that talents often have something in common—a theme—that connects them.”¹¹⁵ Sometimes a person needs to step out of the current of the river of their life, sit alongside the shore, and reflect on what has taken place. Here a person enters the space to assume a third-person perspective—owning the experience by defining the story in their own terms based on their personal interpretation.

This approach is formational and fluid rather than sealed and static, emblematic of the Fuzzy Set. Dan Allender suggests, “You’re writing the truth as you know it. You’re writing the emotional truth, not necessarily the factual truth.”¹¹⁶ Meaning not only

¹¹³ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV).

¹¹⁴ The content of this activity came through an interview with Deborah Koehn Lloyd (October 26, 2019). This activity is presented in the Sections IV and V of this dissertation and was a formational exercise for the cohort.

¹¹⁵ Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 21.

¹¹⁶ Dan Allender, *To Be Told: Workbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2005), 51.

develops over time, but a person's relationship to elements of their story can also change over time. The impact of an event at the moment of occurrence can, and most likely will, be very different from the recollection of the same event a decade or two later. The formative nature of the event will depend on a person's stage of faith, because at each stage the event will be experienced differently.

Helping the cohort rehearse the grand narrative of their lives introduced the practice of attentiveness to one's daily narrative. Familiarization with the details of one's life—one's story—is the foundational way of becoming attentive to the presence of Christ. MaryKate Morse writes, "What is so remarkable about our God is that he came in the flesh to be with us and to be as us in our life experiences."¹¹⁷ The building blocks of faith are found in the rubble of the day—the overlooked moments which, when laid on top of each other, create a holy place where God dwells. One participant commented, "We've talked about discovering something in the things that we already know about ourselves, and I would say that was my experience with mapping my story out. I was able to see patterns in the ways I experienced hardships and joy and I could see Jesus' presence over and through it all, even looking back at the times where I felt most disconnected and unsure of my faith."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ MaryKate Morse, *A Guidebook to Prayer: Twenty-four Ways to Walk with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 85.

¹¹⁸ This comment came from a written survey giving CULTIVATE participants an opportunity to provide written response, input, and evaluation.

The Companion of Symbols and Spiritual Direction

James Fowler makes the following suggestion: “It is the nature of religious language to use metaphor for referring to divinity. It is the character of biblical language about the divine to use *multiple* metaphors to point to the divine-human relationship.”¹¹⁹ Metaphorical language is very different from factual language, yet it is factual language that *faith as belief* and the Synthetic/Conventional Stage and Bounded Set demand. The Individuative/Reflective Stage also wrestles with metaphor, as a person examines it to define their own meaning. Metaphor is seen as subjective, and subjectivity is not valued in an age still overcoming the effects of Enlightenment Rationalism, where faith was defined as fact or objective truth. Abandoning metaphorical ways of speaking about God disregards many common symbols that could act as icons, pointing to the presence and reality of God in everyday life. Engaging with metaphor can open a person to discover God’s presence in previously overlooked places.

One of the results of the rationalism of the Enlightenment is a glorification of facts to the negation of mystery. This can be seen in the literal definitions of Stage 3, or the rationalization of Stage 4 as an individual does the work of picking apart for the purpose of examination and knowing for oneself. Fowler describes the Conjunctive Stage’s relationship to Symbol as he says,

Acknowledging the multidimensionality and density of symbols and myth, persons in the Conjunctive stage learn to enter into symbolic realities, allowing them to exert their illuminating and mediating power. Instead of “reading” and “analyzing” the symbols, metaphors, and narratives, they learn to submit to the

¹¹⁹ Fowler, *Becoming Adult*, 69. Emphasis in original.

“reading” and illumination of their situations that these and other elements of tradition can offer.¹²⁰

Spiritual Direction is a relationship facilitating the opening up of participants to the mystery of God through the everyday, concrete experiences of daily life. One person (the director) helps another (the directee) become aware of the presence of God and join in relationship with God. Barry and Connolly, in their textbook on spiritual direction, state: “The person is helped not so much to understand that relationship better, but to *engage it*, to enter into dialogue with God. Spiritual direction of this kind focuses on what happens when a person listens to and responds to a self-communicating God.”¹²¹ A relationship of this nature is crucial in helping women and men move through stages with attentiveness and reflection.

Barry and Connolly’s “self-communicating God” is not a straightforward statement, but in early stages of faith it will be taken literally. Many disciples of Jesus expect this to mean an audible voice of God, yet, as these same disciples will testify, they rarely (if ever) hear the audible voice of God. Dallas Willard describes the conundrum this way: “It is not necessarily that their experience is lacking, but they do not understand the language or how their experience works. This leaves them feeling confused and deficient.”¹²² Followers of Jesus have multitudes of experiences, but few have a place or a relationship to learn how to discern the experience because those in the earlier stages of

¹²⁰ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 65.

¹²¹ William A. Barry, and William J. Connolly. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 7. Emphasis added.

¹²² Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1999), 16.

faith are not equipped to do so. The Synthetic/Conventional Stage does not have the capacity to sit with a person's "truth" if it is outside the prescribed truth of the community. What is needed are relationships helping individuals be attentive to the presence of God in the everyday activity of life.

This is one of the primary misconceptions about the Holy Spirit: the disconnection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the experience of everyday life. Inarguably, there are incredible experiences God's people have shared with God's Spirit throughout the scripture. The development of the Charismatic Movement, with its signs and wonders, also testifies to this miraculous reality. But alongside of the extraordinary experiences with God are the everyday, seemingly mundane experiences where we join Jesus in responding to what the Father is saying and doing. Margaret Guenther says that "spiritual direction is *always* storytelling. Without the story, there is no flesh, no blood, no specificity. The director's task is to help connect the individual's story to *the* story and thereby help the directee to recognize and claim identity in Christ, discern the action of the Holy Spirit."¹²³ Participating in spiritual direction teaches awareness to the presence of God—to the voice of God—in everyday experiences often endured or overlooked. Rocking a baby to sleep, a conversation with a child on a car ride home, the bird's song at the break of day while sitting with a cup of coffee on the porch, or the clarity of being submerged in a pool during the routine of a daily swim—all of these rather ordinary experiences become alive with the presence of God, become encounters with God, as individuals are taught to recognize and receive God's presence through them.

¹²³ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Cowley Publications, 1992), 32. Emphasis in original.

One of the foundational experiences of the CULTIVATE cohort has been monthly participation in one-on-one spiritual direction. In a survey given halfway through the cohort experience, all six participants affirmed their experience of spiritual direction as critical to the experience of Cultivate. One participant shared the following: “This experience has been such a gift, especially in this season of my life where I don’t often get the mental space to think about what I’m experiencing. The simple questions posed to me have been thought provoking and helped to reframe the way I think about things, even helping me experience newfound freedom and healing.”¹²⁴ Another participant said, “This is a new and stretching experience to me, but I have found it very valuable in recognizing God’s work and becoming more self-aware.”¹²⁵ These comments demonstrate growth as a person names experiences and sees from a different perspective, which is a growth that takes place in the Individuative/Reflective stage.

The Companion of Silence and Solitude

Integral to the practice of spiritual direction is the companion of silence and solitude as teachers of prayer, attentiveness, and communion with God. The place of solitude and the practice of silence are not normal parts of a connected society, and an effort must be made in order to create space to be attentive to God. Dallas Willard writes, “The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder our

¹²⁴ Cultivate Survey, conducted by the author, January 2020.

¹²⁵ Cultivate Survey, conducted by the author, January 2020.

integration into God's order."¹²⁶ The healing work of God is a re-ordering of life in the midst of the rhythms of disorder commonplace to everyday life. While spiritual direction is a place where this takes place, more regular practice of silence and solitude must also be cultivated in daily life in order to be attentive to God. Poet Mary Oliver writes, "This is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know: that the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness."¹²⁷

Silence and solitude are disorienting and difficult because of the addictions to responsibility, production, and people-pleasing driving the motivation of most days. In writing on solitude, Henri Nouwen says, "We have, indeed, to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions, and dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord."¹²⁸ The sheer discomfort and anxiety created from these disciplines of abstinence cause many to forgo their practice altogether. For those in the Synthetic/Conventional Stage, silence and solitude seem unproductive and counterintuitive to what they are called to "do" for God. These are places of self-knowing, and many people are uncomfortable with the truth about themselves, and this can cause even those in the Individuative/Reflective Stage to forgo their practice.

Those who avoid solitude and entering into the quiet of prayer have yet to encounter the healing presence of Christ. However, in the Bounded and Fuzzy Sets, Christ is not the objective. The telos of the Bounded Set is adhering to the truth of the community, whereas the goal of the Individuative/Reflective Stage is more self-focused.

¹²⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1988), 160.

¹²⁷ Mary Oliver, "Low Tide," *Amicus Journal* (Winter 2001): 34.

¹²⁸ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), 17.

The place of solitude has not yet become a place of communion in these stages. The silence has yet to become healing balm. Leighton Ford, author and spiritual director, suggests, “Paradoxically, attentiveness may be just the opposite of ‘fixing our attention.’ Instead it involves a letting go of our usual need to control, an opening of ourselves to what we are being told or shown. Our instinct is to hold on.”¹²⁹ This is not akin to the saying, “Let go and let God.” Rather, it is a description of a need for the posture of surrender, a place of receiving whatever it is God has to give, knowing that whatever God will give will be good.

What is of grave concern is the scarce familiarity those in spiritual leadership have with the place of solitude and the practice of silence. This statement is not statistical as much as it is observational. Parker Palmer suggests, “Whatever is inside us continually flows outward to help form, or deform, the world—and whatever is outside us continually flows inward to help form, or deform, our lives.”¹³⁰ I first observed the following in myself, and I have since observed it in others. The absence of silence and solitude bears the following “fruit”: a defensive leadership posture, an inability to hold complex life situations and instead offering quick fixes (or, at worst, the development of a god-complex and the need to save others), overwork and the neglect of Sabbath keeping, and/or the relative lack of rest and rhythm within the (programming) ministry of the church. On the other hand, leadership experienced in traversing places of solitude and

¹²⁹ Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life: Discerning God’s Presence in All Things* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 25.

¹³⁰ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward and Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 47.

curating times of silence bear the fruit of the Spirit in their communities, presenting a new way of being.

One of the main tasks of leaders in creating spaces of solitude and using the practice of silence is to create safe *holding environments*. Peter Northouse describes a holding environment as “establishing an atmosphere in which people can feel safe tackling difficult problems, but not so much so that they can avoid the problem.”¹³¹ A holding environment can describe the atmosphere a spiritual director creates for a directee, a pastor creates for a counselee, or a leader creates for a church. When a community is well formed and healthy, the community itself can act as a holding environment. This is the place where attention can be given to the details of story, where participants can recognize the communion of Christ and become re-membered children of God. The creation of such spaces requires a certain type of leader—one who can remain present with the individual or community while at the same time maintaining a healthy sense of differentiation.

Edwin Friedman, a foremost voice defining the need for self-differentiated leadership, says this: “A leader must separate his or her own emotional being from that of his or her followers while remaining connected...A leader needs the capacity not only to accept the solitariness that comes with the territory, but also come to love it.”¹³² Friedman’s statement is counterintuitive. The solitariness of leadership is one of the most difficult aspects of being a leader. What Friedman suggests, however, *is* possible in the

¹³¹ Peter Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016), 266.

¹³² Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 18.

life of a leader who has familiarized themselves with places of solitude and practiced the discipline and gift of silence. Leaders who walk the paths to places of solitude and experience the gift of silence *embrace* the mystery, doubt, and struggle of life with a firm belief God is present and working re-creatively in the midst of what appears to be chaos. These leaders then become creators of holding environments for others to receive the work of God in the deep chaos of life. They become witness-bearers who gently testify to those they lead and serve, “surely, God is in this place.”¹³³ As leaders do this, they strengthen and create people who, in turn, can be a similar presence in an anxious world.

Few spaces have been more precious to me than the spaces created by leaders who have guided me to my own places of solitude and taught me how to sit in the quiet. Just like any other aspect of discipleship, silence and solitude are learned in the context of community. Perhaps paradoxically, these practices are communal. Again, Palmer writes, “[Solitude] is not about the absence of other people—it is about being fully present to ourselves, whether or not we are with others.”¹³⁴ Over the years, older mentors have sat with me and taught me how to be more fully present through the questions they asked and the permission they gave. They received my story as it was and provided me with the greatest of gifts—the affirmation of my experience. They held it and blessed it and taught me to do the same.

The practice of silence was introduced early on to the CULTIVATE cohort. Each meeting would begin with five minutes of silence, and each session of spiritual direction

¹³³ Genesis 28:16.

¹³⁴ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 55.

would begin with the same. As the months passed, the dynamic of the group changed. What would have been times of “awkward silence” in the group became small moments where the group learned to “hold” one another and what was being shared. In this silence, they learned to ask questions rather than offer solutions. One member shared a beautiful story of how, instead of responding immediately to a difficult conversation, she found herself responding from a different place. She was introduced to this new place through months of spiritual direction and the regular practice of silence shared by the group.¹³⁵ This was a response learned in the context of community.

The Companion of (a) Community

All individuals are set in the context of some kind of community, and so whatever is happening in the life of the person will necessarily affect the surrounding people as well. The question to be asked of the individual toward the community, and of the community toward the individual, is this: what is the role of community in this stage of faith? The community of faith has the potential to fulfill different purposes at different stages. Todd Hunter says, “It takes a people to do what the church is called to do. Otherwise the transformed life is too overwhelming, even depressing, if we are sensitive to what is going on around us.”¹³⁶ Community gifts courage and companionship. A person does not need the community to do the work for them, but they need the

¹³⁵ From a conversation coming from spiritual direction.

¹³⁶ Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 64.

community to support and encourage the work that is being done in each of the stages of faith.

Tina Stoltzfus Schlabach highlights the mutually encouraging and connected relationship of individual and communal formation. She says, “In specific ways I have experienced how participants in formation groups contribute to the spiritual journey of the larger faith community. First, because they learned to know themselves more deeply, they bring a growing awareness of the patterns and characteristics of the church’s ‘soul.’”¹³⁷ One of the purposes of creating CULTIVATE for the local congregation was to shape the larger community’s “soul” by investing in the formation of small cohorts of people over a long period of time. It’s not only about shaping the members of the cohort, but it’s also about the members of the cohort shaping the “soul” of the church. Through the intentional formation of this handful of individuals, the congregation is also being vicariously formed.

Paul Tillich writes, “The life of faith is life in the community of faith, not only in its communal activities and institutions but also in the inner life of its members. Separation from these activities of the community of faith is not necessarily separation from the community itself.”¹³⁸ The creation of a community’s ethos happens together, but equally in physical separation as members take seriously the responsibility and invitation to do their own internal work. Openness, responsiveness, repentance, and obedience to

¹³⁷ Marlene Kropf, and Daniel Schrock, eds., *An Open Place: The Ministry of Group Spiritual Direction* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 104.

¹³⁸ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 137.

God apart from the physical community determines the possibility and likeliness of these things becoming normative in the gathered community.

Community takes cues from the activity of leaders and leadership. The task of leadership is to create holding environments for adaptive change through faithful, self-differentiated presence grounded in Christ. “Christian leaders are called to help others affirm the great news, and to make visible in the daily events the fact that behind the dirty curtain of our painful symptoms there is something great to be seen: the face of God in whose image we are shaped.”¹³⁹ This is the vocation of community, in whatever size and shape—to take the mire and mud of life to the hands of God, place it upon the Potter’s Wheel of divine grace, and allow it to be shaped into something new and beautiful.

Randy Woodley provides the following vision from the Native American community. He says, “Making mistakes reminds us that we are made to be human and we are not God. In traditional Native American art forms, often a mistake is left in a rug, basket, or pottery as a way of reinforcing our humanity.”¹⁴⁰ Community receives each other’s incompleteness and imperfection, holds it with the Spirit of God, and allows the Holy Spirit to return it to our brother or sister. In doing so, we are changed by participating in the ministry and mystery of Christ, and we participate in holding the potential for that change in the other.

Sarah’s story tells of this beautiful potential. Sarah began working at our church as a new administrative assistant. She brought with her incredible organizational talent—

¹³⁹ Nowen, *Wounded Healer*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Woodley, *Shalom*, 69.

and also a great deal of personal pain. She and her husband had been trying for several years to have a child, but to no avail. They went through a battery of tests and trials, but nothing was helping them conceive. Sarah and I would regularly spend time talking through her struggles. She was aware of her anger, but she didn't know what to do about it.

Eventually Sarah and her husband conceived and she gave birth to a beautiful little girl. Prior to the birth, sitting in a circle with other members of the church, Sarah began to describe her anger—but this time it was describing the anger she *didn't* have. She thanked the church and shared it was the church family, and how they had received her for over three years, that helped free her from her anger. In her words, Sarah said, “I'm not angry anymore—and it's because of you.” The community was formed by holding Sarah's anger and returning grace, love, and forbearance. Sarah's experience embodies the description of community given by Jaqueline Bland, who says, “The quality of divine love becomes transformational in the hearts of believers and reflected in their conduct towards each other.”¹⁴¹ Our community has been shaped by this story as representative of the ethos of our community life at its best.

Assessing the Four Companions

Throughout the CULTIVATE cohort, I have noticed the development of three major patterns in the participants and the cohort as a whole: self-reflection/awareness, integration, and the ability to hold tension. Participants have grown in self-reflection and

¹⁴¹ Jacqueline E. Bland, “Developing Gospel Movement Leaders,” (DMin dissertation, Portland Seminary, 2018), 121, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/280>.

awareness by working through their stories and participating regularly with spiritual direction. Spiritual direction, specifically, has helped them develop an awareness of self and God in real-life situations. In reference to Fowler, they have learned to engage in the Individuative/Reflective Stage through this ability to take a third-person perspective. In relation to Benedictine spirituality, they have learned to look for God in the daily. Participants are finding God in places they did not previously think to look.

Contributing to noticing God in new places has been the process of integration or the holding of paradox. Participants have been encouraged to discover the connection between their story, personality, and spirituality. They have been challenged to recognize and receive the presence of their past in the construction of their present. They are learning to recognize and receive the presence of God beyond the Synthetic/Conventional constructions of religious and non-religious activity—and they have been a community in which to wrestle with Individuative/Reflective questions not to the *negation* of faith, but as *part* of faith. One participant, when beginning CULTIVATE described himself as “barely believing,” but after a year in the cohort he commented, “It feels good to be a Christian again.”¹⁴² He needed a holding environment that believed God was in the midst of—not outside of—his questions and doubts.

The last area of assessment is in reference to the ability to hold tension. Are the participants able to give one another what has been given to them? This has been a telling question as the group has moved from individual spiritual direction to group direction. Old habits die hard, and while the leaders have facilitated and coached environments that

¹⁴² This comment was shared as part of the monthly CULTIVATE cohort gathering in a group setting.

offered silence, space, and directional questions, the group members quickly revert to the Synthetic/Conventional or Individuative/Reflective patterns in Group Spiritual Direction. Rather than asking questions to help other members reflect, they revert to offering solutions or providing consolation. These are not bad things, per se, but they are not the purpose of Group Spiritual Direction. This is clearly a growth area, but I also do not believe a year long enough for a new way of seeing and engaging to become normative.

Summary

It is now time to return to Eric's story. After the session of spiritual direction described in the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, Eric made the twenty-minute drive home. On his mind were his parents—those same parents who provided a Bounded Set understanding of what it was to live life with God. He now lives just across the street from his parents, and before taking the left into his driveway he took a right down the lane to the family farmhouse. His parents weren't home, but that didn't stop Eric from entering the front door. With no one there, but carrying his parents in his heart, he spoke these words: "I forgive you." He then pulled out of the drive, crossed the road, and went home to his own family.

Fowler's stages of faith are not merely theoretical. They are lived and have names. The Stages and Sets are tools that can be used to understand the stories of those like Eric and Nicodemus. The objective is not to rush from one stage to another, but to honor each stage and its work. The Stages and Sets provide a framework, or structure, to the mysterious activity of the embodiment of faith. An embodied spirituality develops within the soul as an individual continues to do the work of each stage. Every loss resulting from times and seasons of transition carves out a greater berth, made ready to be

filled by God out of God's desire to make a home within us. Those like Eric and Nicodemus are in need of guides who have done this work and choose to give themselves to companion others on a similar journey. As this is done, the Church will be made both stronger and richer, more fully embodying the life of Christ.

SECTION IV: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

CULTIVATE is a nine-month spiritual formation cohort designed to help provide structure to the mystery of how a person can deepen their life with God. Thus far, the paradigm has been implemented in the context of the local church, but there is also potential for cohorts of pastors and leaders as well. The curriculum has been designed to take place over the course of nine months with a group of six to ten adults. The tools used during the first nine-month cycle center on cultivating awareness—of both self and God—through attentiveness to the everyday experiences of life.

In order to accomplish this, participants engage in several exercises. These exercises take place in three main environments: a two-hour monthly Saturday morning session, an individual monthly session of spiritual direction, and a monthly online video group check-in. Saturday morning provides a space to reflect on a scripture passage related to a formational idea followed by the teaching of the formational idea, interspersed with hands-on activity and group interaction. Monthly spiritual direction provides the participant the opportunity to reflect on the happenings of life in the past month and become attentive to how God may be present. Monthly video calls are held for the purpose of strengthening community and reflecting on how cohort members have experienced or thought about the formational idea presented two weeks prior.

Helping participants pay attention to “what is” is accomplished through several exercises focusing on self-knowing/awareness. Each exercise is framed out over a two-month period, reflecting a formational, heart-centered and embodied approach to knowing. Self-knowing is first explored through a Life Mapping exercise, and then

through interaction with and exploration of the Enneagram. This focus on the internal world of the participant then turns outward with the development of a Rule of Life—a way to articulate what faithfulness to God in a person’s particular stage and context looks like. Concluding the nine-month cohort experience is a weekend retreat where each member participates in group spiritual direction and has space to think about how their learning impacts their sphere of influence. This undergirds the conviction that spiritual formation is mission-oriented and not merely for the sake of self.

Identifying potential cohort members comes through inquiry or invitation. The objective is not to fill available slots, but to identify men and women who are open to the process. A working theory is that those open to the process are those in the church who find themselves at a transition point between stages. Transition naturally creates an internal environment conducive to change and growth, necessitates a smaller supportive community, and requires leaders who are familiar with the territory and able to create appropriate holding environments. CULTIVATE seeks to foster an environment addressing each of these needs. The goal of the CULTIVATE experience is the impartation of *knowing*, not knowledge. Knowing implies a relationship with what is known—in this case, it is a deeper knowing of self and of God. CULTIVATE creates an environment to become aware of the invitation of God and provides spaces to think about how to respond to that invitation—all within the safety and support of a smaller community pursuing the same thing.

SECTION V:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS

Artifact Goals

The goal of CULTIVATE is to come alongside those in the local church who desire a deepening life with God, but who also feel unsure about what steps to take. Participants will engage in spiritual formation experiences and disciplines, led by mentors, in the context of a small community. These experiences and disciplines are intended to help participants open themselves and become attentive to the work of God in life *as it is*. In this way, an ongoing goal is to help participants engage in an embodied faith—cooperating with the activity of God in their particular life experience.

A beta-version began in September 2019. The components of the curriculum, presented in Section III, were developed and experienced by a group of six individuals, coincidentally three married couples all in their mid-late 30s or early 40s with small children. The exercises presented in the curriculum were experienced by this cohort, with feedback being received at several points. Three online surveys gave participants the opportunity to give longer, written responses to a series of questions. Some of these questions helped to inform the facilitators of the cohort's present understanding of concepts, and other questions allowed them to reflect and provide constructive feedback pertaining to their experience. Based on this feedback, some adjustments were made immediately, and other changes will be implemented for future cohorts. Additionally, a group discussion was facilitated where each member was able to share about the impact the cohort experience had on their life. Each person had something of significance to share, all of which fulfilled the above-stated goals.

The cohort model was used with the intent of it leading to a long-term community focused on the work of spiritual formation. While the guided experience from a teaching perspective may last only nine months, the hope is the cohort will remain together and supportive for years to come. Currently, the first cohort has finished the first nine-month experience and has dedicated themselves to a similar structure with different content for another nine months. Part of the hope is to be able to identify within each cohort who might lead future cohorts. At a minimum, the spiritual formation work done by the members of the cohort will impact the ethos and shape the culture of the larger church community.

Audience

The intended audience for the CULTIVATE artifact are adult members of a local congregation who desire to engage at a deeper level with spiritual formation ideas and experiences that will help them grow in their life with God. An outcome of engaging in a cohort would be to become more aware of and participatory in the activity and presence of God in everyday life. This outcome would come from becoming familiar with and using some basic spiritual disciplines and practices, as well as through the support and encouragement of the cohort as they participate in shared experience.

Scope and Content

The cohort model is based on a nine-month timeline with a monthly rhythm of meeting outlined below.

- *Large Group Meeting* – the second Saturday of the month from 9-11 a.m.

During this time, a scripture meditation will be used to frame the rest of the

meeting. After the scripture meditation, a formational idea will be presented, followed by an activity that will allow each participant to work with the content provided.

- *Online (Zoom) Calls* – Two weeks following the scheduled Saturday morning on a Wednesday evening from 9-10 p.m. This call gives space for group participants to reflect on their experience of the formational idea presented earlier. It also aids in building community and relationship.
- *Individual Spiritual Direction* – Between Saturday sessions, each cohort member will meet with a spiritual director for a 1-hour session. Spiritual direction is a cornerstone of the cohort experience, helping participants become attentive to the activity of God in their lives.
- *A Capstone Retreat* – held in April/May for an entire weekend in a quiet setting. This retreat has multiple purposes. One is simply to celebrate and enjoy the community that has been built over nine months of deep work. Second, the weekend will provide space to gather the work of the nine-months together and discern how God might want to use it within the participants' sphere of influence. Discovering/articulating this will come through a combination of silence/solitude, individual sharing, and group spiritual direction.

All meeting spaces should be conducive to times of silence and solitude.

Aesthetically, the spaces should be welcoming and comfortable.

Budget

A budget of \$600 is suggested for the local church to provide for the retreat cost of the leaders, as well as any other miscellaneous supplies that may be needed to facilitate the formational experiences. Each participant is also asked to give \$100/person (\$150/couple) as a means of investment and expressing commitment. These funds will be used to purchase journals for each participant, as well as a code to take an online Enneagram Test. Additional costs for participants will be \$200/person for the retreat weekend. Support will be provided for anyone who finds these costs prohibitive.

Promotion

Promotion for CULTIVATE cohorts will be done through written communication and storytelling. The written communication consists of a letter of invitation as well as a brochure describing the content and layout. Storytelling will take place in written and video form. Participants in previous cohorts will have the opportunity to share their experiences and the impact of CULTIVATE on their lives. People interested in future cohorts would attend an in-person introductory meeting where they could meet potential cohort members and have dialogue about the purpose and content of the cohort.

SECTION VI:

POSTSCRIPT

The artifact, CULTIVATE, began with the launch of the first cohort in September 2019. As a beta cohort, the intention was to have a maximum of six participants with an equal number of men and women. It just so happened this initial cohort was made up of three married couples. Each couple is in their late 30s or early 40s and has small children. The participant demographic in the freshman cohort demonstrates the achievability of high commitment from participants amidst the time demands and constraints of parenting young children. Not a single participant missed a single session in the first nine months of the cohort. Additionally, and unintentionally, the mutual participation of husbands and wives had positive effects on marriages and households.

A cohort model was chosen because of relational consistency and commitment. The same curriculum could be given in stand-alone seminars; however, the relational trust needed to undergird each session would be less likely present, and the community formed through consistency would be lessened. Seminars would also negate the progression of each of the CULTIVATE sessions. A cohort environment supports my personal conviction that spiritual formation takes place over a longer period of time within the safety and reliability of ongoing relationships.

Feedback throughout the first nine months of the cohort was positive.¹⁴³ The only suggested change came in the book assigned for Session 2. The cohort felt it was less

¹⁴³ Feedback was solicited through online Google Forms with a series of questions to evaluate the effectiveness of each component of the curriculum, which can be found in the Artifact.

practical—and had a difficult time relating to the author.¹⁴⁴ A different text with greater practicality will need to be explored for future cohorts. One element that changed moving into the second year of the cohort was the participation in monthly sessions of spiritual direction. Half of the participants chose not to continue, despite their positive survey responses and this author's observation that the sessions had a profound impact in connecting them with God.¹⁴⁵

The plan is to begin a new CULTIVATE cohort each fall, with the goal of six to ten participants with equal representation of men and women. Long-term, the hope is to see 70 to 100 adults participant in a CULTIVATE cohort over the course of 10 years. This will contribute to shaping the culture and community of the church. This can already be seen in the present cohort through their honesty and vulnerability with one another. These characteristics, and the trust they have developed with one another, contribute to the strength of the larger church.

Several aspects of the future CULTIVATE need to be determined. First, what are the next steps for participants after completing the first nine months? A desire to continue has led the freshman cohort into a second year focusing on spiritual practices. Will this subject matter be helpful, and how will covering these practices once a month lead to more regular participation of these practices in the lives of participants? These questions must be evaluated throughout the second year.

¹⁴⁴ The book used here was Henri Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart*.

¹⁴⁵ One woman attributed this to the time commitment involved, whereas the reasons for the men were not given.

Second, how is a new cohort of participants to be recruited? The first cohort was brought together through personal invitation based on pastoral observation and interaction. Should a general invitation be made congregationally? Should there be an application process? What input or influence should the pastors leading the cohorts have in who participates? What tools are used to discern whether or not it is the right time for a person to participate? These are all questions that still need to be determined.

A final consideration is if, or how, CULTIVATE cohorts can be multiplied outside the context of Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church. How will other pastors and leaders be trained to facilitate similar cohort experiences in other local churches? Or, how can partnerships with other churches be formed, thus creating cohorts from multiple churches? Would this enhance the strengthening of the local church, or take away from it because participants come from different communities of faith?

In addition to the expansion of CULTIVATE cohorts at Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, there is additional work that can be done with Fowler's Faith Development Theory in helping pastors, leaders, and congregations understand how faith develops. This could be achieved through the creation of a seminar. One such seminar might be an overview of Faith Development Theory, giving pastors and leaders a framework through which to understand their congregations. Another seminar might expand on the previously presented ideas of how to pastor people in each stage of faith. Still another area of development may be individual consultations with local churches to discern how they are experiencing their stages of faith.

APPENDIX A:

FOWLER'S FAITH DEVELOPMENT THEORY: A DIAGRAM OF STAGES 3-5

James Fowler's numbering of the stages subversively communicates a hierarchical nature to the stages, and thus can give the impression higher stages are superior to lower stages. In order to honor the substance of the stage, I created this diagram that uses colors to show transitional movement between stages. Instead of a stark exit/entry point between stages, this diagram takes into account the developmental nature that happens in and in between stages. To illustrate what this might look like, I used the Four Companions from Section III.

The Experience of Story through the Stages

	Synthetic/ Conventional	Transition	Individuative/ Reflective	Transition	Conjunctive
As theory:	Narrative defined by the community	Facing limitations of a given narrative and/or encountering the possibility of a different narrative	Self takes responsibility for the narrative	Coming to the end of self	Story found in the context of God's (meta narrative) story
In Practice:	"I am defined by my community"	Wrestling with the content of 'my story'	How has my story shaped or defined who I am?	"I am more than what has happened to me"	Integration of the stages and content of the story leading to living vocationally

The Experience of Symbols/Metaphors through the Stages

	Synthetic/ Conventional	Transition	Individuative/ Reflective	Transition	Conjunctive
As theory:	Literal	Doubt/Questions about prescribed meanings	Empiricized/Rationalized Picked apart Deconstructed	Encountering Mystery	Paradoxical - Holding multiple meanings
In Practice:	Communion = Jesus' death on the cross for forgiveness of my sins	Doubt/Questions about prescribed meanings	Did Jesus <i>really</i> die? What does the cross <i>really</i> mean?	Exhaustion from the continued asking of questions. A desire for deep meaning.	Communion and cross as an icon for understanding God's presence in the world

The Experience of Silence/Solitude through the Stages

	Synthetic/ Conventional	Transition	Individuative/ Reflective	Transition	Conjunctive
As theory:	Mostly non-existent. Too busy doing.	Burnout or disillusionment	Reflective space experienced as 'self-care.' Self-focused.	Encountering the anxiety of self	Experienced as communion with God.
In Practice:	Seen as unproductive. "I can never <i>do enough</i> for Jesus."	Burnout. Disillusionment with all the 'doing.'	Experienced as a 'break' from the busyness - and therefore the community.	A space God uses to confront the false self.	A renewing space for the sake of communion with God out of which to live vocationally

The Experience of Community through the Stages

	Synthetic/ Conventional	Transition	Individuative/ Reflective	Transition	Conjunctive
As theory:	Defines sense of self. A tacit influence.	Questioning the authority of community or authoritative voices.	Community experienced as a holding environment.	Discovery of truth in multiple communities and traditions.	Ecumenical
In Practice:	"I belong here."	"Do I really belong here?"	"Where <i>do</i> I belong?"	"I need to belong somewhere."	"I belong alongside you, but I am not defined by you."

APPENDIX B:

THOUGHTS ON PASTORING DIFFERENT STAGES

Thoughts on Pastoring Those in the Synthetic/Conventional Stage

The Synthetic/Conventional Stage is where the majority of the church finds itself. This is true of *both* pastor and congregation. If the health of our churches is identified by the fruit they produce, the systems of ministry and discipleship in the local church are set up to produce communities defined by the Bounded Set, leaders who understand their role as guarding the boundaries, and followers whose identity is derived from faithfulness to the ideology and expectation of the community. The following are considerations for pastors and leaders serving people in the Synthetic/Conventional Stage:

- James Fowler writes, “We need holding environments in therapy, spiritual direction, or membership in communities of faith that can help us pace our reentry and reintegration in a new stage or place, protecting the fragile new beginnings against the power of old patterns or the premature forging of new ones.”¹⁴⁶ Space should be made *within the personal life of the pastor* to experience such holding environments. This space includes regular practice of silence, solitude, and sabbath by the pastor, which provide an inner hospitality. Pastors and spiritual leaders cannot provide the needed space for others to process if they have not waded through their own waters of anxiety as they press against their own borders of prescribed belief and behavior.

¹⁴⁶ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 74.

- The Synthetic/Conventional Stage relies on certainty, yet no human being is immune from uncertainty. Uncertainty is not the antithesis to faith, but the place where faith (trust/surrender) is built. As many have found, the Stage 3 response to uncertainty is unhelpful and sometimes hurtful. The role of the pastor is not to defend God, but to extend God's covenantal love.
- Cultivate an environment where questions and exploration are welcome. Ask questions when you preach or teach. Do not bring resolution too quickly (if at all), as this might take away from the questions driving people to God in the first place. Resolution will only come as the person finds their home in God.
- Keep a vigilant eye on the ministry programming of the church. People in this stage confuse their identity with "what they do." The busyness of the church and the demands of ministry can easily subdue the inner faith desires and questions. This keeps the ministry of the church going, but it also works to keep people in Stage 3.
- Lastly, use the core characteristics of Stage 3 to invite people to consider God more deeply. I love what James Fowler says here: "A transition from one faith stage to another does not necessarily mean a change in the *content* or the *direction* of one's faith. It does mean, however, changes in the ways one holds, understands, and takes responsibility for living one's faith."¹⁴⁷ What is taught or preached or practiced may not largely change from one stage to another, but the

¹⁴⁷ Fowler, *Faithful Change*, 68. Emphasis in original.

way it integrates us into the life of God will. Could it be that much of pastoral/spiritual leadership work is to help bring about integration?

Thoughts on Pastoring Those in the Individuative/Reflective Stage

I have sat with numbers of men and women who have come to our particular faith community after having left their previous community because there was neither safety nor space to do the work necessary to taking personal responsibility for what made up the stuff of their faith. Most attempted to have conversations and wrestle with questions in the context of previous communities, but were frequently wounded when doctrine or ideology was wielded as a sword. This is a reflection of both leadership and the culture being cultivated in the church. The following are considerations for those pastoring men and women in the Individuative/Reflective Stage:

- Eugene Peterson writes, “One of the supreme tasks of the faith community is to announce to us early and clearly the kind of life into which we can grow, to help us set our sights on what it means to be a human being complete. Not one of us, at this moment is complete. In another hour, another day, we will have changed. We are in process of becoming either less or more.”¹⁴⁸ Do the communities we pastor foster this gracious spaciousness—and is this embodied by the leaders?
- Paul Tillich writes, “If doubt appears, it should not be considered as the negation of faith, but as an element which was always and will always be present in the act

¹⁴⁸ Eugene Peterson, *Run with the Horses: The Quest for Life at its Best* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1983), 29.

of faith.”¹⁴⁹ Questions are not threatening, and neither is doubt. Instead of being threatened by questions, or feeling as though they need to be resolved, honor them by affirming them. Companionship through affirmation will do more to encourage people in this stage of faith than attempting to answer or resolve their questions or doubts.

Thoughts on Pastoring Those in the Conjunctive Stage

The Conjunctive Stage is the rarest of stages to witness in the local church, but when a pastor does find someone in this stage, it is a gift. The following suggestions have less to do with pastoring such a person, as much as what their presence can mean for the local church.

- A woman or man in this stage of faith will feel more like a peer, or even a mentor, to the pastor. They will also receive the ministry of the pastor as a gift because they have moved beyond ideology and being defined by a role or title.
- Be wise with what you ask of them. Their capacity is a gift—not so much in how much they can carry, but in how they carry it. Steward this gift well.
- Don’t be surprised if their contribution to the life of the church is done in an “unofficial” capacity—from the sidelines—as influencers rather than position holders.
- Pastors or leaders in earlier stages of faith may feel threatened by those in the Conjunctive Stage, and this is something to be aware of. However, the gift of

¹⁴⁹ Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 25.

these men and women is that they will most likely not be threatened by you, but receive you with grace.

APPENDIX C:
CULTIVATE CURRICULUM

The following is the first year and a half's worth of curriculum for the CULTIVATE spiritual formation cohort.

Session 1: What is Spiritual Formation?

Description

While most participants will come from the same church family, they may not know each other. This first session is intended to provide time to gather relationally around the table – as well as begin the process of opening up around the subject of spiritual formation.

Participants will have varied experiences and exposure to the concept of spiritual formation, so in addition to relational connection – a framework will be laid for how to think about spiritual formation.

Materials Needed

Dinner!
Moldable Clay
Camera
Each participant to receive a journal

Handouts

None

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Dinner (1-1.5 hrs)

Clay Exercise (15 min)

1. Give each participant a bar of clay, and have them create some sort of container illustrating their *present* openness to God.
 2. Each participant shares why they created the shape they did.
 3. Using the same piece of clay, make another container that reflects the openness you *hope* for yourself at the end of the cohort experience.
 4. Have each person share one word that would describe this second representation. Give them time to etch the word in the piece of clay.
 5. Ask: "What do you anticipate are the things we'll talk about or explore that will contribute to this reshaping?"
-

Defining Spiritual Formation

"Spiritual formation is our continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world." – *Jeffrey Greenman*

Questions for discussion (20 minutes)

1. Write this definition in your journal.
 2. Together as a group – name the different components of spiritual formation provided in this definition.
 3. Give the group time to identify:
 - a. A component that excites you
 - b. A component that intimidates you
 - c. A component you are least certain of
-

Closing Silence and Blessing (5 minutes)

We will introduce the idea of holding silence together, recognizing God's presence with us.

Assignment for the next gathering: Read Henri Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart*

Session 2: Silence, Solitude, and Prayer

Description In order to prepare the cohort for participation in individual spiritual direction – and to provide space to re-think concepts that might be very familiar – this session will help participants learn to pay attention to the presence and work of God in *all* things of life.

Materials Needed Coffee
Small Green and Red Post It Notes
Pens
A candle in the center of the room
Henri Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart*

Handouts None

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Connecting (30 min)

Experiencing Silence (10 mins)

The goal of this time is to take enough time for silence to make participants feel uncomfortable – particularly because they are (most likely) not used to this. Take 10-minutes for silence.

Green and Red/Good and Bad (5 minutes)

Instructions: On the green Post Its – write all the good thoughts you had during the time of silence. On the Red Post Its – write all the bad thoughts you had during the time of silence. Keep writing until you can't think of anything else that has crossed your mind. After completing each Post It Note – Green or Red – crumple it up and throw it on the floor in front of you.

Scripture Meditation on Matthew 13:24-30 (30 minutes)

Main ideas:

- Tendency is to remove the weeds (reds) and keep the wheat (greens) – v. 28b.
- Passage is heard as a heaven/hell passage.
- Suggestion: What if we are the field? God sows good seed. The world, flesh, and the devil sow bad seed. All take place in the field (us).
- God's response: Let them grow together.
- Harvest time – at the end of different seasons of our lives – God gathers up the good and removes the bad – *after* a season of both growing up together.
- Spiritual Direction/Prayer – the place/way we learn to *notice* the wheat and weeds – seeing them both under God's watchful care.

Spend a few minutes reflecting on how this passage/experience is speaking to them.

Processing Nouwen (10)

Take time to process what was read about Silence, Solitude, and Prayer in *The Way of the Heart*

1. What did you connect with?
 2. Where did you experience a sense of disconnection ?
 3. What is a question you're left with?
-

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Practice for the Month

(5 minutes)

1. Set a goal (with your spouse, too, if applicable) for a certain amount of time each day/week to spend in silence/solitude/prayer.
 2. Journal about the experience throughout the month at least one time.
 3. Participate in 1/1 spiritual direction.
-

Closing Silence

(5 minutes)

Session 3: My Story in Stages, pt. 1

Description

The next two sessions will help participants think through their story for the purposes of both growing in understanding of Christian Spiritual Formation – and beginning to think about the idea of vocation. It is necessary, in Christian Spiritual Formation, to be aware of the on-the-ground activity of life – past and present.

Materials Needed

State Maps
Post It Notes
Sharpies
A candle for each participant

Handouts

Instruction sheet with a list of the questions to be thought about regarding the mapping exercise.

***Credit for this exercise goes to Deborah Lloyd, who shared this concept with me during one of the doctoral intensives in October 2018. She provided both the method and questions to use.*

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 min)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Scripture Meditation on John 9 (30 mins)

Main ideas:

- We know this man through his story: past, present, future
 - Past: Children (invaluable); Blind (drain on family); ignored
 - Present (as he encounters Jesus): No worth; labeled a sinner (the larger message of God's posture toward him); Experiences healing and reentry into society
 - Future: Stigma/identity isn't instantly healed. Learns again what it is to live.
 - V. 3 – "The works of God might be displayed"
 - Healings: a person shaped by a physical malady; lifelong message of worthlessness; humiliation of begging; message he was 'punished by God' – sinner.
 - Point: Jesus steps in and reinterprets his story. As we examine this man's story – we want to examine our own story.
-

Quotes

"This is not a vocation for getting things done, but rather for submitting to reality." – Eugene Peterson

"Vocation, we contend, is inherently narrative. It's first language is story...telling stories about our lives helps each of us to reframe our identity and purposes." – Kathleen Cahalan

"A large part of spiritual formation is simply paying attention to what is – because God is present where we are." – Joshua Nolt ☺

Why are we examining story?

Christian Spiritual Formation takes place *only* in the context of story. Vocation (purpose/meaning) is discovered through our story.

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Instructions/ Life Mapping Exercise (60 mins)

1. Choose a state map – one that you're not familiar with. Choose one that intrigues you with its shape/topography/etc.
2. Choose/mark a starting point and begin to plot places on your map using sticky notes by answering the following questions:
 - What are your 3 highest highs?
 - What are your 3 lowest lows?
 - What were your greatest accomplishments?
 - What were your greatest disappointments?
 - Where was your best decision?
 - Where was your worst decision?
 - When were the times when someone came alongside of you? Who were they?
 - When were the times when Jesus came through for you?
3. After answering each of these questions and placing them on the map – go back through and write (on the sticky note) the emotions you felt at each place.
4. Be creative and draw a line to connect the places on your map.

Closing: Reflection and Silence (10 mins)

1. What is one word that describes how you're leaving this experience? Write it down in your journal (and share it with the cohort).
 2. Take 5 minutes of silence to hold the space.
- **Collect the maps and keep them for the participants for next month.
-

Session 4: My Story in Stages, pt. 2

Description

This is the section of two sessions that will help participants think through their story for the purposes of both growing in understanding of Christian Spiritual Formation – and beginning to think about the idea of vocation. It is necessary, in Christian Spiritual Formation, to be aware of the on-the-ground activity of life – past and present.

Materials Needed

State Maps – return to participants
Candles

Handouts

None

***Credit for this exercise goes to Deborah Lloyd, who shared this concept with me during one of the doctoral intensives in October 2018. She provided both the method and questions to use.*

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 min)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Scripture Meditation on John 9, pt. 2 (30 mins)

Main ideas:

- *After* the man is healed, he is forced to tell his story.
 - To those in power (Pharisees), his neighbors (community), his parents (family)
 - Truths about story
 - As our story encounters Jesus, it takes on new life and meaning.
 - Our story is communal: it doesn't just happen to us; not everyone will know what to do with the 'new' story
 - Tension: you have two competing narratives – both of which are true (yes – he *was* blind/yes – he *can* see)
 - There *will be a difference* between the narratives – one that we know at a gut/visceral level.
 - Hope: to honor both narratives while leaning into the narrative Jesus is crafting in your life right now.
-

Telling Our Stories (75 mins)

- Purpose of telling our stories
 - To be affirmed by community
 - Telling our story grounds our story more deeply. It becomes a declaration of God's work/presence in our lives.
 - To honor *the whole of the narrative* – to hold the paradox of the old/new self and the self that continues to grow.
 - Instructions for telling our stories
 - Split up into male/female groups (as some things might be sensitive to share)
 - Give a min. of 20 minutes for each person to tell their story using their Life Map from the previous session.
 - At the end of each story – have one person give thanks and 'bless the story.' The leader/facilitator should be the first one to do so to lead by example.
-
-

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Closing: Reflection and Silence (10 mins)

1. What is one word that describes how you're leaving this experience? Write it down in your journal (and share it with the cohort).
2. Take 5 minutes of silence to hold the space.

For Next Meeting

Go online to the Enneagram Institute at enneagraminstitute.com
Enter the code you were given
Take the test
Print out your test and email the pdf to the Cultivate facilitators

Session 5: Christ in Me, The Enneagram pt. 1

Description

This is part 1 of 2 sessions that will explore the Enneagram for the purposes of self-awareness and self-knowledge. The guiding conviction of spiritual formation is that God is found at work *within the self* – and therefore, we need to be aware of ourselves.

These sessions build off of the awareness of story – and the continued participation in spiritual direction that helps participants pay attention to the daily activity and presence of God in life.

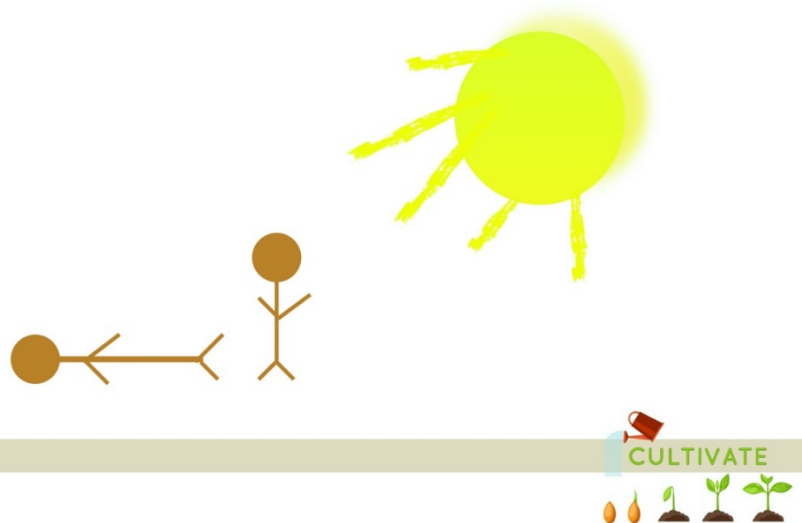
Materials Needed

Enneagram printout for each participant
Candles
Whiteboard and markers

Handouts

Sun/Shade diagram (below)

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session



Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 mins)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Scripture Meditation on Luke 10:25-29; 18:18-27 (30 mins)

Main ideas:

- Eternal life is something to be received *in the present* as we encounter Jesus
- Two different people ask Jesus the same question – and Jesus gives two different answers (*to the question of eternal life!*)
 - There is not *one* answer – but Jesus' words to us depend on what we need to hear.
 - Jesus *personalizes* his response, and the answer he gives helps us discover something about the *person* Jesus is addressing – who they are *underneath*.
- Jesus is not giving them something to *do*, but helping each one understand something fundamental about themselves – and what it would be like *in the here and now* for eternal life to come to them.

Introducing the Enneagram/ Group Discussion (25 mins)

- A *tool* or *lens* through which to view/understand yourself
- Christ as the embodiment of what it means to be fully human – Christ as *all* numbers.
- Our Enneagram results
 - Top #'s – where we get stuck
 - Bottom #'s – where we neglect parts of our humanity¹⁵⁰
- Group Question: The Enneagram helps name “what I didn't know, but I knew.” As you read your Enneagram results, what were you able to name that you didn't know, but knew?

¹⁵⁰ I attribute this idea and reading of the Enneagram to the seminar given by Katie Skurja on the Enneagram.

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Sun/Shade – True/False Self (10 Mins)

- Sun
 - Living in the light of Christ
 - Expansive/Freedom
 - Centered Set – orienting ourselves toward Christ
 - Shade
 - Living in flesh/shadow/stuck-ness
 - Deformed in shape – exaggerated in some ways
 - The Sun is still shining, but we are turned away – myopically focused on self.
 - POINT: NOT that we are one or the other – but aware of when we are one or the other – and how we can live more fully and consistently in the light of Christ.
-

Seeing Our Story Through the Lens of the Enneagram (10 mins)

- One facilitator will retell their story and share how they understand their story from a new perspective as a result of understanding they gained from the Enneagram.
 - This is to model what participants will do in the next session.
-

Closing: Reflection and Silence (5 mins)

What is one word that describes how you're leaving this experience?
Write it down in your journal (and share it with the cohort).
Take 5 minutes of silence to hold the space.

For Next Session

- Read through your Enneagram results a few times. Go back through your story. Where do you notice pieces of what you see from the Enneagram showing up in your story?
-

Session 6: Christ in Me, The Enneagram pt. 2

Description

This is part 2 of 2 sessions that will explore the Enneagram for the purposes of self-awareness and self-knowledge. The guiding conviction of spiritual formation is that God is found at work *within the self* – and therefore, we need to be aware of ourselves.

This session will provide participants with the opportunity to retell their stories through the lens of the Enneagram – helping them to become self-aware in the context of their story.

Materials Needed

Participant Maps from Story in Stages Session

Candles

Whiteboard and markers

Handouts

None

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 mins)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Sharing Our Stories (15-20 mins each person)

**Depending on group dynamics and story content – it may be possible for men and women to participate in this session together. By this time the group *may* have built a good sense of community – and would be helped by hearing from the entire group.

1. One participant will take a turn re-telling their story – including what they new perspectives they've gained from their story because of the Enneagram results. Participants can refer to their Enneagram results to help name something new they've discovered about themselves.
 2. At the end of each time of sharing – other cohort members can share (using “I” language) how the person's story helped them understand something about their own story.
 3. A cohort member or facilitator will volunteer to give thanks for what was shared.
-

Closing: Reflection and Silence (5 mins)

1. Take 5 minutes of silence to hold the space.

Session 7: Silence and Solitude

Description

Silence and solitude is descriptive of a practice and a place. It may be natural to think of these as outward – finding a *place* for silence and solitude – but what this session seeks to communicate is the inward nature of silence and solitude – as a posture and way of relating to God, others, life, and the world.

Materials Needed

None

Handouts

Prayer of Open Hands

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 mins)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Scripture Meditation on Mark 4:35-41 (25 mins)

Main Ideas:

- V. 36 – “Leaving the crowd behind”
 - A time to intentionally separate
 - More than physical separation – demands/expectations – those things contributing to a pseudo-identity or false self.
 - Group Question: Who places demands or expectations on you? What kind of identity do these demands and expectations create?
 - V. 37 – “A furious squall” – two responses
 - Disciples – panicked/anxious, reacting/responding. These can also represent our initial responses to times of solitude and silence – or ‘getting away with Jesus.’
 - Jesus – sleeping/at rest, speaking stillness
 - Role of silence/solitude – move from a place/posture of anxiety to a place of stillness.
 - What it’s NOT – a break, peace and quiet
Exhausted by activity, we take a little vacation to refresh ourselves, then we plunge back into action until we are exhausted again, and on goes the cycle.” – Parker Palmer
 - What it IS
 - Bringing your everyday life to God
 - “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday life – your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering.” – The Message
 - A different trajectory – NOT getting rid of things, but allowing them to become tools in the hands of Christ to form us.
 - In silence and solitude we bring to Christ our words on the matter so we can receive Christ’s words on the matter.
 - Purpose: Communion with God; re-entering the demands of our world with an inner stillness
 - “Solitude is not about the absence of other people – it is about being fully present to ourselves, whether or not we are with others.” – Parker Palmer
-

Cultivate

YEAR 1

Prayer Practice (15 mins)

Set aside time

Three movements...

1. "This is what I'm bringing" – name it
2. "This is how it's making me feel" or "This is what it's doing to me" – being real about the impact it is having
3. "Jesus, with open hands, I welcome you into this." – Far from trying to get rid of what *it* is and what *it* is doing – we welcome Christ in the midst of it.

Closing: Reflection and Silence (5 mins)

Take 5 minutes of silence to hold the space.

Session 8: Lectio Divina

Description

Lectio Divina is a way to listen to the scriptures for transformation – rather than reading the scriptures for information. Participants will think about their relationship to the scripture through their story and history – as well as the role scripture plays in their lives currently. The group will then participate in Lectio together.

Materials Needed

Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible Through the Year
Candles

Handouts

Lectio handout – “Asking different questions”

Final notes and ideas – A space for reflecting and refining after each session

Layout of the Session

Connecting (15 mins)

Opening Silence (5 mins)

Scripture Meditation on
Luke 4:14-30
(25 mins)

Main Ideas:

- Jesus' use of the scripture
 - Speaking to his hometown – he knew them – to their context
 - NOT contextual – but speaks to the reality of the moment (hometown mentality, invitation into what God is doing, confronting what is keeping them from it)
 - How might the people hear?
 - Confirmation bias – “I know what this means” – rallying of the troops
 - Dual Nature of Scripture: Invitation and confrontation
-
-

Leader's Sharing
(5 minutes)

Facilitators take time to share a journal entry demonstrating how the Holy Spirit used the practice of Lectio to speak into their life.

Group Questions
(30 minutes)

1. What have you been taught about the role of scripture in your life?
 2. In what ways is that similar or different to the current role of scripture in your life?
-
-

Group Lectio
(30 minutes)

Teach them the practice by using the Lectio for the day out of *Seeking God's Face*. Walk them through using the Lectio handout that guides them in the four movements of Lectio.

Lectio Divina

The Four Movements of Lectio

Movement 1: Listening for a Word

- Spend a few moments of quiet
- Read the selected passage once
- Listen for a word or phrase you feel drawn to

Movement 2: Invitation

- Is there a particular area of my life this word or phrase is speaking to?
- What might God's invitation to me be?

Movement 3: Response

- What will I do with this invitation? Is there a particular way God is inviting me to respond?

Movement 4: Rest

- Recognize and receive all of this within the love and care of God.

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