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Exploring the Process of Being Me as the Central Focus of Our Spiritual Journey

Jeffrey L. Zakrzewski

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EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF *BEING ME*

AS THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

BY

JEFFRY L. ZAKRZEWSKI

NEWBERG, OREGON

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DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

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DATE: MARCH 11, 2009

TITLE:

**EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF *BEING ME*
AS THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

**WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION DEGREE**

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Acknowledgements

When Michelangelo created his masterpiece in the painting of the Sistine Chapel, all we tend to remember are the finished works which were magnificent in scope and creativity. We have imprinted on our minds the hand of God reaching out to Adam and all those marvelous frescos that consume the ceiling and walls. What a story of humanity they tell! We tend to forget all the work that went on behind the scenes to support the masterpiece of the great artist. Helpers were present to provide the proper scaffolding, painting supplies, food, materials and a place to sleep. There were friends who gave a word of encouragement as well as advice and critiques. It was truly a team effort to make the Sistine experience a feast for the eyes for generations.

While I would never compare this thesis and project to the Sistine Chapel, I would like to acknowledge a team of people who have made this research effort possible. First and foremost is my wonderful and supportive wife Julie who sacrificed scores of hours throughout this year to leave me alone in my research and creative frescos. Her love and acceptance of me for 28 years have proved to be a primary contribution to my experiencing *being me*. Through her I have first-hand encountered God-sensing and people-loving. I also would like to give a hearty thanks to my daughter Janelle who as an English major at Seattle Pacific University took the time to read and provide editing suggestions. Thanks go out also to my son Jeffry who is now serving in Iraq with the Marines. Your courage and perseverance provided me the stamina and motivation to see this goal through to the end.

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Abstract

The struggle of *being me*, or living my true self, has been a longtime wrestling match for humanity that has not always produced a raised-arm victor. Personal identity struggles are as old as human life and can be traced all the way back to Adam and Eve. Yet every human being has that same desire: to know themselves and be known and still be accepted for who they really are. It has raised its head through people living in the shadow of rejection and struggling within their relationships. Yet, I claim that the struggle of *being me* is designed by God to be humankind's primary spiritual journey and that *being me* can only be discovered through converging two life roads: God-sensing and people-loving.

Other solutions to *being me* have pervaded popular society. Psychology has focused on the retraining of the mind, sociology the retraining of behavior, science the retraining of personality type, religion the retraining of morals, and spirituality the retraining of the soul. Each has made progress in some part, but has not completely been successful in helping people understand and know themselves as part of a God-intended spiritual journey.

I plan to show that *being me* is humankind's primary spiritual journey because: it is God's original plan; it is humankind's innate drive; and it is a lifelong spiritual journey. I also plan to show that *being me* can be discovered through two roads: the road of God-sensing because it begins in sensing God and results in congruent holiness; and the road of people-loving because *being me* is defined in life relationships and creates freedom to love others.

The thesis will be presented in the project of writing a personal book that will target both a Christian and non-Christian audience using a style that will draw from personal experiences.

Section 1: The Problem

The confusion of “who I am” is not a humorous joke or novelty set aside for my life alone. These issues confront every human being. Yet whether I call it self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-concept, or self-identity, it has affected my life and permeated my thinking. It showed up through efforts to change my physical appearance as a teenager and young adult. There were many days when I turned red with embarrassment but what I really wanted to do was just change my name and run away. *Being me* was no fun, so I tried constantly to be somebody else. My problem was real and affected not only my thinking but also my relationships.

The problem of *being me* as a human’s primary spiritual journey can be traced to two major roadblocks in our society today: first, the fact that people live in the fear of rejection; and second, that people struggle with the relationships in their lives.¹ Both of these cultural phenomena have contributed to people’s search for themselves outside of God and God-centered relationships. The first roadblock, fear, has divided each person within themselves and forced them to wear masks as a cover-up for their fear. The pressures of society create urgency for people to fill the void of acceptance through multi-tasking and pressure-filled schedules. The results are lives that are incongruent between faith and action and lives that are performance based. The second roadblock brings that fear to light in relationships. People have wrestled with their relationship with themselves, with God, and with other people. *Being me* has replaced an intended God-centered journey with a substitute culture-centered influence. The reality is, is that our culture has not truly experienced *being me*.

¹ This will be proven in this section with statistical evidence from reputable polling agencies as support for my assertion.

People Live in Fear of Rejection

At creation, Adam and Eve lived in complete relationship and intimacy with God. “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:5). Their identity and personhood were centered in their garden experience with the Creator every day. They could be themselves without fear and without shame. God knew them and accepted them and they knew God. This intimate relationship was illustrated through their nakedness both physically and in their openness relating to God. But when the serpent introduced a whole new way of living their identity through status and position (“you will be like God” Genesis 3:4), their world suddenly morphed into one controlled by fear. They made “designer” clothes from the fig outlet and covered their nakedness almost as a symbol of their lost relational intimacy. Adam replied in fear to God: “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid” (Genesis 3:10).

People have been living in fear of rejection from God and others ever since, thinking that if God really knows me then He would not love me as I am, and instead this God of judgment will punish me. We have been fashioning fig leaves to cover all of the “inappropriate” places in our character and personalities ever since. These fig leaves promote a pseudo-self that is a cover up for rejection - now that is fear! Then as we live amongst other people leading to more fear of denunciation. If they only knew who we were and what we were thinking they would not love or accept us. We are constantly trying to conceal with fig leaves so that the real me cannot be revealed. Fear has led many in twenty-first century America today to lives of division.

Because of fear we end up feeling guilty and anxious about being found out that what we are portraying is not necessarily truly us. This dividedness and turmoil leads us into a depression that originates from denying our true selves. Statistics have shown, for example, that seven out of

ten girls believe that they are not good enough or do not measure up with their looks, performance in school, or in their relationships with family and friends.² There is a tremendous fear of rejection even at such an early age in life. The latest statistics indicate that over 34% of all Americans are stressed out.³ Could it be that a great contributor to that stress has been the inner struggle with the fear of being exposed?

Other writers have highlighted this struggle with rejection. Brennan Manning in his book *Abba's Child* wrote, "The greatest fear of exposing the imposter is rejection."⁴ Henri Nouwen commented, "The greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity or power, but self-rejection,"⁵ while M. Robert Mulholland said pointedly "when we live a false self we have the fear of discovery."⁶ John Ortberg expressed what I have felt for years, when he said that the "fear of disappointment is that I missed my true calling."⁷ Fear of rejection has become a normal part of our lives that we have learned to cope with in creative ways.

² *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem*

[PDF] (Dove Self-Esteem Fund, 2008, accessed 10 October 2008); available from

http://content.dove.us/makeadiff/ser_report.html. Information is based on an online survey with 1,029 girls ages eight to seventeen years-old and a second survey with 3,344 girls in targeted cities across the United States.

³ *American Individualism Shines through in People's Self Image*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Update,

2007, accessed 29 August 2008); available from

<http://www.barna.org/FexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=216>.

⁴ Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, Rev. expanded ed.

(Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing, 2002), 159.

⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*, 10th anniversary ed. (New

York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2002), 27.

⁶ M. Robert Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Downers

Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2006), 31.

⁷ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids,

Mich: Zondervan Pub. House / Willow Creek Resources, 1997), 16.

Creation of Masks

We have underestimated the influence society has had upon our identity, blocking the spiritual journey as God has intended. Cultural values have become the norm for both Christians and non-Christians. Within our world today, there are contrasting perceptions of illusion and reality. These contrasts are carried over into both religious circles and secular lifestyles. These temptations have pervaded twenty-first century American life, crossing over into church life, and have had profound effects on how we view ourselves. They are the philosophies of: I am what I do (performance); I am what I have (possessions); and I am what others think (popularity).⁸ These values have influenced us as a culture to the extent that we have even created a mask, or false self, in order to appear as someone acceptable or successful. We have raised a façade to conceal a lack within. We then can appear as a divided self – all alone and yet still in community. George Barna highlighted this divided self when he wrote, “People do not have an accurate view of themselves when it comes to spirituality. American Christians are not as devoted to their faith as they like to believe.”⁹

This mask can become a pseudo-reality for people leading to confusion as to which they really are in their identity, leaving them in conflict with their real self and created self. “The superficial I is not our real self – it is our responsible and our empirical self but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God.”¹⁰ The “I” is a mask that counts on outside experiences to deliver inner meaning. Brennan Manning calls this person a

⁸ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life for Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2006), 74-78. Scazzero’s premise is that these three cultural philosophies are temptations that lead toward living the false self.

⁹ *Barna Lists the 12 Most Significant Religious Findings from 2006 Surveys*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2006, accessed 20 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=252>.

¹⁰ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 8.

“poser” who is preoccupied with appearance.¹¹ It is not winning or losing but how you *look* playing the game.

The masked self can lead to anger, manipulation, destructive behavior, self-promotion and self-indulgence. Our society today has placed such a premium emphasis on appearance that the increasingly rampant fads of plastic surgery, tattoos, and piercings have become big business. Demand for materials and equipment used in cosmetic surgery procedures is forecast to increase 9.0 percent per year to \$2.4 billion. America's obsession with youth is driving growth in cosmetic procedures, which are forecast to grow 9.1 percent per year to 17.5 million in 2010, valued at \$17.3 billion. Best opportunities are expected in nonsurgical procedures (such as injections, dermal resurfacing and microdermabrasion) due to consumer preferences for less invasive treatments. However, demand for surgical products will continue to be strong in areas such as implants, where there are no significant alternatives. These and other trends are presented in Cosmetic Surgery Products, a new study from The Freedonia Group, Inc., a Cleveland-based industry market research firm.¹² One such person who underwent the process of plastic surgery came out of the procedure and made the comment, “It looks better but I don’t feel better.”¹³

¹¹Brennan Manning, *Posers, Fakers, & Wannabes: Unmasking the Real You*, ed. J. Hancock (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003), 30.

¹² *U.S. Cosmetic Surgery Product Demand to Reach \$2.4 Billion in 2010*, [Web Page] (Research Studies - Freedonia Group, 2007, accessed 22 August 2008); available from <http://www.allbusiness.com/marketing/market-research/3890971-1.html>.

¹³ Maxwell Maltz, *The Magic Power of Self-Image Psychology; the New Way to a Bright, Full Life* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 9. Dr. Maltz is actually a plastic surgeon who believes that self-image is a picture of yourself in which you line up your lifestyle accordingly. The physical may change, even through surgery, but people still struggle with self-concept issues.

The sociology of how a fad overtakes a culture is a direct result of wanting to fit in, be accepted and perceived as “one of the group.” For example the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology reports from a survey in 2004:¹⁴

- In the U.S. almost one out of four adults (24 percent) between 18 and 50 has at least one tattoo.
- Of all U.S. adults between 18 and 29 a whopping 36 percent or one in three has at least one tattoo.
- Nearly two-thirds of all those who have tattoos got them before they turned 24.

Tattoos, plastic surgery, clothing, hairstyles, music, homes, and possessions are just a few examples of what people “wear” as masks. This pressure to fit in has contributed as well to eating disorders, special gastro-bypass surgeries, health club memberships, and special crash diets.

Busyness

The 1960 film, *The Rat Race*, depicted two young people, a musician and a model, battling the upward climb in New York City trying to survive.¹⁵ Their lives were a constant motion of activity, tryouts, odd jobs, and anxieties as they attempted to become successful in the big city. It was a picture of what most contemporary Americans face: busy lives that crowd out the unnecessary voices that haunt our inner selves. We have substituted busyness as a way to mask and ignore the fear. Recent surveys indicate that 71% of all adults in America signify that

¹⁴ Katrien Vander Straeten, *Tattoo Tips* [Web Page] (2007, accessed 30 August 2008); available from http://tattoosbodyart.suite101.com/article.cfm/tattoo_tips.

¹⁵ Robert Mulligan, "The Rat Race," (1960). The film was directed by Robert Mulligan and starred Tony Curtis and Debbie Reynolds.

what they need most in life is a good night of sleep and 46% say they are too busy.¹⁶ George

Barna, directing leader of The Barna Group, made the following observation:

The issue is...how we choose to fill our schedule, the development and implementation of boundaries in our lives, and our willingness to forego some pleasures in favor of physical and mental health. We're not busy because somebody makes us busy and stressed; we're that way because we have not learned to say "no" to appealing opportunities, or to accept the notion that we do not need every experience that's accessible. We voluntarily exhaust ourselves and then wonder why life doesn't seem satisfying.¹⁷

In America, we are constantly pulled away from our innermost selves and encouraged to look for answers instead of listening to the questions. In many cases we are not so much pulled away as we have substituted busyness as an antidote to facing our true selves.

Incongruent Lives

When we succumb to the pressures of societal conformation in lifestyles, our outside life ends up not always matching our inside reality. We then create undue stress through the masking of our selves, disconnecting beliefs from actually living them out, and thereby compartmentalize and live incongruent lives. Kenneth Boa, president of Reflection Ministries says, "You are sort of an imposter when your profession and practice disagree,"¹⁸ and Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, elaborates on this disconnection that "Whether the issue is marriage and sexuality, or money and care for the poor, evangelicals today are living

¹⁶ *Americans Just Want a Good Night of Sleep*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Update, 2006, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=247>.

¹⁷ Ibid.(accessed).

¹⁸ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 214.

scandalously unbiblical lives...the data suggests in many crucial areas evangelicals are not living any differently than from their unbelieving neighbors.”¹⁹

The Barna Research Group, a Christian-led agency, conducted a national survey of “born again” Christians and revealing some truth to what both Boa and Sider believe to be true about the duality of the self:

- 92% of Christians believe the Bible to be totally accurate in all its teachings,²⁰ yet 35% of Christians have been divorced (the same figure as non-Christians).²¹
- Christians are more likely to invest money in lottery tickets than non-Christians.²²
- 83% of Americans define themselves as Christians,²³ yet 70% believe divorce is morally acceptable. This discrepancy is compatible with the public acceptance of gambling, the death penalty, embryonic stem-cell research, and premarital sex.²⁴
- 4 out of 5 adults pray in America every week²⁵ yet the majority of people have not once experienced the presence of God within the last year.²⁶

¹⁹Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 13.

²⁰ *Born Again Christians*, [Online Data Base] (2007, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8>.

²¹ *Born Again Christians Just as Likely to Divorce as Are Non-Christians*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2004, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=216>.

²² *Faith Has a Limited Effect on Most People's Behavior*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2004, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=164>.

²³ *Barna's Annual Tracking Study Shows Americans Stay Spiritually Active, but Biblical Views Wane*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2007, accessed 30 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=271>.

²⁴ Lydia Saad, *Cultural Tolerance for Divorce Grows to 70%* [Online Data Base] (Gallup, 2008, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/107380/Cultural-Tolerance-Divorce-Grows=70.aspx?version>.

- 7 out of 10 Americans strongly affirmed that faith is very important in their lives²⁷ yet barely one out of five awarded faith as the highest priority.²⁸

Americans have learned to separate their spiritual lives from their secular lives. Like chameleons they adapt to their surroundings because of the need for approval and acceptance. Compartmentalization is separating the secular from the sacred and the resulting life (that God had meant to be whole) is now living in turmoil and misplaced integrity, as Barna says:

It seems as if God is in, but living for God is not. Many Americans are living a dual life – one filled with good feelings about God and faith, corroborated by some simple religious practices, and another in which they believe they are in control of their own destiny and operate apart from him...It certainly seems that millions of Americans are fooling themselves into thinking that they have found the appropriate balance between God and lifestyle.²⁹

The tug of fitting in within the community standards of acceptance contribute to this dual lifestyle. We live one life at church on Sunday and a different life at work on Monday. Our incongruent lives are a symptom of a missing relationship that is real with God. Fear will motivate constant adaptation to our surroundings because acceptance is the key value sought after.

Performance-oriented Living

There is no doubt that we live in a consumer-oriented society. Within American society, people are having substitute relationships with things. The longing of the human heart has been

²⁵ *Faith Commitment*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2007, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=19>.

²⁶ *Americans Describe Sources of Spiritual Fulfillment and Frustration*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2004, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=175>.

²⁷ *Barna Lists the 12 Most Significant Religious Findings from 2006 Surveys*.

²⁸ *Americans Reveal Their Top Priority in Life*, [Online Data base] (The Barna Group, 2006, accessed 20 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=226>.

²⁹ *Ibid.* (accessed).

interjected into products. What we have lost is the interior person when people are depersonalized and viewed as things. Dr. Darold Treffert describes the American fairy tale as a story that begins with two major themes: more possessions mean more happiness and more production leads to more importance.³⁰ Within this commodity form of living, people have lost their own selves³¹ and our being is in producing and having. You have achieved success if you have reached status in a job, make significant money, and are still climbing the ladder to bigger and better things.

Advertising and media have profound effects in creating a standardized false image of the self to compete against the true self of *being me*. According to researchers, the average person is exposed to more than 3,600 commercial messages each day.³² Most young girls (81%) indicate that the media sets the standards for what is considered beautiful.³³ From billboard advertising to the evening news, from movies to songs on the radio, we are confronted by the media at all turns. We are constantly measuring what culture finds beautiful versus the beauty of *being me*.

This commodity thinking is alive and well within the Christian church today. If the false self is compensated through the art of performance, then our churches are measuring spiritual maturity and growth through performance measurements. We size each other up through prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, witnessing, serving at the church, and giving which are the

³⁰ John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 25.

³¹ Ibid., 65-75.

³² *Bond Trading*, [Online Data Base] (Beverage World, 2006, accessed 22 August 2008); available from <http://www.beverageworld.com/content/view/5901/151/>.

³³ *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem*.(accessed).

standards for spiritual maturity. John F. Kavanaugh emphasizes how grace dissipates while performance rules in his book *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*:

The civil religion of America worships the god of progress and inspires us to compete, achieve, and win for the sake of competing, achieving and winning. Life for many people in the business world has been colorfully described as a matter of “blowing & going, plotting & planning, ducking & diving, running & gunning, slamming & jamming, moving & shaking, shucking & jiving.”³⁴

We are feeding the false self and creating veneer Christians that are compared one to another in a hierarchy of spiritual maturity. The Bible has been turned into formulas to achieve the American dream. We have lost its meaning and we develop fodder for the head with no impact on our lives. An evidence of this within Christianity is that 37% of Christians believe they will go to heaven if they are good enough to earn a place in heaven.³⁵ Grace has been auctioned on the market and replaced with a performance-based faith!

People Struggle with Relationships

“No man is an island” is more than just a statement of ideology.³⁶ It is a statement of reality. The human person was created to live in relationship and in relationship each person was meant to experience *being me*. The basic relationships that we have been shaped to live in life are the ones with: ourselves, God, and others.³⁷ However, each of these have migrated into a struggle that has manifested itself in our culture through not only the larger problems of war, riots, and divorce, but also through the not so subtle life experiences of jealousy, judgment, and bitterness.

³⁴ Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* , 9.

³⁵ *Born Again Christians*, (accessed).

³⁶ This is a quotation from John Donne (1572-1631). It appears in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII*. Donne was a Christian but this concept is shared by other religions, principally Buddhism.

³⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life [Drawings by Mona Mark]* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1986). Nouwen views these relationships as evolving in a spiritual ascent of three movements.

Relationship with Myself

“Most adults hold a generally favorable impression of themselves.”³⁸ George Barna’s observation from a 2006 survey goes on to state that “nine out of ten said they are a good citizen (97%), friendly (94%) and generous (90%),” and that most Americans “feel accepted by God” (83%).³⁹ It seems on the surface that Americans have a good self-image. However, when you dig deeper, you begin to observe that the basis for that self-image is built upon shifting sand.

Gallup’s results on American’s self-image certify that the basis of such an image is on health and income—both of which are ever changing in the course of a lifetime.⁴⁰ Seven out of ten Americans interviewed say that physical attractiveness is important in society in order to get ahead.⁴¹ Barna states that the second most popular response to what makes life successful is accomplishments.⁴² It would seem to me that an average American’s “good” self-image is built surface uncertainty. Such responses indicate that there is incongruency between what is lived, versus what is really felt below the surface.

³⁸ *Barna Survey Offers a Profile of How Americans See Themselves*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2006, accessed 20 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateD=243>.

³⁹ Ibid.(accessed).

⁴⁰ Joseph Carroll, *Health, Age, and Income Factor into Americans' Self-Image* [Online Data Base] (2003, accessed 13 August 2008); available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/9037/Health-Age-income-Factor-Into-Americans-SelfImage>.

⁴¹ Frank Newport, *Americans Agree That Being Attractive Is a Plus in American Society* [Online Data Base] (Gallup, 1999, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3601/Americans-Agree-Being-Attractive-Plus-American-Society>.

⁴² *Family and Personal Accomplishments Lead People's List of Success Determinants*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Group, 2002, accessed 29 August 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=124>. Barna goes on to state that “people continue to divorce their faith from their self-image and their assessment of personal significance.”

“How we view ourselves at any given moment may have very little to do with who we really are.”⁴³ It seems that humankind has convinced itself that they have a good self-image but the struggle is that they have forfeited their real selves in order to trade for a pseudo-acceptance within their community of friends. Jean Vanier insists, “Insecurity is at the heart of one of the great human dichotomies: The need for belonging and the need to be oneself – a real person, fully alive.”⁴⁴

We seem to carry a picture of ourselves as a license within our wallets. We are ready to pull it out and show people that this is who we really are. Yet we know deep inside that it is a fabricated picture, one that we have constructed in order to be accepted and to fit in. We then ignore our true selves in order to choose to act in harmony with our own self-portrait.⁴⁵ We seem to know ourselves but only superficially and not at the core and we let the world define us. That is why we live in the fear of rejection, we create masks, live under the pressure of busyness to perform, and live incongruent lifestyles. Richard Rohr observes “We are a circumference people with little access to the center. We live on the boundaries of our lives in this widening gyre, confusing edges with essence, too quickly claiming the superficial as substance.”⁴⁶

This superficial veneer of American individualistic self-acceptance is just a front that ultimately hides the struggle within. This struggle is to know one’s self and then accept one’s self for who I really am. Thomas Merton tells the story of a hideous man who becomes a father. In the middle of the night he “trembles and lights a lamp and runs to look in anguish on that

⁴³Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace*, HarperCollins paperback ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 168.

⁴⁴Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 45.

⁴⁵ Josh McDowell, *Building Your Self-Image* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 21.

⁴⁶Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999), 13.

child's face to see whom he resembles.”⁴⁷ James Finley makes this comment, “Each day we rise in prayer and rush to the mirror of self-awareness in the hope of discovering that our efforts have given birth to the image of someone who does not bear the mark of disfigurement. Each day we hope to discover the face of a child born anew.”⁴⁸

Underneath the strength of an individual who climbs the ladder is a child cowering in the corner asking what his name is and where he lives. What makes this matter even worse is that most Americans (as you can see by the surveys) do not even admit that the problem exists. To do so would indicate an inner weakness and dependence. But it does exist and it has created an incongruity that leads to a masked guilt. We have become nothing but a social construct that is “saturated into society.”⁴⁹ No wonder we feel such pressure to always be performing! Robert Schuller pointedly states, “Self-esteem or pride in being a human being is the single greatest need facing the human race today,”⁵⁰ while David Seamands called our struggles with identity “the greatest psychological weapon of Satan...”⁵¹ Henri Nouwen observes that “Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us beloved. Being the beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.”⁵² Even psychiatrist C. G.

⁴⁷Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1992), 77.

⁴⁸James Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere; Foreward by Patrick Hart*, 1st rev. ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 2003), 29.

⁴⁹Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1991). The premise of the book is that the process of social saturation is producing a profound change in our ways of understanding ourselves. Gergen tracks the evolution of the saturated self through the romantic self, the modernist self and the post-modern self. Today the post-modern self is pushed to the background as multiple voices vying for reality. People continue to live in a state of construction and reconstruction.

⁵⁰Robert Harold Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 19.

⁵¹David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), 49.

⁵² Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* , 21.

Jung, founder of analytical psychology wrote, “The acceptance of oneself is the essence of the whole moral problem and the epitome of a whole outlook on life.”⁵³ All of these statements are quite telling about the crucial importance of a form of self-esteem or healthy identity as a relationship with oneself.

Relationship with God

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”⁵⁴ The problem is that we do not know how to rest in God because we do not know how to relate to a being we cannot see, touch, feel, smell, or hear. We struggle because we either have a wrong picture of who He is or we misunderstand how to relate to Him. For example, if we struggled with a domineering father, we will see God as demanding and exacting. If we had an absent father then we see God as non-caring and aloof. Our picture of God not only determines who God is but also dictates how we relate to Him.⁵⁵ One author notes, “The fact is that you’re surrounded by God and you don’t see God, because you ‘know about’ God.”⁵⁶ The final barrier to the experience of God is simply our God concept. Our picture of God is contained only within our image of Him and limits who He is.⁵⁷

⁵³ C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Translated by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961), 235. Jung, despite not being a Christian, affirmed and encouraged spirituality as a means to achieve a healthier “self.”

⁵⁴ Saint Bishop of Hippo Augustine, *Confessions*; Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick, ed. H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 204.

⁵⁵ Jim Craddock Robert S. McGee, Pat Springle, *Your Parents and You: How Our Parents Shape Our Self Concept, Our Perception of God and Our Relationships with Others*, Revised ed. (Houston, TX: Word Publishing, 1990). This entire work focuses on how our perceptions of God are shaped by parents and others.

⁵⁶ Anthony De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words*, ed. J. F. Stroud (New York, NY: Doubleday Publishing, 1990), 102.

⁵⁷ Shusaku Endo’s fictional work *Silence* addresses this issue in the form of a novel written in 1966 about persecution and images of Christ.

People seem to desire to want to know God. This is evidenced through the popularity and regularity of spiritual activities. 45% of all Americans spend time in worship and prayer every week⁵⁸ while 87% can identify an activity that brings them spiritual satisfaction.⁵⁹ Yet only 3% mention their relationship with God as their source of spiritual fulfillment.⁶⁰ While a majority of Americans attend church on a regular basis, the vast majority have not experienced the presence of God even once in the past year.⁶¹ Inner and outer noises make it difficult to even hear God.

It seems that people have an inner desire to want to know God but do not know how. As a result they have substituted spiritual activity for relationship. It is much easier to read the Bible, pray, give money, read a spiritual book, listen to a tape, or serve at the church than it is to relate to God. There is a certain sense that we are “doing for God instead of being with God.”⁶² Donald Miller, in his book *Searching for God Knows What*, writes that we substitute formulas for God and that we are afraid to slow down and be “naked” before him.⁶³ Miller points to the garden where man lost that innocent nakedness and security in God’s love and acceptance (Genesis 3). When that was broken man sought that acceptance and worth in other things. Only when we feel safe with God will we feel safe with ourselves.

⁵⁸ D. Min. Albert I. Winseman, “I Spend Time in Worship or Prayer Every Day” [Online Data Base] (Gallup, 2002, accessed 13 August 2008); available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/6127/Spend-Time-Worship-prayer-Every-Day.aspx?version=>.

⁵⁹ *Americans Describe Sources of Spiritual Fulfillment and Frustration*, (accessed).

⁶⁰ Ibid.(accessed).

⁶¹ Ibid.(accessed).

⁶² Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life for Christ*. Scazzero talks of prayer in the same light when it comes to communication with God. We either talk at God, talk to God, listen to God or the preferred way of relationship – be with God.

⁶³ Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), 61-73.

Relationship with Others

Not only have we struggled in relationships with ourselves and with God but it has ultimately led to problematic relationships with other people. Our world is full of disagreements between countries, families, work associates, and school mates. These originate from what James calls “your desires that battle within you” (James 4:1). These desires are the motivator to be the person others want me to be rather than what God wants me to be. Living up to the false self is the essence of sin and the root of relational conflict.

Living in the box of trying to please others changes how we actually see the world. We see culture through our self-image⁶⁴ by having relational responses like: a pessimistic outlook; a lack of confidence in social skills; sensitivity to opinions of others; self-conscious feelings about performance, appearance, and status; viewing others as competitors; striving to become somebody; becoming critical and judgmental of others; defensiveness toward others; fear of being alone, fear of intimacy; and having perfectionist tendencies.

However, the reality of *being me* will not be realized apart from the experience of relationships. Yet the false self cannot experience intimacy in any relationship.⁶⁵ As an imposter or false self we tend to re-center the world to revolve around ourselves. “We look at life like a play – we are the main star and all other players are the supporting minor roles...We get addicted to ourselves.”⁶⁶ So our relationships become a tool for the promotion of me. The false self defends itself against intimacy and lives in a world of promotion.⁶⁷ We compare ourselves with

⁶⁴ McDowell, *Building Your Self-Image* , 53. Persons with a weak or unhealthy self-image operate in life from any number of these perceived factors and motivations.

⁶⁵ Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 40.

⁶⁶ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2003), 180.

⁶⁷ Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere; Foreward by Patrick Hart* , 18.

one another and if someone says they are better than us, we become frustrated, threatened or bitter.

As Christians we have become very sophisticated at comparing each other’s spiritual journeys. Those who practice the “four horsemen” (pray, attend church, give, serve) are viewed as spiritual and acceptable in the eyes of the congregation. They are upheld as examples and promoted to levels of leadership. True relationships are held with ideas, beliefs, prejudices and feelings, not with people; instead we want control, not relationships. This leads to relational conflict which is manifested in some of the following examples, giving us a snapshot of our desire for control:

- There are 31 wars currently going on in our world.⁶⁸
- There are 18.5 million children living with single parents in the United States today of which 2/3 originate from custody settlements.⁶⁹
- Over 15 million lawsuits will be filed in state courts this year.⁷⁰
- Centerville, Georgia, has 48 Presbyterian churches in a population of 5,000 – all due to church splits over the years.⁷¹
- In 2004, over 16,000 people were murdered nationwide.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Fighting Goes out of Fashion*, [Online Data Base] (2008, accessed 22 September 2008); available from <http://www.strategypage.com/qnd/wars/articles/20080719.aspx>.

⁶⁹ Richard Kuhn & John Guidubaldi, *Child Custody Policies and Divorce Rates in the Us* [Online Data Base] (Children Rights Council, 1997, accessed 22 September 2008).

⁷⁰ *Legal Reform Now!*, [Online Data Base] (Legal Reform Now!, 2008, accessed 28 August 2008); available from <http://www.legalreform-now.org/>.

⁷¹ *Forty-Seven Church Splits Finally Brings Doctrinal Perfection*, [Web Site] (TBNN, 2008, accessed 23 September 2008); available from <http://tominthebox.blogspot.com/2008/01/forty-seven-church-splits-finally.html>. The town holds the record for most church splits in a small town. All the splits have taken place since 1899.

⁷² *Crime in the United States 2004*, (Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008 2004, accessed 23 September 2008); available from

In spite of these appalling examples of conflict, there is a deep echo today within America for relationships with other people.⁷³ Americans seek out answers through online dating and matchmaking, church attendance, relational seminars, and yet still struggle with the most basic of relationships. As imposters we simply cannot truly practice relationships within the context of intimacy as they were created to be experienced.

Summary of the Problem

American culture is filled with people who struggle with fear and relationships. Because our culture demands the appearance of happiness and success, we have adjusted to these needs by the creation of a false self. This false self wears a mask that changes according to our surroundings to create a sense of acceptance and worth. We know that the mask is not our real self, so the tension and stress of performing permeates our everyday lives. We stay busy so that we do not have to slow down and face the realities of who we really are. Our lives do not match our real selves because they are lived according to other people's expectations and not our own. We are driven to become actors in an ever-changing play requiring us to adapt new roles in an ongoing life of stress and performance. The next day we start the play all over again.

This fear shows up especially in our relationships. We have a hard time knowing and accepting who we are, let alone living out as that person. Our society has formed us and left us as an aggregate that has lost its uniqueness. When it comes to knowing God, we struggle with His reality and love because He is not touchable. So we replace Him with spiritual activity to offset the fear that He will no longer love us unless we are again performing the role of Christian in an

http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04/offenses_reported/violent_crime/murder.html. These figures actually show a decrease in numbers of 25% from 10 years prior.

⁷³N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco, Calif.]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), x.

award-winning performance. Without the intimacy of knowing ourselves and God, we wade through the lake of our interactions with people in fear and trembling. All along we claim as Americans that we have a good self-concept.

Section 2: Other Solutions

The essence of approaching the problem of *being me* mostly zeroes in on the process of retraining. Because of my fear of rejection and struggle with relationships, I and many others look at this problem through clinical eyes instead of spiritual eyes. When I made the decision as a teenager to stop being an introvert and placed myself in extrovert situations, I attempted to be a whole new me to replace who I really was through clinical retraining. My theory was that changing me was possible through effort and discipline (retraining). I then could have achieved becoming a person that would bury fear and embrace positive relationships.

The emphasis on clinical retraining was all about control. The control (through retraining) of my mind, my behaviors, my personality, my morals, or my soul ultimately led to the creation of a new person that God and people would like, love, and accept. Each of these approaches to *being me* was not only part of my life, but also important roads in the identity journey for countless others. They have each produced an important piece to the puzzle of my personhood as I endeavored to be me. Yet they each have left me short of the goal of *being me* in my self-imposed retraining program.

Psychology: The Retraining of the Mind

“I think, therefore I am.”¹ When Rene Descartes penned those words, he summarized linking the dualism of thought and body to the existence of the self. This philosophical cogito of the seventeenth century would later affect generations of how people would seek to know themselves through the mind. The study of the mind has progressed through the clinical

¹René Descartes, *Discours De La Méthode. English. Discourse on Method; and, Meditations on First Philosophy*; Translated by Donald A. Cress, ed. R. M. d. p. E. Descartes and D. A. Cress, 3rd ed., Discourse on Method (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), 78.

psychology of men like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow to the popular and contemporary philosophy of positive thinking. In its most basic essence, psychological roots were all about the solution of retraining of the mind to form the self.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, I was exposed to principles first introduced at a Bill Gothard Seminar, Institute in Basic Life Principles.² One of the seven principles taught, “thanking God for my design,” was based upon reading what the Bible said about my individuality, thanking God for my design, and then meditating and dwelling on those thoughts. The principle on success taught that meditating on Scripture and using it to make my thoughts God’s thoughts was what brought success and life purpose. At such a needy time in my youth, it affected me so much that I attended the seminar seven times!³

Gothard’s approach lined up well with my Baptist background, but I felt stifled by his somewhat legalistic attitudes. More popular writers like Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller, and John Maxwell successfully taught the power of positive thinking and attitude control which appealed to me. These writers and others took Henry David Thoreau’s thought, “What a man thinks of himself, that is what determines or rather indicates his fate,”⁴ and systematically influenced thousands to change their negative thoughts into positive thoughts and thus formed a positive self-concept. People’s positive thinking could affect their fate in life. Peale, Schuller, and Maxwell had an influence on me resulting in self-disciplined activities of carrying around

²*Institute in Basic Life Principles Basic Seminar*, [Online Data Base] (Institute in Basic Life Principles, accessed 7 October 2008); available from <http://iblp.org/iblp/seminars/basic/>. Bill Gothard’s seminar resulted from his master’s thesis at Wheaton Graduate School on a youth program that eventually led to seven Biblical principles of life.

³ I attended these seminars between the ages of 15 and 20 by joining in with church groups as they were advertised at Toledo Baptist Temple in Toledo, Ohio. Every seminar by Gothard was offered at Cobo Hall in Detroit, Michigan. I retained these notebooks for over 40 years.

⁴Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (Harrington Park, N. J: The 5 x 8 Press, 1942), 15.

quotes and thoughts on small cards and dwelling on their positive influence on my thinking. To think positive thoughts would affect what I perceived as myself, which would also affect how I handled and responded to life – I controlled my fate. Positive thinking was still alive and well and producing one way of seeking identity. Now, “I think, therefore, I am” has become “I think these thoughts in order to become this person.” This was a sort of “Jedi mind control”⁵ leading to self-actualization.

In the development of the self-concept, Carl Rogers saw conditional and unconditional positive regard as a key means of process thinking.⁶ Those raised in an environment of unconditional positive regard have the opportunity to fully actualize themselves. Those raised in an environment of conditional positive regard only feel worthy if they match conditions (what Rogers described as *conditions of worth*) that have been laid down by others. Optimal development resulted in a certain process rather than static state. He described this as *the good life* where the person continually aims to fulfill their full potential. Rogers commented, “This process of the good life is not, I am convinced, a life for the faint-hearted. It involves the stretching and growing of becoming more and more of one's potentialities. It involves the courage to be. It means launching oneself fully into the stream of life.”⁷

The process of mind change was ongoing with the goal of becoming a fully functioning person. The main issue was the development of a self-concept and the progress from an undifferentiated self to being fully differentiated. This process was a journey: to move away

⁵ George Lucas, "Star Wars," (20th Century Fox, 1977). Obi-Wen Kenobi used a Jedi mind trick to convince imperial storm troopers that “these aren’t the droid you’re looking for” in the first *Star Wars* film. Changing our thinking can be likened to a form of Jedi mind control!

⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person; a Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 17.

⁷ Ibid. , 109.

from facades, oughts, meeting expectations, and pleasing others, toward self-discipline, new experiences, acceptance of others, and trust of self.⁸

Another solution has been needs thinking as postulated by Abraham Maslow. Maslow's primary contribution to psychology was his Hierarchy of Needs.⁹ Maslow postulated that needs are arranged in a hierarchy in terms of their potency: the base of the pyramid is formed by the physiological needs; the second level was the need for safety and security; the third level was the need for love and belonging; the fourth level was the esteem needs; finally, self-actualization sits at the apex of the original pyramid. *Finding me* began with the connection of my thinking with my needs.

While psychological retraining has had its benefits and has helped many people, the tendency was to place the power of control of my self-image upon myself. My personhood was clinically boxed in and the spiritual aspect of *being me* has been removed. This focus potentially led to a form of selfishness and a world that was all about me and my personal needs. It could have also created an anti-septic world that imposed mind manipulation as a form of creating self-identity. When it became all about what I needed to think regarding my self-worth, my personhood sat upon a slippery slope of behavior modification that was changeable.

Sociology: The Retraining of Behaviors

Sociology has tried to provide solutions through the retraining of individual behavior. Two schools of thought have provided solutions: finding myself through being absorbed into community; or second, finding myself apart from community.

⁸ Ibid. , 167.

⁹ *Abraham Maslow*, [Online encyclopedia] (Wikipedia, accessed 7 October 2008); available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Maslow.

Jean Vanier commented that “becoming human and belonging takes a tribe and a village”.¹⁰ In the classic *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* John Powell gets his point across that “there is no true real self inside us – we are persons becoming and being in process.”¹¹ In other words, Powell is saying that finding me is a result of being part of a community of relationships. Nouwen said, “Relationship to self is brought to fruition in relationship to others.”¹²

Dr. Larry Crabb believes that the process of connecting in community is vital to healing personal problems as well as in *being me*.¹³ Our identity is directly connected to interpersonal relationships. This process is built upon a connection with God, with the self, and with others. All are interrelated within the context of a new heart expressed in what Leonard Sweet calls a GodLife relationship.¹⁴ I cannot be defined apart from community of being with others.

For the Christian, our identity is rooted in a community of believers. We are an organic community¹⁵ that is intertwined with God’s story and intertwined with one another’s stories. The Bible intensifies this picture using language like brothers, sisters, body, family of God, and community.¹⁶ We share a life in Christ and a common cause of living and sharing his love.

¹⁰ Vanier, *Becoming Human* , 45.

¹¹ John Joseph Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?: Insights into Personal Growth* (Allen, TX: Tabor Pub., 1969), 8.

¹² Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life [Drawings by Mona Mark]* , 65.

¹³ Lawrence J. Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Pub., 1997), xii.

¹⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question - into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2004). The GodLife relationship as coined by Sweet, is very simply a life of relationship between people and God that is personal and extended into earthly people relationships.

¹⁵ Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007). Myers first coined the phrase “organic community” in this book.

¹⁶ See Ephesians 1:5; 2:19; Philippians 2:25; 1 John 1:3-4; Romans 12:4-8 for just a few examples.

Through expressions of love with each other and the world around us, we discover and live out that identity.

Kenneth Gergen postulates that the self has actually been socially saturated into society.¹⁷ This has been evident through historical philosophies that had permeated society. The self in Romanticism was seen as a personalized character of depth that was essential to forming relationships. Then the modernist self had main characteristics of reason, beliefs, and intentions. Now the postmodern self is formed through multiple languages that tend to fragment the self. The authentic self is pushed to the background as voices are vying for reality. People are continuing in a state of construction and reconstruction.¹⁸

In contrast, Frank Green in his Systems Reality Theory teaches the importance of the differentiation of the self. He defines this differentiation as “the means of the capacity of an individual member of a system to define his or her own identity, sense of well being, goals, values, likes, and dislikes independent from the other members of the system.” According to Green, this concept of differentiation includes the capacity to maintain a ‘non-anxious’ presence in the midst of a stressed system, and to take responsibility for one’s own behavior, choices, and emotional well being. Therefore, the differentiated person can take strategic independent action and bring change within a stressed system. So the need is to differentiate yourself apart from the pressure of others and to hold on to whom you are and who you not.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* , 3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Dr. Green uses the material of Family Systems Theory and applies them to the interpersonal dynamic of the family of God with his Systems Reality Theory as presented in “Spirituality and the Personality” DMin 511 as a prerequisite for The Doctor of Ministry program at George Fox Theological Seminary. The quote and ideas are taken from his Reality Systems notes.

Science: The Retraining of Personality

In one way or another we use name-calling or nicknames all the time. I was called “Red” as a kid because of my red hair. I hated that label! Yet all of us do it all the time. The point is that it is almost second nature for us to catalogue ourselves and people around us. Yet such labeling is not always a bad thing. The labeling of personality and gifts has proven to be very helpful to me in understanding myself and others through the years.

It was almost 30 years ago when I was introduced to the whole concept of personality type. Through Tim LaHaye’s four basic temperaments I began to look at myself and others through the labeling of choleric, sanguine, melancholy, and phlegmatic.²⁰ Over the years this progressed into taking and using the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA).²¹ The T-JTA was not just theory, but based on many years of clinical experience and thoughtful research in the fields of individual therapy and marriage counseling. In recent years, I have also used the tool of the Myers-Briggs Type indicator²² as a means to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. This material has produced a scientific classification of behavior and identity through the combinations of the 16 personality types.²³ According to their book, *Type Talk*, typewatching is all about self-awareness. The more I am aware of my patterns and tendencies, the more awareness I can understand myself and others.

²⁰Tim F. LaHaye, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1967). His book takes these four temperaments and shows what they should like when a person is Spirit-controlled.

²¹ Robert M. Taylor; Lucile P. Morrison, *Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis*, 1996 ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Psychological Publications), 1.

²² Isabel Briggs Myers; Mary H. McCaulley; Naomi L. Quenk; Allen L. Hammer, *Mbti Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1998), 3-4.

²³Otto Kroeger, *Type Talk, or, How to Determine Your Personality Type and Change Your Life*, ed. J. M. Thuesen, *Type Talk*. (New York, N.Y.: Delacorte Press, 1988), 8.

Another set of scientific tools that has greatly helped me to know myself has been the skills or gifts assessments. These began in seminary under Dr. Elmer Towns who conducted the TEAM Gifts assessment as part of Church Growth 101.²⁴ Through the years I have used many such gifts assessments for the express purpose of discovering and then using my spiritual gifts as taught in Scripture. These became an important part of spiritual growth development in the churches where I pastored.²⁵ The express purpose of such assessments was to help church members discover their gifts and then use them to glorify God and edify the church. In recent years through the Gallup Organization, the StrengthFinders assessment tool has been introduced to the business world. The premise of Strengthfinders was based upon two major ideas: Each person's talents are enduring and unique and each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strength.²⁶ Overall, StrengthFinders labels thirty-four such theme strengths.

Religion: The Retraining of Morals

My journey to find and be myself was through the retraining of my morals from foundational teachings that originated in my years with a parachurch ministry. This retraining focused on two different approaches to how I viewed myself. Richard Rohr wrote that life is a “dance between attachment and detachment.”²⁷ This jockeying between the two philosophies is

²⁴ The TEAM Gifts Assessment was published by the Church Growth Institute in Lynchburg, Virginia. Dr. Towns taught seminars for Church Growth Institute and shared this assessment with us as seminary students at Liberty Theological Seminary.

²⁵ I primarily used *Network* as a seminar and program implemented by the Willow Creek Association. We conducted the *Network Seminar* as an important part of helping Christians find their place of service in the church. *Network* presented the purpose of spiritual gifts assessments to assist the Christian to use their gifts to edify the church and to glorify God.

²⁶ Marcus Buckingham, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, ed. D. O. Clifton (New York: Free Press, 2001), 8.

²⁷ Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, 169.

directly connected to the diverging views of how we perceive ourselves in the religious
training of morals.

The philosophical stance of the Christian was very simple – we were considered sinners
in need of repentance. God hated the sin in me and I was to humble myself and seek restoration
(revival of my soul) through a breaking of my will and a breakdown of my identity. The resulting
Christian life perspective was one of constantly trying to obtain God’s approval through
detachment from sin. This same philosophy was carried through using words like self-denial and
putting the self to death. A victorious Christian was one who had a good image of his own false
self! God hated the sin but many times his love was washed away in the concept of my
sinfulness.

What this teaching and practice did for me and countless others since the great revivals in
America and England was to produce a personal identity that never quite matched up with God’s
plan for me. From an early age, it drove me to adopt the practice of performance as a way to
achieve God’s acceptance. The frustration over and over again was that I could never quite
match up to God’s perfection, so I would beat myself down with spiritual disciplines. Personally,
this was a performance way of holding down the “flesh” that threatened to overtake the spirit’s
control. I fasted, I memorized Scripture, I spent the night in prayer, and I abstained from
television and worldly music. I was, as the hymn writer penned, such a worm!²⁸ In fact, I was a
frustrated and unhappy worm.

With a sinner identity, I confused my real self with the self I was supposed to deny. I
became puzzled and struggled to understand and receive God’s love. How could He love me and

²⁸ Isaac Watts penned “At The Cross” in which he wrote “Alas and did my Saviour bleed? And did my
Sovereign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?” This was one of many hymns I sang
growing up in the Baptist church that reinforced my “wormliness”!

expect me to deny that same self? God's road to acceptance was to follow Paul's admonition "to not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment..." (Romans 12:3). The more I could beat myself down, the more God might like me. Our purpose as a church community was to gather together, admit our sin, seek forgiveness, and invite others to become worms with us...God's love somehow got lost in that translation! The purpose of our meeting together became nothing more than "sin management" in which we focused on getting ready for heaven without giving attention to the eternal kind of life now.²⁹ And the way to obtain that full forgiveness was to work for God in the church as a volunteer – a sort of penance to overcome His hate for my sin. These thoughts drove me to seek God but it was under the guise of a person seeking to find himself. I became the proverbial cat on a hot tin roof in my relationship with God because it was based on performance. Meanwhile I lost myself.

Two years into my time with Light Ministries, a new perspective on the Christian life was introduced by our ministry leaders. This concept had a profound impact on how I looked at myself as well. Popularized at the time in a book called *Birthright*, David Needham wrote that as Christians we were no longer sinners at all. "A Christian is a person who has become someone he was not before – a saint."³⁰ Based on 2 Corinthians 5:17³¹ this truth was not just positional but also experiential and actual. At salvation we become a new identity on a spiritual level and as a Christian I am God's ultimate spiritual masterpiece. Instead of pursuing detachment, I was to run after attachment, attaching myself to the reality that I was actually a saint.

²⁹Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998). 41-42.

³⁰David C. Needham, *Birthright: Christian, Do You Know Who You Are?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1979), 47.

³¹ "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation..." According to Needham becoming a Christian is not just getting something (eternal life) but becoming someone, a saint.

While these thoughts changed our ministry philosophy and practice and greatly freed my spirit, they also continued to present problems in my concept of myself. I still battled with living up to who I really was in the eyes of God. So am I really the one God sees as a saint, or am I the one who seems to battle choices between sin and holiness? It seemed that Rohr was right: I needed to dance in life between the two. Yet that dance seemed to be more of a battle.

Others have taught the concepts of imitating Christ or the exchanged life.³² While these concepts are prevalent in Scripture, I wrestled with the idea that being a Christian was in essence a “clone war”. The war was to live up to our position in our practice. If we all become Christ-like, then is not our personal identity lost in the mix? If we all resemble Christ, then there is no need to be me - I just exchange my life for Christ’s. Mulholland simply defined spiritual formation as “a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.”³³ If that process is goal-oriented toward living up to who we really are, then it resulted in my frustrations checking into a reality show. When I become Christ-like it simply means losing my identity and submitting to the world of being a Christ-clone.

Sinner or saint? My confusion between the two blurred my identity perspectives even more through the years. Religion had beat into me for years the worm theology, and now I was being taught that, as an eagle, I needed to soar instead of waddling on the ground like a turkey.³⁴

³²Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, 101-126. Boa claims “exchanged life spirituality” is but one of 12 facets that describe the spiritual life. This exchanged life centers on resting in what God has already done for us. Our identification with Christ leads to and is the basis for our imitation of Christ.

³³M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 15.

³⁴Peter Lord wrote a parable, “Turkey and Eagles” that wonderfully communicates God’s truths of your identity in Christ. This story was incorporated in our revival crusades with Light Ministries in the late 1970s and early 80s.

The dance was on but it seemed more like a foreign quick two-step instead of a slow waltz. I was not at peace with either label in my lifestyle.

Spirituality: The Retraining of the Soul

Spirituality has become a popular byword in contemporary culture to show the openness of people to an inner life. Because two out of every three people describe themselves as deeply spiritual,³⁵ this quest has become an important part of their lives.³⁶ According to N.T. Wright, his interest has erupted from a “hidden spring” and burst into a new rediscovering of spirituality.³⁷

One of the results of this new interest can be observed in book stores with an explosion of books in spirituality, religion, and self-help sections (as if spirituality was a result of self-help!). What you see in such sections (as I observed recently in a Walden’s Bookstore) is a rich mix of works delving into such spiritual realms as: reincarnation (if we discover who we were in a former life, we will understand why we think and feel the way we do now), nature-mysticism (we keep in touch with the rhythms and deep cycles of the world around us and within us), Buddhism (advocating a detachment from the world and withdrawal into a spiritual world where the outward things of life cease to be important), Kabbalah (originally a type of medieval Jewish mysticism, now subverted in some quarters into mere postmodern mumbo jumbo), labyrinths (aids to prayer in some medieval cathedrals, notably Chartes, now more widely used in a blend of Christian spirituality and late-modern self-discovery), pilgrimage (where spiritual hunger rubs

³⁵ *American Individualism Shines through in People's Self Image*, (accessed).

³⁶ Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* , x. Wright believes that spirituality is one of four main echoes of a God’s voice speaking to people in the world today. The other echoes are the longing for justice, the hunger for relationships, and the delight in beauty.

³⁷ *Ibid.* , 19.

holders with globe-trotting curiosity), or the Celtic upsurge (speaking of a haunting possibility of another world filled with a more direct presence with God and his world).

Rich and deep experiences of these types are called spiritual and usually engage the emotions of people in very profound ways. Sometimes these experiences produce a deep sense of inner peace and happiness and a sense of self-discovery. Wright may call this a spring, yet on the other hand people who have been starved for water for a long time will drink anything, even if it is polluted. This deep desire for the spiritual and self-knowledge has created a divergent path that many are scurrying to find.

Common threads between these roads are the main disciplines of meditation, awareness, and wholeness. Commonalities between the faiths of the world view these three as a means to encounter either God or an ever pervading reality. Zen Yoga, Kabbalah, and Islam teach that one lets go of reliance on thought and memories to become one with the sacred mystery that permeates reality.³⁸ Meditation, awareness, and wholeness intertwine to teach individuals how to see and to wipe the lens clean. Learning once again to see creates a mirror in which we can see ourselves as we fit into the grand scheme of an eternal oneness.³⁹ That encounter in a sense blends our reality into the reality of all else. Hence our individuality and uniqueness mesh into an awareness of a universal being that pervades all things in life. This spirituality is a retraining of the soul to believe that there is no soul or God. The Buddhists speak of the “clinging mind” or small mind that clings to power and control.⁴⁰ Contrasted is the big or large mind that relinquishes control to exist freely in the larger picture. Buddhists see this same self throughout

³⁸James Finley, *Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 55.

³⁹Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* , 103.

⁴⁰Ibid. , 125. Rohr goes on to identify the “big mind” with having the mind of Christ. It’s a mind that lives in a perpetual awareness.

all forms of reincarnation. The Hindu sees an evolving of the self to eventually reach the peace of Nirvana. In a sense, these forms of spirituality eventually lead to the individual dissipating to become one with God or an all powerful force. It was Dallas Willard who commented, "Spirituality wrongly understood or pursued is a major source of human misery and rebellion against God."⁴¹

Summary of Other Solutions

All of these forms of solutions to *being me* have had various successes in people resolving identity issues. Psychology places a tremendous amount of emphasis upon self-actualization or the process of self-worth through various roads I make happen. My worth may be blocked through psychological disturbances but breaking through those blockages requires human help through counseling and mind change. Sociology retrains our behaviors by placing the stress upon interaction with the group. The problem with the group is that the beliefs and fads of a society are ever-changing, making standards for identity ever-changing. And then to be self-differentiated means I have to step away from such pressures to find myself – a seemingly impossible task. Scientifically, we have clinically imposed specific formulated testing classifications to determine our personhood in comparison with others. These labels fail many times because the testing is created by humans, and not infallible, resulting in classifications that may produce immediate judgments upon each other that may be misleading not only to others but to themselves as well. Through religion people have imposed formulas of systematic theology to force humans into creating pathways to lead to self-worth. Many times these systems distort biblical truth and end up creating more of a works-oriented or performance path to

⁴¹Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 81.

achieve identity. Finally, spirituality has created multiple pathways to seek peace through a variety of gods and beliefs that are not necessarily Christian in nature.

What they all lack is a certain sense of permanent peace that is achieved only through elements beyond our retraining and control. Each of these pathways to *being me* has placed the solution to self-worth upon the individual and their direct power to manage. How well I organize those factors determines how well I become myself. Each discipline also never really makes the connection between *being me* and our spiritual journey. Finding me is always viewed as an outside issue that is not related to my spiritual life. Again the solutions are then placed upon identities that are non-spiritual and the mystery of a relationship with God is ignored. We want control even in that relationship and we also desire to be a person that is self-made.

My personal journey has forged a path through many of these world solutions. Yet controlling my disciplines has always left me living in a world of discontent within a vacuum. I discovered and learned more about myself while in the process, but the link of *being me* to spiritual formation has never really been a connection considered or a thought pursued directly. Retraining relies too heavily upon my doing and not God's doing and with all my hard work I always fall short of expectations.

Section 3: The Thesis

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”¹ This accomplishment speaks of a universal journey that every person travels as a life-long pursuit – *being me*. I have documented the problem that this pursuit creates as well as many solutions people have sought in the pursuit of *being me*. My claim is that this struggle of *being me* is designed by God to be humankind’s primary spiritual journey. I also claim that *being me* can only be discovered through converging two life roads: the road of God-sensing and the road of people-loving.

Being Me is Our Primary Spiritual Journey

Anthony de Mello in his book *Awareness* shares a famous story about the lion that came upon a flock of sheep and to his amazement found another lion living among the sheep. This lion had been brought up by the sheep ever since he was a cub. He would bleat like a sheep and run around like a sheep. The lion went straight for the sheep-lion and when the sheep-lion stood in front of the real one, he trembled in every limb. And the lion said to him, “What are you doing among the sheep?” And the sheep-lion said, “I am a sheep.” And the lion said, “Oh no, you’re not. You’re coming with me.” So he took the sheep-lion to a pool and said “Look!” And when the sheep-lion looked at his reflection in the water, he let out a mighty roar, and in that moment he was transformed. He was never the same again.² While most of us live near water of some kind, a sudden understanding of who I am by looking in a reflection pool is not going to be the normal process of discovering *being me*. This discovery has been intended to be a life-long

¹*Ralpho Waldo Emerson Quotes*, [Online Data Base] (2006, accessed 21 October 2008); available from http://thinkexist.com/quotation/make_the_most_of_yourself-for_that_is_all_there/224485.html.

² De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words*, 57.

ourney of becoming “the lion” we were meant to be. It is returning to the pool of God’s presence to see who we really are. Not only has this been God’s plan all along but also an innate inner drive that he placed inside every human being. It is our spiritual journey that has been meant to lead us to ourselves by encountering God as part of a life-long process.

Because *Being Me* is God’s Original Plan

When my son Jeffry was born he inherited not only the DNA from his parents but also the DNA of God himself inbred in his personhood. In a similar fashion he also took on a unique identity that was only his. These two ideas identify and reveal God’s plan for each of us of *being me*.

DNA, Deoxyribonucleic acid, is a nucleic acid that contains genetic instructions used in the development and functioning of all living human beings. The main role of DNA is the storage of information that is used to construct a master blueprint of the human.³ Many people throughout my life have commented that my son Jeffry not only bears my name but also bears my image – we look alike. Especially now that he is a grown up man serving in the Marine Corps, sharing his photos with my friends has always ended up with the observation, “He looks just like you.” My DNA has contributed to his genetic makeup and therefore he bears my image. God’s original plan was that I would bear His image as a foundation to *being me*. His DNA is inbred in my personhood!

In the Garden of Eden, God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...” (Genesis 1:26). The writer of Genesis goes on to document that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (verse 27). I like

³DNA, [Online Data Base] (Wikipedia, accessed 24 October 2008); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA>.

the phraseology of Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of these verses using the description of God making human beings in “our nature” and creating human beings to be “godlike”.⁴ Whether you view the *imago Dei* as substantive, relational, or functional, God’s stamp of His personal selfhood is impressed upon us as humans.⁵ According to Dr. Larry Day we have been created to become “image-bearers” of God in our personhood. In fact, Day links this directly to our self-worth when he states, “The ultimate basis of a secure and healthy sense of self-worth is directly related to the level of accepting, understanding, and experiencing the truth of our being image-bearers of God.”⁶ No matter what my experience is in life, I do not cease to be made in His image.

So the road of our primary spiritual journey first faces the signpost of recognition. Do I see myself as an image-bearer of God? And if so, do I also recognize that all humans have been fashioned after His image as well? If God pulled out His photo of me in pride, would others say, “He looks just like you”? God’s plan in creation was to weave His DNA into our likeness of Him.

In like manner, fingerprints offer an infallible means of personal identification. They have served as a science for tracking identification of criminals over the last 100 years. No two fingerprints have ever been found alike in many billions of human and automated computer comparisons. In fact right now in the largest AFIS repository in America operated by the

⁴ *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. English.*, ed. E. H. Peterson (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22.

⁵ S. Gannon Murphy, *On the Doctrine of the Imago Dei* [Online Data Base] (Minnesota Apologetics Project, accessed 23 May 2008); available from <http://www.geocities.com/mnapologetics/ImagoDei.htm?200823>. The substantive view refers to certain qualities or attributes in humans that mirror those of God Himself. The relational view sees the image of God as not something in humans but rather his relationship to God or other humans. The functional view holds the image of God to be contained directly in that which a person does.

Department of Homeland Security, the US Visit Program contains in itself over 74 million fingerprints.⁷ In the way that our fingerprints serve as a one of a kind identification of who we are, God has stamped on each of us a set of fingerprints that separate us from any other human being. What unites us is that we share His image. What makes us unique is our individuality in appearance, personality and giftedness. The psalmist described this uniqueness even as we were being formed in the womb:

Oh, yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God – you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration – what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived on day.⁸

There is a certain connotation that we are all born with “a seed of selfhood that contains the spiritual DNA of our uniqueness; an encoded birthright knowledge of who we are, why we are, and how we are related to others.”⁹ That DNA of being in God's image is the seed that gives fruit to our unique individuality. No matter how we try to categorize ourselves: male or female; straight or gay; married or divorced; parent or single; introvert or extrovert; athletic or academic; all of us are all beyond categories because there is no one else like me. I am a product of God's fingerprint which was created for me and me alone. No one else has the combination of my genetic background, my personality, my giftedness, and my emotions like I do.

⁶ Dr. Larry G. Day, *By Design and in God's Image* (Portland, OR: Mt. Tabor Press, 1992), 15. Day defines his image as eight gifts bestowed on each of us that make us a person like God is a person: feelings, choosing, thinking, communicating, creating, a conscious, self-awareness, and spiritual awareness.

⁷Greg Moore, *The History of Fingerprints* [Online article] (May 18 2008, accessed 25 October 2008); available from <http://onin.com/fp/fphistory.html>.

⁸ *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. English.*, 1081.

⁹Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass, 2004), 32.

So in a very real sense, when I endeavor to become like someone else, I reject the uniqueness that God has intended for me to be. We are to define ourselves “radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.”¹⁰ God’s intention was to fashion us uniquely and to love our uniqueness unconditionally. The journey of *being me* is humankind’s primary spiritual journey because God’s DNA fashioned me in His image and with His fingerprints made me completely unique. That was His intention – for me to be me! That is what gives glory from the creation to the Creator!

because *Being Me* is Our Innate Drive

Every human being has that innate inner drive to not only be themselves, but also to be valued and loved for being themselves. Dr. Schuller was spot on when he commented that “self-esteem is the human hunger for the divine dignity that God intended to be our emotional birthright as children crested in his image.”¹¹ That inner drive was purposefully installed by God to be our primary spiritual journey because that road ultimately leads to God Himself. When I reach that objective, I fulfill my purpose and I am released into a life of freedom and love. “The more I become myself the more glory I give to God.”¹² However that road takes one of two turns: either choosing to live life apart from *being me* or choosing to live life in light of *being me*. That fork in the road sets me up for either a life of peace or a life of turmoil.

The essence of our relationship with God was meant to be founded upon openness and acceptance. With that came a sense of trust, and if God truly made me as an image-bearer and uniquely a designer original, then I can trust Him. To have that trust broken is what Schuller

¹⁰John Eagan, *A Traveler toward the Dawn: The Spiritual Journal of John Eagan, S.J.*, ed. W. J. O'Malley (Chicago, Ill.: Loyola University Press, 1990), xii.

¹¹ Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* , 15.

¹² Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* , 31.

calls “the essence of sin.”¹³ Sin is that deep lack of trust that separates me from God and levels me with a sense of shame and unworthiness. Sin is not doing bad things, “it’s living an illusion.”¹⁴ That illusion is to believe that *being me* can be discovered apart from God. Robert McGee put it this way: “Since the fall, man has often failed to turn to God for the truth about himself. Instead he has looked to others to meet his inescapable need for self-worth. I am what others say I am, he has reasoned. I will find my value in their opinion of me.”¹⁵

In other words, Satan’s lie was to deceive us into believing that self-worth was a result of my performance plus other people’s opinions. The resulting problem is that we seek *being me* apart from God, which is the nature of sin. We were wired to be secure in God’s love and acceptance. When that was broken we sought that acceptance and worth in other things.¹⁶ We have lost our nakedness and are afraid to be in the buff before God. This has been transformed even into our perceived nakedness before each other. We are scared because we are afraid we will not be accepted. We have gone so far as to distort our physical nakedness in a perverted way to gain that acceptance (i.e. surgery, prostitution, etc.). Society has missed the point of intimacy and replaced it with clothes of insecurity. Donald Miller said it best:

The Bible is attempting to explain a relational break man tragically experienced with God and a disturbed relational history man has had since then, and furthermore a relational dynamic man must embrace in order to have relational intimacy with God once again, thus healing himself of all the crap he gets into while looking for a relationship that makes him feel whole.¹⁷

¹³ Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* , 156.

¹⁴William Harmless, *Mystics* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31.

¹⁵Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance*, Revised and expanded. ed. (Nashville: W Pub. Group, 2003), 20.

¹⁶ Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* , 71.

¹⁷ Ibid. , 155,

The life apart from *being me* is one that places more value on the perceived realities of society above the reality of God's desired relationship with each of us. All of us have that inner drive but when we seek to fulfill it apart from God, we live within the confines of fear and measuring up.

To live my life within the freedom of *being me* is inevitably counter-cultural. "To be a human person is inevitable to be lodged in culture. But we are not made in the image of any culture. Culture is not our image. We are the image of God. Such is the revolutionary nature of holiness."¹⁸ When John Kavanaugh wrote those words, he was painting the true picture of a battle we fight in order to *live me* in our culture. There is always the pull to be changed into someone else. To live my life in the light of *being me* means to accept God's fingerprints and image and to extend that relationship with the Creator God into my world of human relationships. Schuller describes that kind of life in this way: "God is trying to build his kingdom by appealing to our unsatisfied hunger for self-esteem. He offers to save us from guilt and shame and insecurity and fear and boredom to a life of security, serenity, stimulation, and self-esteem."¹⁹ At the point of salvation, our identity or self-worth is received as a "divine endowment or gift."²⁰ To receive the blessings of "eternal life" (John 3:16) is to receive the gift of self-hood beginning in this life and continuing into life in God's presence in heaven. This is the life given as a gift to us and is that life John talks about as "abundant" (John 10:10). Meister Eckhart said that "for God to be is to give being, and for man to be is to receive being."²¹ There

¹⁸ Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* , 194.

¹⁹ Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation* , 136.

²⁰ Douglas D. Webster, *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us through Relationships* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 43.

²¹ Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere; Foreward by Patrick Hart* , 73.

s nothing that we have to do or perform in order to achieve *being me*. It is a gift received. It is a gift experienced by living life under that perspective.

The pressure of culture impresses that in the context of all my faults and shortcomings, there is no possible way that we can achieve *being me* apart from achievement and performance. To be human is to admit my failings, my shortcomings, and my humanness. Yet as Brennan Manning states, “The ordinary self is the extraordinary self.”²² The true self according to Manning draws its identity from our belovedness found in a God-centered life. We give glory to God by simply being ourselves. Augustine wrote, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”²³

We were created to have an innate drive to *be me*. That drive was purposefully placed within our personhood for the express purpose of having that journey toward God Himself. Each day of our lives we feel the tug of war between finding our identity in God verses in what society thinks. God desires for us to rest in who we have been created to be both as image-bearers and as unique individuals created for His glory.

Because *Being Me* is a Lifelong Spiritual Journey

Our spiritual journey to *be me* is somewhat like a choice between taking the long way versus a shortcut. We tend to choose to take shortcuts to *being me*. Those shortcuts usually avoid God and act without God, ending up in that same place of tension and fear.

Every journey has a beginning and an end. Our spiritual journey to *being me* begins at the point of an encounter with God. Called by some the point of salvation, coming to Christ, or being saved, this encounter is receiving the gift of my identity as a result of a work of God’s grace and

²² Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 51.

²³ Augustine, *Confessions; Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick* , 204.

ot a work on our part. This beginning is bookended with that point when we physically die and
o into His presence in heaven. Both have a commonality in their pureness of our reality of
ersonhood. Both are moments in time that can easily be faded and forgotten. It is how we
andle the middle of the journey that determines our receiving of this gift.

The meat of that journey is living life. Paul stated in his letter to the Philippian church to
work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). The interpretation I was
ught throughout my years in a fundamentalist church background was that this was the process
f holiness. I must choose to do spiritual works in order to keep God’s approval and become
hrist-like. That constant striving under God’s nodding or disapproving head resulted in much
ear and trembling mixed with frustration. You see, I could never achieve either constant good
works or His approval in my mind. Somehow the beginning and end of the journey never could
atch up with the realities of where I am living now – in the middle. In the words of David
eedham, I was a “saint”²⁴ but living in the middle of our journey is the place where I am also
truggling to see myself as a saint. The middle of this journey is where our purpose resides – the
truggle to *be me*. This struggle of *being me* is found in a relationship with God and people.
Merton expounded, “Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace,
nd happiness depend; to discover myself in discovering God. If I find him I will find myself.
And if I find myself I will find Him.”²⁵

This process of “working out your own salvation’ is interpreted by Peterson as “be
nergetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God.”²⁶ The middle of the

²⁴ Needham, *Birthright: Christian, Do You Know Who You Are?* , 47.
²⁵ Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* , 38.
²⁶ *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. English.*, 2138.

ourney is all about learning to rest in the process of God-sensing and living out that God-sensing
n my relationships. That “reverence and sensitivity” is learning to live this awareness of God.
his is the process of the middle – resting in who I am. That awareness of me and my
elationship with God are intricately related.²⁷ Rohr further explains this middle journey by
aying, “We have no real access to who we really are except in God. Only when we rest in God
an we find the safety, the spaciousness, and the scary freedom to be who we are, all that we are,
nore than we are, and less than we are.”²⁸

The middle road is not about either achieving a standard or laying aside our humanness.
Karl Barth’s way of speaking about development and growth in the Christian life was to become
what you are.²⁹ It is a way of resting and living our true selves. Soren Kierkegaard’s perspective
was simply this, “Now with God’s help, I shall become myself.”³⁰ The process of being and
becoming are gifts of God, yet paradoxically they involve human participation. This participation
is not a fearful striving or a measured standard that is unattainable. This participation is simply
God-sensing and people-loving, and a spiritual growth process of *being me* that is God’s design
for my spiritual journey. It is a journey centered on awareness. De Mello astutely noted, “Be
aware of your present condition. Stop being a dictator. Stop trying to push yourself somewhere.
Then someday you will understand that simply by awareness you have already attained what you

²⁷ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life for Christ* , 65.

²⁸ Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* , 26.

²⁹Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 23. Holt describes Barth’s way of speaking about development and growth in the Christian life as a way of reaching a status God has already given us in Christ.

³⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Prayers of Kierkegaard / Edited and with a New Interpretation of His Life and Thought*, by Perry D. Lefevre (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 147.

ere pushing yourself toward.”³¹ If God truly loves me as I am and not as I should be,³² then awareness of His love in the now becomes the center of this middle-of-the-road journey.

Michelangelo, a 16th century artist, described his process of sculpting as a specific release: “In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it.”³³ God as the Master-sculptor has in mind what I have been created to be. He provides as a gift through the middle of the road journey a glimpse of that masterpiece of *being me* through using the moment-by-moment engagements of life to show forth to myself what *being me* is centered in: awareness. I am learning to be in the middle of the journey.

Being Me can be Discovered through Two Converging Roads

When it comes to *being me*, it is not about stopping or starting different approaches. It is all about the blending of two converging roads: the road of God-sensing and the road of people-loving. These two merge together and blend in a life that is endeavoring to live *being me* as our primary spiritual journey.

Road of God-sensing

Senses are the physiological methods of perception. While the number of senses may vary, the traditional five senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste were proposed as

³¹ De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words* , 95.

³² Brennan Manning, *Lion and Lamb* ([Old Tappan, N.J.]: F.H. Revell, 1986), 20.

³³ *Thinkexist.Com Quotations*, [Online Data Base] (Thinkexist.com, accessed 25 October 2008); available from http://thinkexist.com/quotation/in_every_block_of_marble_i_see_a_statue_as_plain/148720.html.

classifications by Aristotle.³⁴ Our senses are like windows into our perception of the world around us. Each window works together to give us that total window experience of life. When one of our senses is not performing correctly, it has profound effects for the rest of our life experience. God-sensing involves using similar perceptions to become aware of His presence and activity in our relationship with Him. *Being me* originates from this awareness of living life, called God-sensing. It finds a life resulting in congruent wholeness in which what we do and what we are come together in harmony. The truth is that we can sense God and that sense leads to *being me*. When we talk about God-sensing, we are acknowledging that God is already present. “We cannot attain the presence of God because we’re already totally in the presence of God.”³⁵ What is needed in our sensing is a new God awareness.

because *being me* originates from sensing God

Anne Morrow Lindbergh said that we are to “live like a child or saint in the immediacy of the here and now.” She went on to say that “there every day, every act is an island, washed by time and space and has an island’s completion.”³⁶ What all these senses have in common is an awareness of the moment of the now. It is an experience of God in the present not living off the past or just hoping in the future. God is at work in the now, joining with us so that we can experience *being me*. Robert Pirsig, in his book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, blended the importance of the romantic and the rational. As part of many philosophical discussions on a 17-day road trip, Pirsig focuses at one point on the romantic present like

³⁴*Sense*, [Online dictionary] (Wikipedia, accessed 25 October 2008); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense>.

³⁵ Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, 29.

³⁶ Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Gift from the Sea* ([New York]: Pantheon, 1955), 40.

ocusing on a film projector slide of the now – not the past or future.³⁷ In a sense, each of our
od-sensing experiences isolates the present to enjoy the moment of God presence giving
efinition to my personhood. His presence is present in my presence.³⁸ God-sensing is all about
ensing that presence through the five senses. However, our road trip into a life of sensing has a
eparture place that is foundational to the entire journey of *being me*, as well as a practice to use
long the journey.

The journey to live faithfully to my true self begins with a pursuit of knowing and
xperiencing God through the disciplines of solitude and awareness. As I take time to be quiet
efore God each day, my fears and pretenses are exposed and His love is applied like a soothing
alm. As Abba’s child, I experience a sensory rush of a relationship that was meant to be. I am
His. He truly loves me just as I am. I am His child! As I see God for who He is, the truth of
hose I am becomes a reality in clear focus. Knowing God in such an intimate fashion leads to
nowing me as I really am. It is only when I feel safe with God that I will feel safe with myself.³⁹

I was raised in the church and became a Christian at age seven. Because of the many
ears of learning that my relationship with God was built (according to the church I grew up in)
n doing the right things, my perception of God became distorted through the years. As I sit in
quiet before God, there are moments of deprogramming. It is a place where the “doors of
erception are cleansed and everything appears to me as it is.”⁴⁰ It is entering a whole new reality
hat is not based upon performance that permeates my thinking and practicality. Brennan

³⁷Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Toronto, New York: Bantam, 1975), 170.

³⁸Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958), 70.

³⁹ Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 30.

⁴⁰Jean Pierre de d Caussade, *Abandon À La Providence Divine. English Abandonment to Divine Providence; Translated, with an Introduction by John Beevers*, 1st. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), 78.

Manning said that “our longing to know who we truly are will never be satisfied until we embrace solitude.”⁴¹

Making time for solitude is the practice of creating space for me to sit before God every day without the noise and interruptions of life. It is not necessarily speaking to God or asking for His help as in a prayerful mode of petition. So many times I have created my relationship with God to be that of a child sitting on the lap of Santa Claus, selfishly giving my list for him to fulfill. Instead I sit and wait and enjoy just being with Him. Many times in my relationship with my wife Julie, I’ve enjoyed the quiet moments of just being together without pretense, without words, without tasks – just presence. Being together has underscored the fact that she accepts me as I am and loves me for being that person. There are no demands or pretenses – just love. The solitude of the “mystical experience” produces an overwhelming consciousness of God and one’s soul.⁴² At that place I know what is God and what I am. We can love God and not just think of Him or know about Him.

Fil Anderson, in expressing his personal experience, explained it in this way, “When I meet God in solitude and silence, he adds ballast to my life.”⁴³ It’s when I don’t incorporate the importance of solitude in my practice that I get out of balance in my living. Solitude provides the napping necessary for the spiritual journey itself. “Solitude is essential to personal integration.”⁴⁴ With solitude came the means to make the trip through awareness.

⁴¹ Manning, *Posers, Fakers, & Wannabes: Unmasking the Real You* , 61.

⁴²Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays*, The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays (Oxford: Boston, MA: Oneworld, 1999), 9.

⁴³ Fil Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 89.

⁴⁴ Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World* , 22.

But when we enter into our world and daily lives do we leave solitude behind? Henri Nouwen explains the relationship between the two when he wrote, “Silence can be seen as a portable cell taken with us from the solitary place into the midst of our ministry.”⁴⁵ When I take that solitude with me into my ministry of *being me*, I heighten my awareness. My solitude experience of God is not meant to be reserved for some narcissistic adrenaline rush in a private encounter. It is not just a feel good experience that alleviates the guilt of a life that falls short in the eyes of others. I have been created to relate to God and others in my total life. Therefore, in solitude I sit and am able to “be” with God and myself in order to drive the road trip of doing in the world around me and to join in on what God is doing. Because of that solitude and the practice of awareness on that trip, I can do so without pretense and fear of being my true self as God has intended. Rohr describes this stance: “It’s a way of living in the Presence, living in awareness of the Presence, and even enjoying the Presence.”⁴⁶

Brother Lawrence portrayed this awareness as practicing His presence: “The schooling of the soul to find its joy in His divine companionship, holding with Him at all times and at every moment humble and loving converse.”⁴⁷ This awareness of who God is and who I am maps out what God is doing and heightens my relationship with Him and with others as we journey the road to *being me*. A psalmist put it in this perspective: “I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body shall also rest secure” (Psalm 16:8-9).

⁴⁵ Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* , 21.

⁴⁶ Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* , 31.

⁴⁷ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God with Spiritual Maxims*, 1st New Seeds ed. Boston, MA: New Seeds Books, 2005), 75.

Notice the progression of the psalmist. He purposefully “sets” God before himself in a matter that is definite. The Hebrew word is in the perfect tense indicating that the psalmist is living life as if the deed has already been completed. Awareness on the trip involves a purposeful effort to spot God’s intimacy in the now as a reality. He is already in the now (perfect sense). I just need to *be me* accordingly! As we experience God in the now, we notice creation anew (2 Corinthians 5:17) including a refreshed picture of ourselves as well as His work around us. DeMello calls this aspect of spirituality “waking up.”⁴⁸ He goes on to say that “when you are awake you will live in the present moment.”⁴⁹ We live and experience an authentic self. The truth is that God is already present. However, I do not always recognize that presence or live in congruence accordingly in my praxis. When I do live in awareness the end result of that lifestyle will be an attitude that is not shaken by any circumstance that may come my way. The outcome is a true joy and peace that is evident in my actions. In fact the psalmist concludes by saying, “You have made known to me the path of life [(awareness)]; you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand” (Psalm 16:11, parenthesis mine).

Paul wrote that if we practice the discipline of awareness, our minds will be renewed (Romans 12:2). In other words, we will be transformed to view the world around us in a new and fresh manner that incorporates a reality of who we are. This aspect of awareness of the journey around us and of ourselves means observing whatever is going on in you and around you as if it were happening to someone else.⁵⁰ We can be surrounded by God and not see God because we know all about God. That knowledge can become a roadblock in our journey to seeing life with

⁴⁸ De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words* , 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid. , 121.

⁵⁰ Ibid. , 46.

fresh eyes. We cannot exist off of what we know about Him alone or what He has done in the past. Today is a fresh new day with a new start and a new awareness! As we travel along the journey, we need to be reminded that God is in the car with us all the time – we just do not always recognize it. “God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.”⁵¹

Sensing sign 1: Seeing with new eyes. After the resurrection two disciples were walking long the road to Emmaus when a stranger joined them. After an in-depth discussion they saw the stranger (Jesus) break bread and “their eyes were opened and they recognized and they recognized him” (Luke 24:31). *Being me* is all about waking up to the presence of God and seeing with new eyes.

One of my many dreams is to be able to visit the Louvre in Paris. As an art major in college I grew to appreciate the fine classical works of art that are on display in such places as the Louvre. For me to make such a visit, I would need a tremendous amount of time because I would stop and soak in each and every painting and masterpiece. In the same sense, every day there are rich paintings of my personhood on display in life and with each and every encounter I need to stop and see them with fresh new eyes – the eyes of God’s fingerprints on that painting and on my personhood. To see new and afresh is to recognize God’s presence and work. Now His presence is not necessarily in the fantastic or bizarre, but in the littlest of things, such as the smile of a small child or the gift of a friend.

Recently a jeweler friend of mine at the mall took my father’s ring for me and sized it himself for me to wear on my small finger. Such a visible act was seen by me as the presence of God that He cares even about a small thing like a ring. Tilden Edwards calls this type of seeing

⁵¹*Brainy Quotes*, [Online Data Base] (2008, accessed 31 October 2008); available from http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/saint_augustine.html.

innocent seeing, split seeing, and participative seeing.⁵² It involves the development of a graced eye that sees as God sees. Meister Eckhart said, “The eye with which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me.”⁵³ When I see God in life around me it is with the same eye that God sees me. And with that seeing, comes not only awareness but also the receiving of love and acceptance from the eye of God.

My brother would occasionally sleepwalk while growing up. There were many times we had to stop him from using the closet as the bathroom! In the same way, many of us today are sleepwalking through life with blinders on. We are so focused on controlling situations and meeting deadlines that we walk right by the luminal places where God is residing. Those insignificant events and meetings are where we do not look for the image of God. But when we see the image of God where we do not want to see the image of God, then we will see with eyes not our own.⁵⁴ Normality is the way things appear but God can be experienced through the mundane and the average. In a sense, to see with new eyes is to live at the “overlap between heaven and earth.”⁵⁵

Sensing sign 2: Listening to the voice of truth. Casting Crowns released a song a number of years ago describing a person facing difficulties in life and being tempted to listen to the voices telling him, “Boy, you’ll never win, you’ll never win.” Life is full of such noise and false words that affect how we feel about ourselves. The song continues, “But the voice of truth

⁵²Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence: Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 45-46. The innocent eye sees without pretense as a child, the split eye stands outside the circumstance to see anew, and the participative eye sees in the midst of the situation in awareness.

⁵³ Meister Eckhart, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart / Introduction and Versions by Matthew Fox*, ed. M. Fox (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1983), 21.

⁵⁴ De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words*, 56.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 161.

tells me a different story, the voice of truth says ‘Do not be afraid!’ And the voice of truth says ‘This is for my glory,’ out of all the voices calling out to me I will choose to listen to the voice of truth.”⁵⁶ Our perception of who we are and how we relate to the society around us is many times influenced by these voices. But Fil Anderson reminds us that “each day it’s absolutely crucial for me to listen for God’s voice, affirming that I am God’s beloved child. Only then can I resist the temptation to re-inhabit my false identity.”⁵⁷

When Samuel was a boy, he heard the voice of God clearly in his innocence (1 Samuel 3). Now at first he thought it was the voice of his mentor Eli, but it actually was the voice of God. His response should be our response, “speak for your servant is listening” (verse 10). Charles Stanley explains that our listening must have expectancy and be quiet, patient, active, confident, dependent, open, attentive, careful, and submissive.⁵⁸ Such listening skills to the voice of truth would change dramatically our perceptions of God and ourselves. God-sensing through listening is not hearing to confirm my beliefs but to discover the new that God is at work with me present. Spiritual learning is unlearning or listening.⁵⁹ When we choose to listen to God’s voice of truth we are reminded once again of God’s DNA inbred in my personhood and His fingerprints stamped on my identity. He wants me to be who I am and to resist the Commodity Form and make the transfer to Personal Form.⁶⁰ Doing so involves a keen awareness of listening

⁵⁶ Single by Casting Crowns from the self-entitled debut album *Casting Crowns* released 2003 under the Teach Street label, produced by Mark Miller and Steven Curtis Chapman, written by Mark Hill and Steven Curtis Chapman.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers* , 176.

⁵⁸ Charles F. Stanley, *How to Listen to God* (Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1985). These points serve as the chapter titles of which the book discusses how to listen.

⁵⁹ De Mello, *Awareness: A De Mello Spirituality Conference in His Own Words* , 17.

⁶⁰ Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* , 75. Commodity Form looks at people as things while Personal Form sees people as irreplaceable persons in relationships.

what God is doing all around me. It is discerning the echoes of what He is doing and responding in genuine integrity of being myself.⁶¹ I can be described as a “resident alien” endeavoring to live as an authentic self within a colony of distracting noises.⁶² Every object, every person, every situation speaks of God if we only learn to listen.⁶³

Hearing the voice of truth comes from those times in solitude when we sit before God with all the other voices dissipated. It is being “quick to hear and slow to speak” (James 1:19). Like Samuel, in those quiet moments I become attuned to God’s voice and am reaffirmed of His love for me as Abba’s child. Listening in the noisy world for God’s voice is a practice of *being* resulting in peace in the midst of turmoil.

Sensing sign 3: Touching lives in love. This sense of touch is part of the process of *being me* and how *being me* can be discovered. It includes paying attention to the individual person, the situation, and applying understanding and caring. It is taking the time to pose intimate questions, stop tasks to spotlight a person, and to demonstrate a loving touch of the hand. In the presence of our interaction God is present and at work. In the presence of our interaction, I am being released to be myself.

Here is a personal example about a woman I met, Shawna. Shawna is a mall regular. She is one of those people that mall workers would avoid whenever she approaches them. She is slow in understanding, physically unattractive (according to the world’s mold) and carries many times

⁶¹ Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, 8. Wright identifies these echoes as the longing for justice, the quest for spirituality, the hunger for relationships, and the delight in beauty.

⁶² Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, a Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*, ed. W. H. Willimon (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989). Hauerwas truly explains our emotional feelings of being alien to the voices of the consumerist society we live in.

⁶³ Peter G. van Breemen, *Called by Name* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1976), 59.

an odor that is as unappealing as her looks. Yet she has a sweet spirit and is a loving person. Because I started paying attention to her by stopping to talk and use her name, she now regularly seeks me out when she is in the mall. When she does, I give her a squeeze hug of affection. She smiles and calls me her Teddy Bear! I have found that showing a radical hospitality toward people is a way of God being present in my life and a way of discovering *being me*. It is Jesus touching others through me as He touched the sick, blind, and lame. He called them by name. Sometimes for me it is not just a hug but a touch on the shoulder, a shake of the hand, or a high five to a kid. Like Henri Nouwen's experience at L'Arche, I have discovered that all my training and experience mean very little.⁶⁴ My vulnerability through the simple touch has become my connection and extension of *being me* to the spirit of others. When I open my arms and mind to squeeze all kinds of people, I open myself to *being me*.

At such a point of touch, God is creating me in that present moment. Our presence is the presence of God.⁶⁵ We find our true self not in the guise of spirituality but in the loving touches of life itself.⁶⁶

Sensing sign 4: Smelling the perfume of suffering. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscious, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁶⁷ When Mary Magdalene anointed Jesus' feet with the sweet smell of perfume, there was foreshadowing of the anointing He would receive after His death on the cross. Recently I ran into Macy's to pick out a bottle of perfume for my wife. She had already given me the

⁶⁴Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 16.

⁶⁵ Finley, *Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God*, 9.

⁶⁶ Finley, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere; Foreward by Patrick Hart*, 34.

⁶⁷C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 91.

instructions I needed in order to purchase the right perfume (left on my own who knows what I could pick up). To think of suffering as a sweet smell is like the odor outside my house today. The landscapers are laying cow manure in all the beds and the entire neighborhood stinks like a cow patty! That is the smell we would normally associate with suffering. But it is in suffering that we not only encounter and sense God, but we also discover ourselves.

To “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2) is to live a life out of solitude coupled with awareness. We find out truly who we are when the tough times come. “The reconciled heart says everything that has happened to me has had to happen to make me who I am without exception” writes Brennan Manning.⁶⁸ My premise is that happenings do not make us who we are, they reveal who we are. They are a reminder of the grace of God and His love for what I am. “Tears tell me something about the secret of who I am” writes Phil Anderson.⁶⁹ The rubber meets the road on our journey when smelling the sweet perfumes of pain and suffering. It is because through pain and suffering God is shouting from the housetops “I love you and I am with you.” That presence is a sweet smell that wafts throughout those times of struggle and disappointment. Nouwen concurs, “The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of pains and joys of the here and now.”⁷⁰ Within that suffering we smell that we are His beloved and that His presence is without end. It is through suffering we discover ourselves and sense God. He loves me. He cares for me. He will never leave me!

⁶⁸ Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 157.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers* , 162.

⁷⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 21.

Sensing sign 5: Tasting the fruit of blessings. Tonight, Julie and I will sit down to a meal of steak on the grill, baked potatoes, salad, and ice cream for dessert. My taste buds are watering already! To enjoy the varieties of foods (I enjoyed them all) is to enjoy the blessings of God. When we recognize and admit to God's blessings in our lives, we God-sense. When we taste those blessings we discover our worth and value and care for us even in the little things. Sometimes those blessings are the everyday touches of just plain living and enjoying His creation. I live under the foothills of majestic Mount Rainier in Washington. I am amazed that almost every day the mountain has a different look. God paints the sky different colors with new rushes just to spike my creativity. Now for me to experience that blessing outside my window every day is a gift in my life. He is present in that daily painting, reminding me of the anticipation of His blessing today. When I sense and recognize that blessing, I experience myself new and afresh that I am His and He is mine.

The holy sacrament of communion provides an ongoing reminder of the blessings of God's personal touch and love for us as His children. The physical aspect of eating the bread and drinking the wine symbolically give us reasons for gratefulness and a hope for the future. Christ's death and resurrection are real activities that have opened the doorway for my pathway to *being me* that I could not have experienced alone. God-sensing through this holy time creates the opportunity for a grateful heart and thankful life.

"In his presence we will not hate ourselves, second guess ourselves, or compare ourselves to others; but rather our lives will be filled with the gratitude of His presence, and we will know for the first time the glory of being human."⁷¹ Being human is a glorious experience of *being me*

⁷¹ Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* , 228

nder the blessings of God. Those blessings are all around us and in front of us every day. We
ist need to get our noses in tune with the smells of His presence.

The road of God-sensing originates from sensing God out of our solitude and awareness.
ach of these God-senses is never going to stand alone. They interweave and work together just
ke my physical senses do. There is never a time when I decide I am going to see and not hear or
aste and not smell. The discovery of *being me* comes from these times of sensing God as we live
ur lives under a new awareness. The end result is a life of congruency.

because God-sensing results in congruent wholeness

As a pastor of several local churches throughout the years, I have witnessed ongoing
incongruency amongst my church members. Their lives did not always match up with their
beliefs or teachings. One church leader once told me that he does not read his Bible all week
ong so when he comes to church on Sunday he expects to be fed – clearly a picture of
incongruent standards of living. It was easy for me to be quick in being critical of such people
when I suddenly realized that I do the same thing. My lack of consistent church attendance over
he last five years does not seem to line up with a life of service for God – clearly an
inconsistency! The result of God-sensing as part of the journey to *being me* is a life that
esembles both a circle and a straight line.

If wholeness can be defined as an integrity that comes from being what you are, then
piritual formation or the process of *being me* is the journey of becoming whole and not divided.
To have integrity is to have a state or quality of being entire, complete, and unbroken. It is very
imply put as having your being match your doing. As a circle of integrity our lives come out of
he gauntlet of solitude and awareness resulting in wholeness. The problem we face without
God-sensing is living life on the circumference. The answer: God-sensing takes us away from

the circumference so that we will know ourselves and God. Living on the superficial will lead to incongruence. Living out of the center leads to wholeness.

In a very real sense, the experience of *being me* is blended with experience of knowing God. These two experiences seem to move forward together and shape a life of wholeness. Merton explains this blending of the divine with *being me*: “The spirit of God, dwelling in us, given to us, to be as it were our own spirit, enables us to know and experience, in a mysterious manner, the reality and presence of the divine mercy in ourselves. So the Holy Spirit is intimately unity to our own inmost self, and his presence in us makes our I the I of God.”⁷² The essence of incongruency and the false self is to identify ourselves as separate and apart from God. The false self will compensate through performance and because of that performance will become changeable as circumstances warrant, thus leading to inconsistent living.⁷³ Without that union with God through God-sensing our identity becomes culture driven and divided. To live in a circle of integrity is the result of a life of God-sensing.

Another end result of God-sensing is that my life will no longer be compartmentalized into religious and non-religious or public and private or serving and playing. Congruent wholeness will evidence itself in how I approach life. The great constant overtakes the various aspects of life we live. That great constant is first the presence of God and second *being me*. I no longer have to consider making the decision of which mask I must wear depending on where I might happen to be. I am experiencing *being me* and experiencing God-sensing, whether I am attending a ball game as a father or speaking at a class in church as a pastor. My life becomes a straight line of consistency in which I am at peace. To juggle masks leads to fear and ends up

⁷²Thomas Merton, “The Inner Experience,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 18 (1983), 210.

⁷³ Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*, 29.

rganizing my responses appropriately to the corresponding people. God-sensing becomes the
abilizer, however, and my life is lived like a straight line rather than a long and winding road of
inconsistency.

load of People-loving

Henri Nouwen shares the picture of dropping a stone into a pond and watching what
appens. The place where the stone landed sets off concentric circles that continue to drift further
and further away. Nouwen’s point is that our relational intimacy with God will affect all our
other relationships.⁷⁴ If Christianity is all about the journey to *being me*, then why has that
ourney so often been replaced with other paradigms? Leonard Sweet notes that the Reformation
aradigm focused on replacing relationship with reason, thus leading to belief systems and
iblical teaching as the way to *being me*. According to Sweet, in contrast, the mission paradigm
s a way of life – the life of faith and relationship. It is the pursuit of the “GodLife
relationship”.⁷⁵ Christian growth is much more than systems and beliefs – it is born in
elationship and nurtured in relationship and those relationships intricately define *being me*.

because *being me* is defined in life relationships

God created us to develop a relationship with Him and others. It is within relationships,
s M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. says, that a “litmus test” is set up for what encompasses *being me*:

If you want a good litmus test of your spiritual growth, simply examine the nature and
quality of your relationships with others...Our relationships with others are not only the
testing grounds of our spiritual life but also the places where our growth toward
wholeness in Christ happens...Holistic spirituality...takes place in the midst of our
relationships with others, not apart from them.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* , 16.

⁷⁵ Sweet, *Out of the Question - into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship* , 10. Sweet
efines the Godlife relationship as the authentic life of trusting God and living in love.

⁷⁶ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* , 42-43.

piritual growth can be defined as the journey to live faithfully to my true self.⁷⁷ This choice is a
 fe journey that is intended so that we can truly live and be as God intended for us. This is not a
 selfish journey designed to prop the *me* in front of others. Instead, it is the release of fear and
 iding that comes directly from sitting in the lap of God in total acceptance. This freedom is
 eleased into a life of uniqueness and service to others. It is the demotion of my created illusions
 o live in a God-intended reality.

If “all of life is meeting”⁷⁸ then at the bottom of our identity we are called to live life
 within a constant barrage of relational meetings. This is a place where wholeness is tested and
 growth toward *being me* is drawn out. The people in our lives confront *being me*, shape *being*
me, and release *being me*. My life was never meant to be lived within a cocoon apart from
 people. It is only in community that the final finishing touches can be applied to the painting of
being me. Confronting, shaping, and releasing are actually different angels of the same painting.
 All three cannot be isolated but instead work together as a potter working through different
 stages of forming his new creation.

When a potter works with clay there is simply a two-step process. The clay must first
 have edges cut off before the shaping can begin. That cutting in my journey to *being me* is my
 relationships confronting me. The sharp edge of the difficult people in my life will force me to
 make decisions about myself. Will I choose to be myself in freedom or will I choose to buckle
 under the pressure of fear and choose a path that is not me but safe? With every confrontation
 with difficult people comes a decision. “The relationship to self is brought to fruition in

⁷⁷ This is my personal definition of spiritual formation. Living according to my true self is the key to
 eshing out my relationships with God and the world.

⁷⁸ Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance* , 92.
 Kavanaugh quotes Martin Buber from his book *I and Thou*.

relationship to others” says Nouwen.⁷⁹ Many of the choices I face will include some of the following paths into and out of relationships: Will I forgive that person who wronged me? Will I choose to respond in anger by how I was treated? Will I act out of fear because I am living under performance standard? Will I choose control of my way or the highway? Will I continue to make believe I am that person others like rather than who I am in reality? Or, will I join in with others and make fun at the expense of someone else?

These types of responses could possibly expose the imposter (or false self) that wants to replace my true self with a veneered replacement. The truth is that “the imposter cannot experience intimacy in any relationship.”⁸⁰ According to Manning an important aspect of *being me* is calling out the imposter and embracing and accepting him. In a relationship when we keep on that mask we ignore who we really are and endeavor to live a picture of who we want others to think we are. To tear off the mask is to accept the reality of our sinfulness and to accept our authentic self. When we have to confront people with a problem in a relationship, the tendency is to ignore the situation and put it off, hoping that it will disappear and the problem will go away. When we are practicing God-sensing, we will recognize God’s work and presence and respond to confront the situation without fear and rejection. Mulholland stated that “others become an agent of grace toward our wholeness in Christ.”⁸¹ Therefore, when we run from confrontation we put on our false self, shirk intimacy and never live in the freedom of *being me* and we miss out on experiencing His grace.

⁷⁹ Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life [Drawings by Mona Mark]* , 56.

⁸⁰ Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 40.

⁸¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* , 154.

For years, I lived a life of fear and compliance. Whenever I had to face confrontation in a relationship, I would immediately give in to become the “peacemaker” because it conveniently made me look godly. And after all, appearances were of supreme importance especially as a pastor. Peter Scazzero wrote, “When, out of fear, we avoid conflict and appease people, we are false peacemakers.”⁸² This confrontational approach to *being me* came to a head at my last church. Consistently during board meetings and in decision-making with the congregation I lived a life of compliance and apparent peace. But deep inside, I knew that I was not living up to being the true me. I was wearing that mask in order to avoid conflict and to avoid the fear of rejection. Manning expressed what I was feeling when he said, “The greatest fear of all is that if I expose the imposter and lay bare my true self, I will be abandoned by my friends and ridiculed by my enemies.”⁸³ It was during my last 12 months at the church that I made a significant turnaround. I began to see the value in confronting *being me* in the midst of the meetings and relationships. While the end result may not look favorable in the eyes of most people - I resigned from the church and was rejected and judged by many church members - I began to be true to myself. That process continued throughout the next two years as I dealt with depression and rejection. It was through my times of solitude and God releasing me to be myself that I have come to a place of truly loving others through *being me* and not out of a veneered performance. Manning summarized operating out of *being me* when he wrote, “I connect best with others when I am connected to the core of my true self.”⁸⁴ When I was willing to recognize that I was operating out

⁸² Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life for Christ* , 184.

⁸³ Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* , 159.

⁸⁴ Manning, *Posers, Fakers, & Wannabes: Unmasking the Real You* , 66.

the false self mode and living a lie, God confronted me through new relationships apart from the church. With each confrontation I am learning to let go and *be me*.

The second major role a potter has in his artistic creation involves molding or shaping of my true shape. This aspect of defining *being me* involves the loving touch of the potter as revealed through the loving relationships in my life. Within loving relationships, shaping sometimes can be perceived as accountability. I attended a number of Promise Keeper conferences while serving as a pastor and enjoyed the brotherhood and spiritual challenges that we received as men.⁸⁵ One of the strongest pushes we were challenged to take away from the conference was the establishment of accountability with other men. A series of questions created a sense of a legalistic record of rights and wrongs that became rather awkward for me as a pastor to be part of in a group of men.⁸⁶ Joseph Myers describes this kind of loving accountability as hierarchical, abrasive, unhelpful, and harmful. Keeping track of our behavior together was another method of works and performance that I had already been living for years. To place myself within that format only produced more of the false self living a mirage. I like Myers' solution to shaping described as edit-ability. "Accountants keep records. Editors wipe away errors while keeping the voice of the author." Myers' point (based on Galatians 6:1-2) is that this kind of shaping is all about finding someone rather than catching someone. Within that spirit

⁸⁵ Promise Keepers was founded by Bill McCartney in 1990 as an organization dedicated to the evangelization and discipleship of men. I attended at least 6 conferences in the 1990s of over 50,000 in attendance in the Detroit, Michigan area as well as the pastor's conference in Atlanta where 42,000 pastors gathered.

⁸⁶ *Promise Keepers Men of Integrity*, [Online Data Base] (Promise Keepers, 2008, accessed 31 October 2008); available from <http://www.promisekeepers.org/faqs/mensministries/sampleaccountabilityqs>. These questions include: What one sin plagued your walk with God this week? Is your thought life pure? Did you look at a woman in the wrong way? At any time did you compromise your integrity? Are you giving to the Lord's work financially? Are you walking in total obedience to God? Have you lied about any of the previous questions?

galism dissipates and the self is lovingly shaped by the Potter’s hands through loving friendships.⁸⁷

The practice of forgiveness within relationships is a proving ground for the extent of how deep God’s forgiveness of me has been experienced (Matthew 18:21-35). Broken relationships can either bind me or release me. If I truly have grasped the truth of the images He portrays I will be more willing to forgive others as God has forgiven me. Some of these powerful images include the following: removing our sin as far as the “east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12); God casting our sin behind His back (Isaiah 38:17); God wiping out our transgressions for His own sake (Isaiah 43:25); God remembering our sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34); and God casting all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).

When we forgive those who have hurt us we acknowledge that we too need forgiveness, and that we are not as different from the offender as we might like to think. There is a natural tendency in all of us to excuse our own faults and to blame others for their faults, and an inclination to reach for grace and understanding in our own situation, as well as to reach for justice or even revenge when the same wrong is done unto us by others. To forgive others is to release them from any obligation to make up to you what they have taken from you. But as Lewis B. Smedes argues in *Forgive and Forget*, “When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover the real prisoner was yourself.”⁸⁸ When we have experienced the freedom of not having to perform for the acceptance of God’s forgiveness personally, we will also live the freedom of not

⁸⁷ Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* , 138-142.

⁸⁸ Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive & Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve* (New York, N.Y.: Pocket Books, 1986), 83.

pecting others to perform for our forgiveness as well. Within this context relationships reveal
ur humanity.

With relationships come tears and laughter, joys, and pain. N.T. Wright commented,
Relationship was part of the way in which we were meant to be fully human, not for our own
ake; but as part of a much larger scheme of things.”⁸⁹ When we sense failure in our
relationships, there is a pulling to be fully released as a truly self-differentiated human being.
here is an echo of a further purpose in that relationship that speaks of the God of relationship.
One of the central elements of the Christian story is the claim that the paradox of laughter and
ars, woven as it is deep into the heart of all human experience, is woven also deep into the
heart of God.”⁹⁰ The release of *being me* in my humanity is living close to the heart of God. In
eality you cannot relate to yourself until you love others and likewise you cannot love others
ntil you learn to relate to yourself.⁹¹

because *being me* creates freedom to love others

Mulholland states “The ultimate test of our spirituality (*being me*), lies in the nature of
ur life in the world with others.”⁹² Within this world with others, the key word that describes a
fe of loving people based on God-sensing is freedom. A life living under the guise of the false
elf is one that is living in bondage and fear. For me to choose to serve others with that kind of a
task is one that is always questioning and wondering if what I do is the right thing. Am I doing
nough and how do I look in the eyes of others with my service? Many of us live with an

⁸⁹ Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* , 37.

⁹⁰ Ibid. , 38.

⁹¹ Jay Edward Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image*, Self-Esteem, Self-Love,
elf-Image (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 1986), 111.

⁹² Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* , 142 (Parenthesis mine).

ldiction to approval, which becomes our motivation for service. *Being me* was never meant to e lived in secret, but instead in the world of relationships where it is shaped, defined and lived ut in service with others.

When the disciples leaned on the breast of Jesus at the table of the Last Supper they stened to the heartbeat of the Master. That heartbeat existed for the express purpose of elationships and loving others. Jesus said that He came to serve and to give His life for others. s we practice God-sensing we will pick up on the heartbeat of Jesus with people all around us. ve will become passionate about what God is passionate about, loving people, within the ontext of community: *being us*.

John Powell commented that a “fully human person is in deep contact with the world round him.”⁹³ Living a life of passionate friendship is letting the heartbeat of God become our eartbeat first as community. That assumes a life without pretense and chooses to love without ear. To express that passionate friendship means being sensitive to the lives of people around us /ithin that community. To be passionate about loving others I must let go of the focus on me. When I am comfortable with who I am, I cease the worry and can release that passion into ction. Self-understanding is based upon self-surrender.⁹⁴ Self-surrender is at the heartbeat of the hristian life of *being me* lived within the community of *being us*.

The box where passionate friendship is developed is within the contexts of church ommunity and close friendships. The essence of church community and close friendships is at of sharing what we have in common and yet embracing our unique differences. The common ond draws us to affinity and relationship with others and yet when we recognize our differences

⁹³ Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?: Insights into Personal Growth* , 30.

⁹⁴ Webster, *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us through Relationships* , 50.

promotes the freedom to be unique. Within those relationships our *being me* self develops the freedom of *being us* through connection, affirmation, and admonition.⁹⁵

In John 13 we see a visual picture portrayed by Jesus himself of what serving is all about. It was evident that there was no servant to wash the feet of Jesus and his men before they reclined at the table. This must have been an embarrassing situation, since foot washing was a customary part of hospitality in the ancient Near East, but it was obvious that if the disciples were fighting for a prominent place, none of them would volunteer to be the servant of all. Their embarrassment became acute when Jesus arose from supper, laid aside his garments, tied a towel around Himself, and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with a towel. Many would interpret this lesson as this: if Jesus can serve then they should as well. But I would interpret the more important lesson in this classroom as *being me* through serving. Jesus had no concern to jockey for approval and position at the head of the table. He did not demand that He be lifted up and served as a means of feeling better about His personal identity. Instead, He chose to serve in complete freedom. He did not let what they thought affect His choice to serve at all.

Serving under the freedom of *being me* releases a person to truly focus on the needs of others and removes all concern for how I appear in the process. Choosing to serve and being treated as a servant are two different concepts. I can select to serve and still nurture my self-concept in the process. Being treated as a servant can be a blow to who I am in my own eyes. It can damage a life that is not centered and congruent. That is why self-sacrificial servanthood is the high road of *being me*. It is operated under complete freedom and originates out of a centered God-sensing relationship with our Creator.

⁹⁵ Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* , 13-21. These are adapted from Crabb's three ingredients of a healing community.

Here is the paradox – finding myself through God-sensing and people-loving results in others focus instead of a self-centeredness. If it truly has originated from the center and is operating away from the circumference then the issue of *being me* has been resolved. When it has been settled, I live my life in the complete awareness of other people’s needs and give of myself to the service of people. Fears fade away and freedom to serve makes its home in our hearts.

Summary of the Thesis

The chorus of song, “Who Are You”⁹⁶, that introduces the television hit *CSI*, exemplifies the innate drive of all humanity. We all seek answers to a question that has been answered through a variety of solutions. M. Scott Peck argues that we are all born narcissists and that learning to grow out of our narcissism is at the heart of the spiritual journey.⁹⁷ Yet the drive to find out who we are is really a drive instilled in us by God. It is a drive that leaves narcissism behind and culminates in a life rediscovered through God-sensing and serving others. This drive is the ultimate quest of our spiritual lives. It is not just a narcissistic quest that ends up in a self-centered pleasure of *enjoying me*. The quest to find ourselves and know ourselves ultimately leads to God Himself and that was His plan all along. God-sensing begins the discovery of *being me* through life perception that includes centering in on God and life awareness. When I practice God-sensing, my life takes on a congruent wholeness and dissipates all forms of the imposter. God-sensing was never meant to be a sensory-high to be enjoyed by the self alone. It was meant

⁹⁶ “Who Are You” was originally recorded by The Who in 1977 and released in 1978. The single was from the album *Who Are You* recorded under the Poldor and MCA labels, written by Peter Townshend and produced by Glyn Johns.

⁹⁷ M. Scott Peck, *A World Waiting to Be Born: Civility Rediscovered* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 108, 112.

to be placed into the test tank of loving relationships. Within the context of relational interaction, *being me* is confronted, shaped, and finally released into a life of service and freedom. *Being me* makes *being us* a difference maker in our society. Somehow we have missed the boat in the church and in our fervor to become Christ-like and to develop disciples we have lost God's original intention for each of us to discover and live who He has created us to be. The greatest gift we can give our world is *being me* within the context of *being us*.

“Now with God’s help I shall become myself (*being me*).”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ *Brainy Quotes*, (accessed). Quotation from philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. Emphasis (italics) mine.

Section 4: The Project

I have selected a project that would provide a solution to the problems presented in this thesis in the writing of a book that will be prepared for publishing. Now I recognize and realize that while this is not a novel or unique approach to this subject, I believe that my writing style will carry a unique and different address to the topic. The book I write will use personal stories and illustrations from my life experience to create a connection with the reader. That connection is meant to draw vivid mental pictures of issues covered in the actual thesis to guide the reader into the resolutions of *being me* through God-sensing and people-loving. The difference with my written book is that it will remove the controls of my self-worth from my hands and place them into a mystical relationship with an Almighty God. It is meant to draw from both a religious and non-religious reader because I firmly believe that *being me* is an inner desire for all human beings. Touching on this subject will draw attention from any reader because of that common need.

This is not a “How-to” book that outlines a step-by-step process to *being me*, since this has been done scores of times by a myriad of authors. Instead, I plan to draw the direct connection between our desire of *being me* and our spiritual journey. *Being me* is our spiritual journey that has been created by God to draw us to a relationship with Him that is not centered on what I do or my achievements or my status or what others think. Instead of a step-by-step process I will point the pathway of *being me* through my personal story and experiences. *Being me* has been the struggle of my life and this book would be the culmination of a journey that I desire to share with others. I have chosen this method because I believe that stories and experiences connect more effectively than theory or philosophical works that can alienate their

aders or psychological systems or religious teachings imposed upon my control. Religion has walked down that path, leaving formulas as the guiding post to a relationship with God. Instead, I will leave the doorway wide open for the reader to interpret that pathway for themselves through solitude and awareness.

I will be working with an editor that will assist me in preparing the book for a publisher through a query letter, marketing strategy and book proposal. These are all first time experiences for me that will teach me the process of publishing and how to work with a book agent. While I may not be able to get the book published in time for graduation, I will be still pursuing that as a personal goal even if it stretches beyond that date.

Other solutions that I might seek in the future include formulating a Para-church ministry, website, classes, and/or seminars that could further provide helps for people in life and at the church. While my desire is to help others and my personal path is to be practical and pragmatic, the danger is to become just another self-help ministry, which again, places controls for change within my own hands. Instead, this help should focus more on the teachings of discovery that open the pathway to freedom and variety of applications.

Section 5: Project Specification

Goals and Strategies

My goal is to open up a whole new world of possibility that *being me* is a spiritual journey that is common to all human beings. That goal includes presenting to readers the roads of God-sensing and people-loving as ways to actually experience *being me*. My strategy is not to write a how-to book which has been done many times. Instead, my strategy is first to touch the human heart using my personal struggles with identity on the problem of self-worth that all people have experienced. I will then paint the picture of how I traveled down the numerous pathways of seeking answers without getting final solutions. Finally, I want to introduce God's journey designed for people than can be identified as *being me*. The discovery of *being me* will be addressed through the two converging paths by honestly sharing what religious and non-religious people are thinking concerning spiritual living, religion, and the journey for self-worth. Each chapter will focus on an aspect of the thesis that is meant to cause the reader to stop and think about the main idea being presented. My goal is to show that the key to a fulfilled spiritual journey is that of *being me*.

I want to guide my readers into solutions that will change their lives and their outlook on personal worth. My desire is to pursue the publishing of this work before graduation. Ultimately my goal would be that any of these people could read this book and benefit from its message: my Mormon boss, my former worship leader, my Marine son, my non-religious work associate, and my wife. I will measure the success of this project based upon how potential readers may change their perception of how *being me* is tied to spiritual formation and the final affects it may have upon particular lifestyles and church pragmatism.

audience

The project will be directed at both Christians and non-Christians who share one common struggle in life – that of the search for personal identity and worth. The age group of that audience addressed will be adult in nature and not necessarily educated in its cultural setting. The commonality of the struggle with the topic crosses all lines of religious beliefs from the religious to the non-religious. The writing style will attempt to not use religious terms and “insider” Christian family jargon.

Project Scope and Content

My biggest challenge will be effectively addressing both the religious and non-religious with my writing. It is not a task that is impossible especially when a common nerve is addressed. For example, *The Purpose Driven Life* and *Blue Like Jazz* were such books that were widely read by both religious and non-religious. The challenge will be in selecting the structure to be logical and yet creative in format. The stories must be relevant and selected to paint effective pictures and must be presented in a way that can be grasped by people despite their beliefs. I will write mostly from a personal chronicle of my life (first person) but will occasionally divert into third person to draw conclusions.

The book will be organized into 13 chapters (along with an introduction and conclusion) of approximately 10 pages apiece. The chapters are not meant to be too long to accommodate the somewhat shorter attention span of readers today. Each chapter will stand by itself in presentation and creative content yet also follow the format of the thesis. Chapters 1 through 5 will chronicle the common problems that we all face within two major arenas – rejection and relationships. Each of these areas represents the intense struggle we face on the journey of *being me*. We tend to fear that when the true me is exposed the real me may be discarded. Fear drives

into wearing masks to cover up ourselves and to pattern ourselves to be like others. We also place our fear with a busy lifestyle that pushes that fear into that background and the result is a life that is compartmentalized and incongruent. What we do in life does not necessarily match who we really are. Finally we base our acceptance on how we perform in life and we live in a world filled with comparison. Another problem lies in how we handle our personal relationships with God, with me, and with others. When pleasing others dominates our thinking and living, we become dysfunctional and *being me* gets lost in the mix.

Chapter 6 and 7 will explore some of the various solutions we have sought in this quest for *being me*. For many of us that journey ultimately takes us through the church and its unique culture. Even through spiritual eyes and spiritual teachings we can misunderstand God's intentions and replace them with formulas and performing duties in the church. Other solutions come from various disciplines and teachings in our society that assist in knowing ourselves but do not ultimately provide answers that satisfy.

Finally, Chapters 8-13 explain the pathway to *being me* through two distinct roads in our journey: the road of God-sensing and the road of people-loving. *Being me* will be painted as our primary spiritual journey that first can be reached through God-sensing. Sensing God in my life is a form of experiencing His true love and approval of me. He formed me, loves me, is present with me and is dynamically active in every moment of my existence. His DNA is stamped on me and His fingerprints are all over the details of my life. *Being me* is finally lived out through our relationships and how we respond in love and in serving others. Without the think tank of relationships *being me* is only a thought or concept. Relationships define, shape, and mold us like a potter with clay.

udget

The financial costs for the completion of this project will center mostly upon the editing and publication process. I have chosen an editor that will also work with me in the preparation of the book for a publisher. He will also be editing my thesis, so he will have knowledge of those needs as a backdrop to the book. These are the projected costs under those goals:

Editing of the book, marketing research, and query letter	\$1000
Book proposal for the publisher	\$200

My plan before graduation (if time permits) is to at least get to the step of the book proposal upon which I will attempt to include these aspects with this paper: Marketing research, query letter, and book proposal.

romotion

My plan is to work together with my editor and agent to put together an initial marketing strategy for the book to create the need for the publisher. Ultimately the marketing and promotion of the book would lie in the hands of the publisher. This aspect of the project possibly will not be completed at the time of graduation.

tandards of Publication

My editor will consult me on what is necessary in order to complete the book under the correct standards to publish. It will be formatted using the correct standards for the front and back matter and the final manuscript.

Action Plan

There are least five basic components to the completion of the book project: Book outline, Timeline, Writing, Editing, and Publishing. (Action Plan continues on next page.)

ook Outline

Chapter	Title	Personal Story	Thesis Point	Outline
Intro	Shortcuts	S - short cut trip from VA to OH	Being me as a journey	Overview
1	Being Uncool	S- my looks	Wearing masks as security	I. The Problem 1. Rejection a. Masks
2	Thumper	S - nervous leg	Busyness as a coverup for fear	b. Busyness
3	Two Face	S- ministry work without time with God	Incongruency in our lives for acceptance	c. Incongruent
4	Give Me the Thing	S- dream/Light/Sprint	Performance to be approved	d. Performance
5	Naked Drawings	S- drawing/problem people at church	Shielding relationships for self-protection	2. Relationships
6	Clone Wars	S - cloning me, Jesus clones	Seeking religious formulas	II. Other Solutions 1. Religion
7	Labels	S- I'm Jeff I Think	Other solutions, assessments, personality	2. Others
8	Blockhead	S- Michelangelo	Our primary journey to be me	III. The Thesis 1. Primary Journey
9	Nose Watching	S - my eyes/seeing, hearing -Shawna. 7' guy	Seeing, hearing, touching as God-sensing	2. Two Roads a. God Sensing
10	Looking Under Rocks	S - God's blessing story on my family - marriage	Tasting, smelling as God-sensing	
11	Geometric Integrity	S- Math/ circles and straight lines	Wholeness is the result of God-sensing	
12	Like Me Buttons	S - hiring and firing/relational at Sprint	Relational definition	b. People-Loving
13	Running Alongside	S - Running Track	Freedom to serve	
Conclus.	It Ain't Over Till It's Over	S-What does being me look like?	Summary of the entire book	3. Summary

Query Letter

ate

Mr. Editors Name
Magazine Title or Publishing Company
Street Address
City, ST 77777

Mr. Editors Name:

The Gallup organization released statistics that show over 50 million Americans are suffering from some form of mental illness that is directly related to a struggle for self-acceptance, and with over 1.2 million references to self-acceptance on the internet, it is evident that the struggle of *being me* is all-too-common. Yet “*being me* is designed by God to be humankind’s primary spiritual journey that can only be discovered through converging two life paths: God-sensing and people-loving.” My book, *Being Me*, is written for the burned-out business man meeting performance quotas, the college student trying to fit in with his dorm buddies, and the married couple going into debt to achieve status, because every human being has as a desire to be accepted for who they really are.

Being me is a lifelong struggle. Throughout my twenty-six years of ministry, I have served and experienced people from sixteen countries around the world, where some of the roads traveled grew cold and dark with the fear and anxiety of rejection. I have spent my life studying the spiritual life as I hold a Fine Arts degree from the University of Toledo, a Master of Divinity from Liberty Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation from George Fox Theological Seminary – all of which I graduated with honors. In all of these experiences, I would find myself wearing masks to hide my true self in a vain attempt to please everyone. This book shares insights from those struggles to realign myself back on to God’s primary journey. It is a personal narrative where readers can identify with their self-acceptance ailments, combating issues of *I am what I do* (performance), *I am what I have* (possessions), and *I am what other people think* (popularity).

In 146 pages, this book portrays all of the masks I wore, paralleling the images of Brennan Manning’s *Abba’s Child*. Readers who have been attracted to the insightful essays of Donald Miller in *Blue Like Jazz* along with the spiritual self books by M. Robert Mulholland Jr. will resonate with the journey of *Being Me*. What makes my book unique and different is the total vulnerability and openness in each personal experience and the first-hand accounts of the emotions that accompany each story.

Previously published books on spiritual formation and self-acceptance have shown you are interested in this timely topic. I invite you to consider this book proposal and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jeffrey L. Zakrzewski

Timeline

November 1-12	Book outline
November 13 – December 13	Writing the manuscript
December 14 – 31	Editing the manuscript/ Query letter/ Marketing strategy
January	Book proposal for the publisher
January 12	Edited copy submitted to advisor
February 9	Revised copy submitted
February	Obtain Literary Agent
March 30	Archival draft submitted to school

Writing

Over these weeks I have planned to take a number of days off from work in order to focus on the actual writing. Each week I will devote three complete days to writing the manuscript averaging two chapters per day. Each chapter will build on the thesis as the book will be composed of the thesis outline. The voice will be mostly in first person using personal stories and related visual connections. I will use endnotes instead of footnotes in order to retain the integrity and flow of storytelling.

Editing

I will be working together with a professional editor to make revisions and appropriate edits. The editing will be in content, grammar, and format and geared toward preparation of the manuscript to present to a publisher. In addition to my work with a professional editor, I also

ill use the assistance of my thesis project advisor and my daughter for input on content and
thought development.

ublication

My editor will assist me in the creation of a query letter which will be used to present the
book thesis to the publisher as well as a marketing strategy. The strategy will help the publisher
understand the reader that will be targeted.

Section 6: Postscript

As I take a step back from this thesis and project, I have several noteworthy comments to make about the process itself and the completed project. The first overall observation is that I spent entirely too much time on the thesis statement and not enough time on the project. My original timeline was organized around completing the thesis in August and working on the book project from August through December. In actuality, I did not officially complete the thesis until November and have endeavored to complete the first draft of the book manuscript within a four week period of time. My thesis written statement ended up being around 120 to 130 pages of which my school advisor recommended a substantial editing job. I followed suit and edited about 10 pages from the written statement draft. As a result I have felt the pressure to write creatively the book while under a time crunch – a process not always conducive for quality or enjoyable work.

Concerning the book project itself, my endeavor to mix creativity with clarity was a constant struggle. My goal was to use personal stories along with other visuals to hit home on a number of points about my personal journey and thesis solution. The stories and visuals became the connecting point to personalize obscure truths. I found it difficult to write in the first person and then switch to the third person in tenses. The selection process of what material to use or not use was a constant tension and I also found myself in the manuscript repeating myself with the writing saying the same thing over and over different ways.

As far as the process for publishing, the whole journey has been one that I have sought for years as a personal goal. To finally get to this place has been a triumph for me and a blessing to hold on to. Whether a publisher picks up the book or not is not vital to this book being a success to me. The book is already a success because it serves as a culmination of my life story

pursuit of *being me*. Meanwhile the preparation of the book to present to a publisher has been a learning process that has shown me the value of having an agent to assist and an editor to clean up my messes. In regards to my school advisor, I do not believe that I sought enough input from him along the way in the book writing journey. The reasoning could possibly be in the time crunch I felt and the self-imposed deadlines I was endeavoring to keep or even my insecurity.

Another approach to the book writing would have been to write from a more theological perspective using footnoting and a more structured presentation. I would still be interested in coming back and revisiting this material in a book manuscript that would follow such a format. I am also continuing to think about utilizing other mediums such as web sites, seminars, and workbooks as a follow up to what I have started. Now I realize that generally for most authors what I have done is somewhat backward. Most authors would develop the material for seminars and then out of the seminar write a book using that material. I have also developed an interest in pursuing a historical perspective on this topic which would involve a whole different level of research and study of the writings and theology of the great men and women of the past.

The key to the effectiveness of the book will be when I have key people from different walks of life read it and then interact with it. I will plan to do that upon completion of the manuscript and if I am able to obtain their commitment to read and comment on the material before this thesis is complete, I will include their interactions.

Finally, I believe that this whole process of both writing the thesis and the book project has in and of itself been a test to the extreme of my own self-differentiation of *being me*. This process has laid bare my own personhood and has served as an opportunity to reflect on my life and where I am in that present journey. With every editing and revision by my readers and editors, I have been tempted to revert back to that performance response looking for acceptance

and approval and dreading rejection. I realize that ultimately I will be judged and graded upon my performance but to me the heights of success lie in my own self-discovery and the resulting peace that has come upon my life.

I will never look at life the same.

I will never look at myself the same.

I am finally at peace with *being me*.

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Addendum

BEING ME

THE HEART OF A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

JEFFRY L. ZAKRZEWSKI

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To

Julie,

Jeffry, and Janelle.

Thank you for loving and accepting

the real me.

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PREFACE

When I was born, I became Jeffry Zakrzewski, kicking and screaming the whole way.

The doctor laid me naked upon a cold steel slab with lights surrounding me, hurting me. I was naked; totally naked for the whole world to see. The room's chill was deathly, and the doctor slapped me on the behind as a welcome into a world of pain. When I was introduced to my mother (since my father was in the waiting room), I was the baby boy who kept putting his hands into his mouth and then urinated in the incubator.

As I was curled in a small ball, I wondered, "Who was protecting me?" I was laid bare without any pretense or embarrassment with my manhood exposed and my disapproval loudly heard by the nurses and doctors. Then my parents had me circumcised without my consent. Apparently they didn't like the way I looked and right away I felt the pressure to conform to the other little baby boys. Pressure to conform is a lot to handle for a newborn infant who is a rookie to this fitting-in-game.

Not only was my entrance noisy and shocking but I also had to face the unbelievable future life of a name like Jeffry. Can you believe my mother misspelled my name on the birth certificate as Jeffry? It's Jeffrey, mother! And then I discovered that my middle name was Lynn—that kind of guys name was that! What happened to something strong like Brock or Max or Ronson? And then the final straw was my last name—Zakrzewski. Zak-whose-ski?! Was this some kind of cruel joke? Didn't they think of all of the anxiety I would face explaining how to say my name? I would have to pick out a wife who is former spelling bee champion or linguistic expert to live with that last name. It's no wonder my first girl friend, Betty Nutter, picked a guy with the same last name of Nutter to marry. What are the chances of me finding a girl with the last name of Zakrzewski?

After my birthday, it's no wonder that I spent the rest of my life running from myself. I could leave that place covering up my nakedness with clothes of acceptance and approval. Any innocence left intact from my entrance into this world was simply the beginning of my life's journey. A journey to return to my being naked—my *being me*.

INTRODUCTION:

“Shortcuts”

During my seminary days in Virginia, my wife and I along with our young children faced the impossible task of making an extensive trip together to Ohio within the confines of a small Nissan. The impossibility of the car journey rested upon the challenge of a 550 mile jaunt through and around mountains coupled with the impossibility of traveling with two preschool children. This formidable task was conducted by our family at least twice a year because Julie and I desired for our son and daughter to grow up knowing their grandparents – something we as parents never experienced ourselves. Ultimately the task was worth all the crying, the fighting, the occasional food fight, car sickness, travel games, and myriad of bathroom breaks so our children could know Grandma and Grandpa.

On our next planned vacation, we started the drive into the mountains and quickly discovered that my “shortcut” was a big mistake. The two-lane road twisted through the narrow passes rivaling a roller coaster ride at Disneyland causing a tremendous amount of anxiety. With each swerving turn I could feel my heartbeat faster and my hands grip tighter on the wheel. I was stuck on a road of battling tension, danger, and fear as the perspiration appeared on my forehead and palms. When it was all said and done, the journey took much longer than the extended way around and with the restless kids in the backseat and a nervous passenger next to me it didn’t make it any easier...so, so much for shortcuts.

My life journey has been filled with similar circumstances – destinations blocked by mountains and stifling shortcut passes – all keeping me from reaching the goal of *being me*. *Being me* is simply defined as living my true self as God intended without fear of rejection or

iding behind masks of approval. Fear and masks were my shortcut attempts through a mountain pass unattainable.

Being me as a journey seems rather paradoxical. After all, we are who we are and nothing can alter that, right? Yet as I grew up in a good home, *being me* always had false shortcuts that created fear. It involved being a person who had to wear a mask and accept certain personal and social boundaries as a shortcut to the journey. Those shortcuts were imposed upon me in the form of expectations by my family, my church and by a culture that anxiously looked at me as a prime suspect to mold and shape. I didn't like myself and would be willing to follow anyone or anything in order to experience approval. Being someone else seemed more convenient and less confrontational and appeared to match the meaning behind my first name, Jeffery – peacemaker. To me a peacemaker was not a person who had the ability to stand strong but one who gave in to the crowd in order to keep the peace. Being someone else maintained the peace and avoided conflict. In that sense I had become a pseudo-peacemaker as a shortcut to being someone else. That road of peace had a false security behind it.

If we are who we are then why was I so confused as to who that real self was? I adopted peacemaker role not out of strength for who I was but out of a desire to be accepted as someone else. The clarity of *being me* was always clouded by choosing roles to play that were shortcuts of acceptance. I then progressed on my journey of choosing the person everyone decided I should be. Was I really a pastor or did I just assume the role that everyone expected out of me? Was I really outgoing or was that a chosen personality that traveled quicker down the success road in the eyes of others? Was my melancholy nature an albatross that needed to be suppressed and replaced with optimism and positive thinking? Or was I just a sinner in need of a renovation by a

avior? The road seemed confusing and full of obstacles. The further down the road of life I traveled the more bewildered I became as to who I really was.

What if my journey to *being me* was meant to be my primary spiritual journey? The prospect of *being me*, as related to anything spiritual, never seemed like a viable connection for most of my life. Religion and *being me* in fact seemed to collide on the altar of repentance and doing good deeds for approval. I was lost in a world of sacrifice and becoming Christ-like and blending into a homogeneous Christian community. *Being me* was simply being the Christian everyone else decided I should be. That was what being a good Christian and church member were all about – becoming lost in Jesus and lost in a community.

My journey through the church set standards of expectations that seemed to suppress me as a person and replace me with a Christian persona. On top of that I was even called a Christian or “little Christ” and I was expected to pattern my life after Jesus. I would talk as He talked, control my emotions as He did, make the right choices and give up all of my independence to serve others. I was to be kind and merciful even when I didn’t feel like it. I would be joyful like Jesus in the midst of trouble even when it felt false. I was to release control of my personhood to the control of God in my life and that was considered spiritual. I was to replace my bad deeds with good deeds – in other words I was to be busy doing work at the church as a form of ministry. If my primary spiritual journey was that of *being me* then why was the church teaching me to deny myself and be like Christ instead? My journey was getting lost in the shortcuts of spiritual jargon and good works. The more I would do, the more others thought about me as that wonderful good Christian guy. I would be given titles and responsibilities based upon what people thought about my Christian image. And then I had to live up to the pressures of maintaining that image.

Outside of the church my culture was pressuring me to change my appearance, clothing and even assume the status of different titles. Having money and things gave prestige and created once again images of what others thought were successful and approved. I chose shortcut roads to gain the approval of others at work, school, and even at play. Once again the constant pressure of wearing the right labels or appearing with the latest hairstyle or body build became a road of fear to live up to. As I chose shortcut after shortcut the fear to maintain overwhelmed me into a world of confusion. I no longer knew who I was and lived a chameleon life of blending in.

Somehow resolving *being me* and being what others wanted constantly created conflicting roads toward the same destination. The problem was that I was consistently taking the shortcut thinking it would get me there quicker and easier. The result was fear of rejection and struggles with relationships. Both proved that my shortcut had not been a shortcut at all.

This book is about making choices – choosing either the shortcut through mountains or the long road around mountains. It's about a road-trip discovery of *being me* – a discovery that only comes about when I take the long journey.

PART 1: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER ONE

“Being Uncool”

Growing up I always underestimated the influence society had upon my identity, overlooking the spiritual journey that God intended for me. Within America, there are contrasting perceptions of cool versus uncool. These contrasts have saturated 21st century American life, crossing over into church culture, having a profound effect on how we view ourselves. They are the philosophies of “I am what I do” (performance), “I am what I have” (possessions), and “I am what others think” (popularity).¹ These viewpoints have affected my thinking about myself for most of my life and have controlled the majority of my decision-making. They boxed me into a corner of frustration living by these ever-changing rules and expectations of cool and uncool.

Growing up I always felt my scourge in life was being born with curly red hair that rebelliously followed its own path and freckles that dotted the landscape of my face and arms like some kind of disease or plague. The curse of the curly red hair dominated my outlook as an elementary school boy and totally embarrassed me as a teenager. My red hair made me different but I was not interested in being different. Different was weird and geeky. Instead I wanted to be that kid who was cool and fashionable like Robert Redford, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood, or Paul Newman. Who didn’t want to be Clint with his magnum staring down people saying “Go ahead make my day” or Redford as the handsome mustached Sundance Kid or Newman’s anti-establishment *Cool Hand Luke*? Others thought they were cool and so did I. I wanted to be what others thought was cool.

In fifth-grade, I would walk home from school while neighborhood bullies sought me out calling me “Red.” I hated that name so much, it would make me angry and embarrassed at the

me time. Being such a strong secure boy, I chose to run home in tears. It was impossible to be Red” and still be cool.

You think that by the time I became a teenager, I would have sorted out this issue but it only got worse. In the 1960s, the cool look was the Beatles hairstyle; straight hair hanging down over your forehead. Once, I tried to be that kind of cool by using hair straightener. To get that Beatles-do, I applied the product and then wore some of my mother’s nylons over my head while slept at night. The smelly ingredients of the straightener, combined with my mother’s nylons over my head, produced a Beatles effect—sort of. One night my mother walked into my bedroom when the lights were out and thought I was a robber breaking in to steal all her valuables. I guess the nylon scared her and my hair did look flat and unnatural but luckily the Beatles hairstyle didn’t last long.

On one warm summer day my mother went out on her usual walk through the neighborhood. While she was gone my brother decided to give me a little trim in our bedroom. As I sat by the mirror my brother sheepishly took the electric scissors and began trimming. He made a mistake that he could not repair and sweat began to bead on his forehead as he went back and forth between the two sides of my head to somehow balance the look. Meanwhile my younger sister was at that giggly excited stage. She assumed her position on the bed to watch and continuously giggled and laughed throughout the cutting ordeal. Finally the aggravation overtook my brother and in total frustration he shouted, “Oh heck with it!” Then with complete abandon he shaved my head totally bald! When my mother came home, that five-foot dynamo English woman took the belt and whipped my brother on the backside and then threatened “Wait until our father gets home.” I threw on my hat (even though it now fell over my ears) and took the rash out only to have the neighbor ask about my haircut. Great, now the whole world knows! I

assumed a position on the couch covering my head with pillows when my father arrived home from work. As he walked in my mother shouted, “Look what your son did to Jeff”. I pulled back the pillows and revealed my head in all its baldness to my dad, and he proceeded to laugh hysterically. Being bald was not yet cool in society so it didn’t turn out to be a viable alternative to my red curly hair. But in some small sense justice had been done.

I figured that with all my hair dilemmas I needed some guidance and counsel on what to do to be cool. Enter my sister. I always valued the opinions of my sister and her creativity when it came to experimenting on me. She finally convinced me that the answer to my hair dilemma was simply to replace my curse with a hair piece that was cool and in. So I purchased a wig and wore it my entire senior year in high school. I thought it was really working because so many students all of a sudden became very kind to me. Then I realized that my classmates were only nice to me because they thought I was a cancer victim. You see, most kids undergoing chemotherapy would lose their hair and wear wigs. I wore mine for a whole different disease – self-acceptance. But pity is not the same as being cool.

My sister’s influence continued right after high school as well. It was the early to mid 1970s when the afro became very popular. She convinced me to use a pick and grow out a fro—a huge bright red fro. Needless to say I was one cool dude. In fact, a friend of mine (who was riding in a car seated behind me) actually took a small club and smacked me on the head because he thought it would just bounce off my hair. It didn’t bounce and the resounding thud left more than a mark. The world’s concept of what my hair should look like became my road to acceptance. I felt rejected for how I looked so the only path to approval was to conform to the world’s perceptions of good looks and coolness.

After all my effort on my impossible hair I decided to tackle the white freckled skin.

White skin and freckles were not the fad as a teenager either. In all the commercials on television and in the magazines the California guy and girl had straight blond hair with tanned skin, so I spent an entire summer outside painting houses and working as a landscaper wearing nothing but shorts. By the end of the summer, whatever reddish tan I did have diminished within a few short weeks and faded away with all hopes of my coolness, so I ventured into the tanning machine. The results were predictable. My skin turned into bright red hot sunburn instead of a cool bronze. Then, I discovered that peeling skin had an adverse affect on attracting girls. On television I saw the next answer to problems—instant tanner in a bottle. All I had to do was smooth it on at night and “presto” I would wake up the next day with a tan. Except in my case my bronze tan assumed the color of a nice bright orange. I guess if you liked fruit, then I was your man.

When I was thirteen I began to notice some skin problems on my hands. They started to crack and peel causing not only pain but embarrassment. So again, I went to my neighborhood skin doctor and began years of treatments, skin creams, shots, and skin therapy. Even this last year I underwent pre-cancer treatment on my face that left me looking like I had a really bad sunlamp burn for over four weeks. The impressions and responses of people I worked with in sales resulted in a fear of total rejection. Every day I felt people were thinking, “Who is this masked man?” and “please don’t touch me!” I could only imagine what it must have felt like to be a leper and shunned from society for their disease. Coolness was not found in what other people thought.

The essence of cool was purchasing my very first new car. My father gave me a 1960 Chevy for graduation and within a few months the transmission fell out. Then I picked up a 1965 Ford but it had multiple mechanical problems and the inside roof kept popping down on the

passengers. It was 1971, I was only 18 years old and I wanted to move away from the problems of the Chevy and Ford into a cool car so I approached my dad who reluctantly co-signed for me to purchase my dream car – a 1974 newly released red Chevy Camaro. I had told God that if I could get this car that I would fill it up with people to take to church. With just two seats I suppose I had to be selective about who I brought. The car was low to the ground and sporty with bucket seats, and surely would be a girl magnet. I envisioned the girls lining up outside my car for a spin with me. Steve McQueen was described as the essence of cool and when he drove that sporty Mustang in the movies, all the guys wanted to be like him.² And now my Camaro could be the tool that would give me McQueen's coolness. In the front seat we were Steve McQueen and Jeff McZakrzewski living as two peas in the same pod of coolness. Then the monthly car bill began to arrive and I realized that coolness cost money. By the way, the lineup of girls was a nice fantasy that went unrealized. Where was the real McQueen when I really needed him?

Why did I place such pressure on myself to change my hair and my white skin and my car? It was because I felt that the way I looked was rejected by the standards of coolness in my private world. I did not fit into the mold of popular but assumed the role of different. And to me different was not something to embrace but to hide. Being different must be covered by a mask to be cool.

In the 1960s, I was a huge fan of comic books and all the superheroes. Whether it was Spiderman, Superman, Batman, or the Avengers, I admired their courage and superhero status. They were the essence of coolness. Once I even dressed as Thor and ran through the neighborhood with my axe and cape frightening all the girls. (I guess it's a good thing I shook off that Thor thing by the time I grew up). I loved to read those comic books because I could get

lost in the identities and stories of each superhero. They represented a part of me that desired to wear a coolness mask and adopt a cultic superhero status. In the comic books, each hero was actually only average and sometimes even below average without their costume and mask. After all, what girl would want to be with dull four-eyed Clark Kent or geeky Peter Parker? But thank God each one had their own phone booth where they could change immediately and escape their uncool commonality. Inside the privacy of that phone booth the coolness mask was donned and then they could perform superhero deeds like conquer bad guys, solve the world's problems and get the girl in the end. What a cool life!

In a very real sense you could say that these superheroes never really could be themselves. They wore masks when conquering bad guys, but also had to hide their superhuman status while dressed as ordinary members of society. As a superhero they could stand out and be different and admired for their good deeds. As a common member of society they could enjoy fitting in and being what is considered normal. I've struggled with that same type of conflict within my own person. On the one hand I want to stand out and be different and admired by others for what I do. On the other hand I want to fit in and be seen as a model of cool within my own culture. These two fight each other with *being me* getting lost in the mix.

In the Bible Saul is a study of a man living in a conflict of cool versus uncool.³ He was a nobody within a nobody tribe so there was little foundation for his personhood to be built upon anything else but what he possessed and controlled. He was thrust into the limelight from an uncool nobody to cool king. Based upon physical appearance and attributes, this "superhero" was constantly living on the edge of confrontation of cool versus uncool. He was a man out of balance, living a life of approval by others that helped to shape a self that was chameleon in nature and ever shifting. The last straw was when Saul went ahead and offered sacrifices in

Samuel's absence. Samuel was the priest and offering sacrifices was his job. When confronted with Samuel's absence King Saul responded in fear of what people would think and moved ahead to keep his cool controlled image alive. These events and relationship with Samuel revealed a hollow superhero.

You contrast Saul's obsession with coolness with David's comfortable skin of uncoolness. David had been picked by Samuel to be Saul's successor as king. Even though David was seen as the least of his tribe and was but a boy, he was not bothered by what others thought. The contrast between these two showed up on the battlefield with Goliath. Saul hid in fear as the cool king worried what failure might do to his image if he was defeated by this giant. David on the other hand went to battle comfortable in his identity and in victory turned uncool into cool.

As I grew up I adopted this line of superhero or Saul thinking only with a sophisticated facade. There still was the very real emotional part of me that felt rejected when others saw me for who I was. They were constantly trying to mold me to be cool by being more outgoing, more fashionable, more handsome, more athletic, and more successful. My red curly hair, slight build, and speckled white skin were in definite need of a makeover. So I put on my superhero masks and ran through life like Thor ready to conquer bad guys, solve the world's problems, and get the girl in the end. I attended seminars on how to be a better leader with confidence and learned how to wear my cool mask as a pastor with effectiveness. I dressed for success, drove the right car, and adopted a cool personality that would be suave and unfazed by problems. Meanwhile inside I was scared and fearful of being found out. Somehow, somebody at some time would pull off my cool mask and discover that I was never cool at all.

I have always been intrigued with the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible.⁴ As the first man and woman, they lived in complete relationship and intimacy with God. The Bible says that the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Their identity and personhood were centered in their garden experience with the Creator every day. They could be themselves without fear. God knew them and accepted them and they knew God. This intimate relationship was illustrated through their nakedness both physically and in their openness relating to God. But when the serpent introduced a whole new way of living their identity through status and position (‘you will be like God”), their world suddenly changed into one controlled by image and fear. They made “designer” clothes from the fig tree outlet and covered their nakedness almost as a symbol of their lost relational intimacy. Adam replied in fear to God: “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

People like me have been living in fear of rejection from God and others ever since. If God really knows me then He would not love me as I am. Instead as a God of judgment He would punish me. I have fashioned fig leaves to cover appropriate places in my character and personality. These fig leaves promote a pseudo-self that is a cover up for rejection. Now in me that is fear! Then I live among other people, they don’t love or accept me, leading to more fear of denunciation (if they only knew who I really was and what I was really thinking). I am constantly trying to conceal myself with fig leaves so that the real Jeff cannot be revealed.

Because of fear I end up feeling guilty and anxious about being found out that the coolness of what I am portraying is not necessarily the true me. This dividedness and turmoil leads to a depression that originates from denying my true self. But I have learned that the fig leaf of coolness can cover up fear and rejection. I play games with myself, with God, and with people in order to keep up this coolness image. I wear masks of performance, possessions, and

popularity to present an image that is not really me. Someday my ultimate fear may be realized – the coolness mask will come off and I will be revealed for the uncool self I really am – a red-haired, freckle faced, skinny person that just doesn't match up.

Hopefully then, like David, uncoolness will turn out to be cool after all.

CHAPTER TWO

“Thumper”

I’ve noticed a curious habit of mine that appears frequently during quiet moments of waiting. Whenever I am sitting still, my leg starts nervously jumping up and down, resembling the little rabbit from *Bambi* who introduced himself, “I’m thumpin’! That’s why they call me thumper.”⁵ That is an introduction that would rightly fit me.

Where does Thumper appear? He appears in my quiet time alone with God. In the morning, I gather my spiritual tools (my Bible, my devotional book, my journal) and then proceed to sit in silence before God. Within one minute, Thumper pays a visit and my mind begins to wander. The pressures of the day overtake my mind and the to-do list moves my legs and feet into faster activity. Finally I can’t take the quietness any longer and start working on reading my devotional. As I sit in spiritual quietness the leg twitching overtakes my piety as if to say, “Come on, let’s get to something more productive than this idle listening and waiting.”

I know that Thumper lives within me when the leg twitching moves me into leg walking. I’ve noticed that my desire to stay busy and fill in the non-productive moments with activity moves me into a brisk walk no matter where I go. My mother used to tell me that my father would always walk at a fast pace in front of her which of course made her feel like his slave. My father developed the habit after years of playing rounds of golf by himself where he would walk the course briskly and efficiently (he was a city league champion once). However, I experienced with him the frustrations of golfing behind novices, which provoked anger in him that few have seen. I can still hear the grumbling and see the scowl as we skipped many holes just to get around them. Somehow I have assumed that fatherly walk. I catch myself striding briskly with my head down and eyes glued to the floor as if I were following a specially marked pathway.

he blinders are on as my mind is in a flurry of activity and other people disappear because of my blinders. Many times I tend to walk right on by someone who greets me but I am so in “the mode” that I don’t hear or see anyone or anything. Thumper has succeeded.

Every day, as I work in the mall as the manager of a cellular phone store, I can feel the influence of Thumper. I begin to scurry from activity to activity trying to fit in all the tasks that need to be accomplished. I’m often in the middle of a duty when I’m interrupted by a customer. As I sit and listen to their problem, the leg twitching arises inside of me and I feel the impatience of time wasted. One morning I went down to work on my day off to take care of paperwork and learn how to use the new scanner. My time was short because I had set aside this day for working on this book. Just as I was about to complete my activities and leave, a customer walked up and asked me to help him with a phone issue. I felt annoyed and really did not want to assist him because I had a goal to accomplish and he was keeping me from it. I ended up helping him, but felt the pressure building inside me to leave and go home. After all, I could make better use of my time writing than hearing complaints or facing someone else’s problem.

Thumper also moves me into living by the following rule: “Never perform one thing at a time when you can do at least two.” Multi-tasking is Thumper’s answer to life’s challenges. The idea is that you can complete twice as many tasks in the same amount of time. For example, Thumper appears while listening to my wife recount all the events of her day filled with descriptive detail. I love my wife and I am interested in what is happening in her life but when she chats about her craft business or job, the leg twitch begins until finally I have to stand up and start working on the dishes or cleaning up while the conversation continues. (I must be desperate for activity to assume these tasks.) It’s as if sitting and listening were unproductive so I had to add an activity that could make me feel busy while listening. Of course I have learned to keep

my eyes fixed upon her as she talks while I am doing my activity; otherwise, she would feel that I was not paying attention. Then I could believe that I was accomplishing something as I listened; after all listening certainly cannot be an achievement all by itself.

I've often pondered the purpose of such meaningless activity. I think the real reason for assuming the role of Thumper is very simple. I cannot stand inactivity in my life. To sit still or be quiet is to be unproductive and wasteful. There are always dozens of projects to accomplish and people to see and books to read and places to go and...you get the picture. I am a very busy guy with very little time to accomplish all my daily goals, so I don't have time for idle dilly-dallying.

Filling my life with busyness has to have a purpose behind it. I've noticed my sister lives a similar type of life. She works a job and also serves as a caretaker for my elderly mother. That task alone is all consuming in its pressures every day to assist her with bills, doctor appointments, and simple household duties. My sister will voluntarily travel to my mother's (who is now 86 years old) house multiple times every day to help her, so that she can keep her out of a nursing home. My sister has filled her life with so much activity that she never has a moment to rest. Once I asked her why she never takes a break. She replied, "If I sit down and rest, I have to think and face myself and that scares me. If I stay busy enough I won't have to take the time to think about me and my life." *Thump, thump, thump.*

My sister spoke of what I today face myself. I have substituted busyness as a way to mask and ignore the fear. Then by cutting down on my sleep I have talked myself into believing that I can accomplish more with less rest. I am not alone in this. Three-fourths of all Americans say that what they need most in life is a good night of rest but yet they indicate that they do not have the time.⁶ Recent studies by NOVA have proven the opposite – that a good night of rest improves daily performance and memory.⁷ With four hours of sleep every night I am part of that

eeding rest statistic. Instead of changing my lifestyle to plan eight hours of sleep to be at peak performance, I dream other dreams. What would life be like if I did not have to sleep? Think of all the benefits of never having to rest with all the boxes I could check off, things I could accomplish and opportunities to multi-task. I would be in Thumper heaven.

Doctors have said that there is a distinct difference between the brains of men and women.⁸ Women's brains have more connectors between the two halves than men and tend to use their whole brain in life. This leads to multi-tasking and handling the pressures of several areas at once. Men have to switch back and forth between the two halves which explains why many days when I multi-task I sometimes appear with that deer-in-the-headlights look. (That's why men are truly half-wits.) Maybe my functionality has short-circuited somewhere between the two halves of my brain leading me to revert to the only physical response left—thumping.

We have a society that feeds the Thumper in all of us. I can go to McDonalds because it is "fast" food and yet grow impatient in line because it takes more than two minutes to get my food. I see advertisements for speed-reading classes and cell phones that allow me to take television and the Internet with me everywhere I go; all so I can cram more things into my day. Out here in the Pacific Northwest there is literally a Starbucks on every corner; ready and waiting to provide the caffeine to fuel my busy lifestyle. And what does it do for me, but leave me unsatisfied, seeking even more. There still is not enough time in the day to relieve me of my thumping.

Could it be that I assume this role as Thumper because there is a deeper fear that lies within me—the fear of facing my real self? When I am quiet and all alone, the realities of who I am rise to the surface and I don't always like or accept who that is. It is much easier and non-threatening to put on that disguise and thump my way into a life brimming with activity. When I

ace myself I realize that many times I am afraid. I ponder being 55 and think about my future, wondering what is in store for me. Fears of failure overtake me and all my faults and flaws rise to the surface like cream. I think of my friends from seminary who have churches they pastor and ministries to serve in, while I have been out of the church for five years and am currently working in sales. I have experienced first-hand the rejection of the church, so to stay busy is to push that fear of rejection down underneath the surface. It's as if the thumping is a type of therapy that physically pounds my fears under the surface, so I don't have to recognize or cope with them. In our world we are constantly pulled away from our innermost selves and encouraged to look for answers instead of listening to the questions. In many cases we are not so much pulled away as we have substituted busyness as an antidote to facing our true selves. We stay busy so that we can crowd out the unnecessary voices that haunt our inner soul.

Being alone and in solitude can bring about yet another fear—an intense fear of God Himself. My experience daily with God seems to be crowded out by the noise, so I only seem to experience Him in a controlled environment at church and or sometimes as I pray alone at home. Because of my unfamiliarity with God, I then live with an image of Him that sees God as the great Judge in the sky weighing our worth every day according to our deeds. What if all this talk about God's love for me personally were just words and not a reality? After all, God hasn't seemed to show up at work lately in the success of my business and His absence is curiously missing in my family life. I don't see him standing on every street corner and He certainly is not making an appearance in the faces of my customers. More and more as I assume the role of the thumper, He seems to take on the role of thunder. The God of thunder is ready to strike me with a lightning bolt to zap me back in line like one of Pavlov's rats. After all, this is a rat race and God must be sitting in heaven with his zapper taking delight in making sure I follow the maze

orrectly. It's no wonder I don't want to be alone with Him. He may be waiting with His zipper
nd then "fztzzzzt"—I painfully pay for my shortcomings. It's better to avoid that time with God
r else dance around the issues quickly and move on.

And then I think that I act as Thumper because my busyness and ceaseless activity is one
method of proving that I am acceptable to others and to God. I am motivated to live that perfect
ife in which everything is completed every day and accomplished as I have planned. That vision
f a utopia has driven me all my life. The more I accomplish the more people will like and
ppreciate me and the more I can like myself.

So through the years I have driven myself to reach unattainable goals that have left me
xisting in a world of constant frustration and fear. What if what I accomplished was not good
nough? What if I did not do enough? Or what if I am not good enough?

I have even pondered these questions on my road to accomplish degrees and write. This
book as a project could be an example of filling my life with even more activity and acceptance.
f the church thing didn't work then certainly pursuing a degree might. The countless hours of
taying busy doing papers, reading, and chatting have given me a whole new checklist of activity
o accomplish. I've contemplated what will take its place when I graduate and the classroom
ctivity ends. Meanwhile my time in solitude and silence continues to be invaded by Thumper.

The end result of it all has led to times of depression and the fight of fear. Then when I
ravel down that lonely road of depression and fear I come up with a great solution—I get busy.
The journey to *being me* has subsequently passed through the tunnel of ceaseless activity as a
form of approval. The more the action, the more I do not have to face the reality of myself. I'm
iving the dream that the true me is somehow existing in the approval of others for my hard work
ethic and list of accomplishments. That masked self, coupled with activity has painted a picture

f me that appears acceptable and commendable. But deep inside I know it is not the real me. So,
ne depression hits, the fears come, and then the solution returns once again. I delve into new
ctivities to attach to my worth and new ventures to consume my time.

Thump, thump, thump... Thumper lives on.

CHAPTER THREE

“Two-Face”

When I was a young kid I was fascinated with comic books. The best part about comic books was the evil villains who also possessed super powers that threatened good guys like Spider-Man, Superman, or Batman. The really good bad guys made you hate them while entertaining you at the same time. Harvey Two-Face was such a bad guy. After a criminal disfigures half of his face with acid, Harvey Dent, District Attorney of Gotham City and an ally of Batman, goes insane and becomes the crime boss Two-Face, who chooses to do either good or evil by flipping a coin. One side of his face was normal while the other was hideous.

I guess I liked comic books so much because the good characters and the bad characters were really not that much different. Each had troubled backgrounds and faced a unique tragedy that altered them into characters with superhuman powers. Each wore masks and donned outfits befitting a superhero or villain. The major difference between the two resided in the will to choose to use their powers for good or evil. I believe I liked reading these stories because I saw myself as capable of being either a superhero or a villain. I could choose a mask and present myself to others for good and they would love me. Being the good guy as a masked crusader does have its benefits; (think of the kiss Peter Parker got from Mary Jane Watson).

Two-Face influenced me to the extent that I created a false self in order to conceal my shortcomings and appear as someone acceptable. I then appeared as a divided self—all alone and still in community. If you flipped the coin, on one side was a church-faced Christian while on the other was a popular-faced person who wanted to fit in. In all piety I would enter the church with my religious face and worship and serve God. I would close my eyes during the music and pray with my head bowed and reverently fold my hands (this had a nice effect). I would say things

ke “God bless you” and “I’ll be praying for you” as I talked the religious talk with others. I those particular kinds of serving opportunities that helped create this special religious face and maintain the image. (It was also good for my résumé to have led music and taught children.) My persona at church helped me to create a certain respect and admiration for my “godly” life. It helped me to feel better about myself...at least when I was in church.

Outside of church I assumed the other half of my Two-Face; my attitude and approach to life were on the flip side of my church face. I left God at the door and picked a popular face as I went into the work force and hung out with my non-Christian friends. In those places I never talked about God or the church because that kind of conversation never seemed to make me very popular. I laughed at dirty jokes, looked at dirty magazines, attended R-rated movies, and was fascinated with the opposite sex. I had a girl friend that lived right by the church so many times we would park in the church parking lot at night and make out. And despite the fact that I was a Sunday School teacher and respected church attendee, I would hardly ever read my Bible or pray throughout the week. Now I did talk to God when I faced problems but I came to Him rather sheepishly trying to hold up my other face as I entered His presence—as if He didn’t know I was holding up a false face.

You are sort of an imposter when your profession and practice disagree.⁹ For me I continued to Two-Face my way through life all the way up until even the days that I pastored. In fact, I have worn this mask so well that I often have wondered which one is the real me- that church face or popular face. That pastor who walked down the aisle to meet and talk to people or who greeted people at the door on the way out of the church was a Two-Faced man. People liked the pastor face and I identified with that. When I was at home and I would receive a call from a church member that had a need, I would put on my church face and pray for them (even though I

was irritated that they interrupted me). My church face was that of a self-assured leader who also was a peacemaker. I would be the first to back down in a confrontation because choosing peace was the high road to spirituality—or so I thought.

The last two years I pastored at my last church, I tried to put away the church face and assume the real me. When I did, confrontation appeared. The people at my church didn't like the real me. "Turn the other way," they would say, "so we can see the church side of your face. That's the face we like." Once again I would feel the pains of rejection that I felt growing up. Others wanted me to be that face they expected whether it was the real me or not. This expectation continued to promote being Two-Faced in my practice as an adult. If I could justify being Two-Faced then I could return to an outward peace. The problem was the residing inward fear of discovery. Eventually the pressure to continue as Two-Face was too great so I subsequently resigned my church and retreated into another part of the country where all those expectations did not exist. I was seeking the peace of wanting to be myself that I had sought all of my life since youth. Maybe I could find it on the West coast.

To this day many of those former church members of mine still call me Pastor Jeff even though I have not pastored them for the last five years. (My mother still addresses me as Pastor Jeff on birthday cards or letters.) My identity was wrapped up in that face so much that when I left my last church I sought a position at another ministry for years in order to play that role once again. And why not, I was good at it and had earned another opportunity to play the pastor face. But God intervened and blocked all my efforts because He had other plans.

Currently I manage a cell phone store at the mall in the state of Washington. I engage strangers and convince them that they can't live without this communication device. The effort to fish for a sale and then close it requires being highly extroverted and competitive. The bottom

ne of my store is that I am judged based on the effectiveness of my popular face (or sales). After ten hours of sales battles and numbers, I go home and put on my real face—the one that sits in front of the television in silence and zones out from the world. When I am at home at night in my drained state I have a hard time even deciding what program to watch on television. I would be just as happy to flip a coin or let my wife make that choice. Wearing that sales face all day long can be extremely taxing not only physically but mentally. What if I am found out that I am not really that person at work who is outgoing with customers or pumps up my work associates? The ensuing fear pushes me to simply flip a coin because I am too exhausted to talk about it.

My observation is that I am not really living my life any differently than non-Christians.¹⁰ When I succumb to the pressures of societal conformity in lifestyle, my outside life ends up not always matching the inside reality. The pressures to match up cause undue changes and stress within me. That anxiety shows up in compartmentalization and incongruency. I pray and meet with God every day but I have chosen not to attend church very often. I could count on one hand the number of times I have attended this past year. I have preached and practiced giving to the church in my past, but have not given consistently for the last five years. I have taught over and over the importance of using your gifts for God but have laid my gifts aside. I pray for my Marine son in Iraq every day but still question my own faith. I have stood against divorce for most of my Christian life and yet was encouraging my son to walk away from his new wife this past year. It would appear that there's been a real disconnect between my beliefs and my actual living.

I have learned to separate my spiritual life from my secular life. Like a Two-Face chameleon I adapt to my surroundings because of my need for approval and acceptance. Compartmentalization is a resolution between the secular and sacred. My life that God had

meant to be whole is now lived in turmoil and misplaced integrity. Sometimes compartmentalization is a necessity in order to survive the pressures of living. I assume roles of father, brother, son or boss and then in my family wear hats of accountant, chef, garbage collector or lover. I'm not talking about that kind of compartmentalization but instead changing *being me* in order to fit the setting. When I change myself then my life is incongruent and I become Two-Face.

The tug of fitting in within the community standards of acceptance contributes to this dual lifestyle. I live one life at church on Sunday and a different life at work on Monday. My incongruent life is a symptom of a missing relationship that is real with God. Fear will motivate constant adaptations to my surroundings because acceptance is the key value I seek. In many circumstances church for me becomes a stopping point in the week to unload guilt for the way I live my life the other six days. I may not even have to talk to God on Sundays or worship Him from my heart. Just my presence is enough to placate God into another week of Two-Face living.

My greatest desire is to want to reveal who I really am while in church with others. But my fear is that if the truth is revealed others will not like or accept me. The fundamentalist church, where I became a Christian, practiced an altar call. This was the time when the Holy Spirit took the form of one of our deacons who roamed the aisles looking for unconverted prey. When he found a victim, he publically argued with that person to come up to the altar to receive Christ. Then immediately after this public decision, the person was asked to stand and face the congregation for a vote of approval in order to *let* them become a member. This ceremonial vote became the foundation of peer approval for acceptance into the church club atmosphere. As you began to live your life as a new club member you had to perform and live the right life in order to be approved as a good Christian. After that palm-sweating vote experience, the new Christian

would be instructed as to the correct clothing they were to wear to church next week. Women of course had to wear skirts and men a shirt with a tie. They were pressured to commit at that moment to working on the bus routes the next week. God just accepted them into His kingdom, just as they were, and then we, as a church, proceed to impose other conditions in order to be accepted by our church. Because of this disconnect at the time of their conversion, we have taught them to begin and live their Christian life as a Two-Face. God's grace was good enough to convert them but in order to stay approved you must learn to wear the Christian face well. That atmosphere contributed to the development of my Two-Face lifestyle.

As a pastor I was asked to be a part of various committees in which leadership was chosen. These nominating committees chose potential leaders using unusual screening methods. First and foremost as a screen they had to be a member of the church—that was even above being a Christian. Then, to be qualified, they had to be willing to serve for the time frame of the office in question. Why didn't we check out their personal life? Did it matter if they were congruent or Christ-like qualities? Have they grown in their life and what was their personal relationship with God like? As a result of such practices we would have men on the finance committee who never gave to the church and deacons whose wives never attended the church. Such practices within the church today feed the Two-Face mentality. It's okay and acceptable to live two different lives as long as the church work gets done and the monies come in. In a very real sense we have excused the reality of the self and check a collection of masks at the church doors in order to make the game even more effective. Our collection of Two-Faces, have assumed roles like crime bosses within a spiritual setting.

Sometimes I've thought of my life as compartmentalized, as one in which I put God in my pocket and then take Him out at the appropriate times. Church times are the most convenient

to bring God out into the open, but not during the week. I found myself reaching down deep into my pocket to pull out God during the tough times or times when I needed something. He's like a good luck charm to use when the stakes get high and my luck gets low. Sometimes, when my sales were down, I took out my God charm and prayed for sales. God didn't care much for my good-luck charm prayers that day. I didn't sell any phones.

I have often wondered if Jesus was a Two-Face. Here was the divine deity of God coming down to take on the form of man. He was God but He also was man – sort of a Two-face. Maybe the disciples thought, “Would He wear the face of a man today when He was eating or washing up in the morning or would He wear the face of God by feeding the thousands?” I wonder if they saw him as the same man. Is there any difference between Jesus and me? I put on my human face when I struggle with living life and face daily depression. I also put on my church face when it is convenient to pray for miracles and sing songs of praise. As I read His story from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, I become even more confused:

“Think of yourselves the way Christ thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of Himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death – and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth – even those long ago dead and buried – will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”¹¹

It seems that Jesus is teaching us by the example of His life to deny our true self and to take up a church face in order to be blessed by God. If that is true, then Christianity is suggesting becoming a Two-Face as a solution to my journey to be myself. After all Jesus assumed this role and I am supposed to pattern my life after His.

On the one hand I want to wear a church face but my motives come into question. I do so because I am selfish and insecure. I view my world as revolving around what makes me look good and acceptable to others. That church face is especially acceptable to Christians and usually respected by non-Christians. But it becomes my security blanket and distorts my true self and ignores its reality. I pray because others will think I'm spiritual. I give so people will think how generous I am. I give of my gifts to others so I will be noticed. If Jesus' motives were based on selfless giving and love for others it had to have come from a congruent life. But where did that life originate and what was it based on? Was that life unique to Him or is it a model for what I could become in my own life?

Somehow the journey to *being me* has to resolve the problem of being Two-Faced.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Give Me the Thing”

It was one of those nights as a kid that you dreaded the most. I was sick in bed feeling miserable with an extremely high temperature while my mother assumed the role of nurse in trying to take care of me. She brought in the cold washcloths and the aspirin and water and would turn out the lights and tell me to sleep. Trying to rest with a fever is like holding your breath underwater – I was soaked, breathless and delirious. Finally in desperation as she walked in I reached my hand up into the empty air and frantically shouted, “Give me the thing! Give me the thing!” I never did know what the “thing” was I wanted – it has remained a mystery for most of my lifetime, but I have a hint as to what it could have been.

Starting in grade school, I achieved high scores in all my classes and that work ethic transferred over into Junior High. I was inducted into the Honor Society because of my grades at Washington Junior High in Ohio. It was a proud moment for me as all the parents and students packed the auditorium waiting in anticipation. As we walked in the lights were out and all the inductees carried a glowing candle through the quiet auditorium until we arrived up on the stage and formally sat down. I could feel the excitement of the people watching (at least in my imagination) as the official ceremony began. One by one the principle would introduce an inductee and call them forward to receive their cherished honor pin. Since my name began with a ‘Z’ and there were about 30 of us on the stage, I had a little bit of a wait but I was excited to capture my big moment. This was my time to shine in front of other students and parents. Think of all the pats on the back I would get and the ensuing applause for my recognized accomplishments. Midway through the ceremony I heard a slight creaking noise and moments later...CRASH! My chair collapsed (with me following) on the floor. My face grew hot,

lustered in the packed auditorium. I reached for anything resembling a chair to sit in as all attention shifted to my vicinity. Then, before I truly realized what had happened, I heard the principle announce, “Jeffrey Zack... Zack... Zacher-zew-ski.” Even at my big moment he could not get my name right. “The thing” I had worked for in obtaining academic recognition was replaced by a picture of me lying red-faced on the floor. I had to replay that flop for weeks to students and teachers – not exactly the attention I was looking for.

There were other embarrassing school moments. My school career was extremely successful throughout the ensuing years in college and seminary – both of which I graduated with honors. I was driven to want “the thing” – to perform and reach the highest grades possible and be recognized and approved. Once I remember in an ancient Near-East history class preparing for the course final. Now if you know anything about ancient Near-East history, there is a lot of memorizing of strange names, places and dates. I had received A’s on my first two midterms and didn’t want to blow my grade for the class. So when the final test came it was during a week of about five other class exams. I stayed up all night before the exam and studied all the way up until walking in to the classroom. If there was a way for me to drive toward success I would spend all night seeking it if I had to. I marched into the classroom to take the final test proud of my hard work but still hoping I could remember all that I had crammed. The professor looked at me with bewildered eyes and said, “Why are you here? You aced the two midterms and are not required to take the final.” I was stunned but in my stubbornness to achieve I stayed anyway to take the test – I wasn’t going to waste a good night of studying. I wasn’t going to be embarrassed again!

In high school and college my silent motivator was my father. He had only attended school through the eighth grade when he had to leave to support his family because of the

Depression and the war. He was never the type that patted me on the back to tell me what a good job I was doing with my grades. In fact he never did. I have always felt that deep down inside I strove to excel academically because I just wanted him to be proud of my achievements.

One of the most unsatisfying moments of my life was when I graduated from college. I had obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Fine Art and a minor in History. After I graduated, I applied to the Fine Arts School with the intent of pursuing my art career. Gathering up all my prize creations during school, I took them in to be evaluated by the art experts. I waited patiently, tasting my future success in art. After reviewing my work, I was rejected by the school because my talent was not good enough and my world came crashing down. Then I went home, and after six years of school work, tests, studying and paying my own way; my dad said, "What good was all that...now what are you going to do?" Sadly I did not have an answer.

I picked myself up and immediately applied to a West coast revival ministry. Within weeks I left for California and my life's course was set in motion. I had a new vision to achieve, a new direction in which to perform, and a new "thing" to seek for approval.

My life mantra was simply this: work hard and people will like you. As I served in that parachurch ministry, we focused mostly on revival in churches on the West coast. I began as a singer and then quickly rose to become a team leader, handling details while traveling on the road. I was working very hard for approval.

Singing was a challenge. I could sing and perform but I did not have a natural ear for pitch and many times I would be slightly off key. My director would call into question my performance at countless rehearsals, and drew attention to my inadequacies in front of the group. I responded by working even harder, spending countless hours rehearsing and learning the parts on my own time.

My next job in that ministry was to schedule a revival team to visit a church for nightly meetings two weeks at a time. As Crusade Director, the scheduling of these crusades required great administrative planning, for it concerned: logistical planning, housing 20 people or more, bringing in motor homes, fifth-wheel trucks, and a tremendous amount of equipment. The title of "Crusade Director" made me feel good about myself. This "thing" was something others would respect and appreciate about me.

During this time the team left in their caravan for a trip ten hours to the north for their scheduled revival crusade. I had driven the leaders to the airport, said goodbye and retreated back to my apartment with my pregnant wife. The call I received later in the day shocked me as I was made aware that I had sent the entire team to that church one week early! Needless to say when I picked up my bosses later in the early evening on their return trip from the airport, I received an earful! My worth ethic was greatly shaken as my work ethic had failed. The end result was that I drove myself into more work and endless hours of striving to be accepted. My acceptance centered in my performance as a Crusade Director. If I performed well, I believed I was appreciated and well-liked. If I did not perform well I did not emotionally feel or experience worth.

After I graduated from seminary, I joined up with a team of school friends to become part of a church planting effort in Tampa, Florida. At the time seminary was all about successful church planting and the school experience was dotted with winning church planters who had performed up to the standards of school expectations. They now received their reward and were invited to come back to the school and speak to the students about all their accomplishments while the current students stood and applauded their success. "Do it like we did it" was the recurring message. We had decided as a team that that was our goal. We would become the

biggest church ever to be planted from our school. We had planned the process for several years before graduation with support raising meetings with strategy sessions and timelines and then the moving process began. We were excited to become that big success the school had in mind when they trained us. I could taste the invitation back to the seminary already – this was another “thing” worth pursuing.

As we moved to Florida the realities of the challenges of church planting set in. The new church was not going well, our team was not operating in sync, people were not attending and my savings account (three years of scrimping) became drained as I could not find suitable work to meet our family’s needs. Finally in defeat I decided to take up an offer from my former boss and move back to Virginia where the seminary was located and do some scheduling for my former university ministry. While working temporarily setting up concerts for singing groups we looked for another church to pastor and had to settle with living in a beat-up old missionary house across from the church. Not only was I rejected by the team for making this decision but I also had to face the thousands of questions thrown our way by those that previously sent us off in glory. Their looks pierced through my fragile identity. I was so low that I joined up with some old school buddies of mine still in the area where we officially formed the “Zero Club” complete with matching shirts, logos, and regular meetings. “The thing” had eluded me and I was beginning to think like a failure.

Over the next thirteen years I found myself serving as a pastor in four different churches and three states. Each church had a commonality: a dysfunctional past with a lack of direction and a history of splits and division – all of which resulted in stagnant growth. In each case Julie and I threw ourselves into the world of performance once again. We worked hard to achieve growth and experienced many wonderful blessings but inside I was still looking for “the thing” –

ats on the back for performing so well and the acceptance that coupled with it. Because church growth did not happen, I felt like a failure in each case. I understand now that I really was not a failure, but my emotions still rule the day. Needless to say, without the expected success, the todos I sought after did not come.

At my last church we had just completed a milestone victory of a \$750,000 renovation and remodeling of our facility. Its design for ministry was of my own creativity and became a possible innovative form of ministry in our community. We gutted out our traditional auditorium and renovated it to resemble a coffee shop complete with padded chairs in groups, end tables, coffee tables and an open café. I spoke from a couch with a cup of coffee on the coffee table and would occasionally interview real life stories as part of my talks.

Interactive discussions within the groups were incorporated in the service and people were free to get up and grab refreshments at any time. The purpose was to create an interactive relational atmosphere that focused on people over programs. The only piece left to the puzzle was the cooperation of the church attendees to own and live the vision. The church made the decision to become contemporary only because the previous founding pastor led them to that change just before he retired. Because he was so respected and admired by the church people they cooperated with the change but did not fully believe in it. When I became pastor I was told that this was the vision of the church and then proceeded to lead accordingly. I was constantly compared to that founding pastor in style and leadership. Eventually the grumbling and complaining led to one of the church members taking up a petition to force me into a meeting to 'address the issues.' He did so without the approval of the elders. The person calling the meeting had openly stated that the purpose of the meeting was to remove me from the church pastorate. But when the names grew on the list the elders decided not to back me but instead wanted to go

head with the meeting. During this time people stopped giving, attending, and inviting new people to attend. They wanted to change the style of the church and go back to what it was when the founding pastor originally led the church.

Six months after the grand opening and completion, I found myself resigning and moving cross country to the state of Washington. The people of the church had rejected me and the vision. Within weeks I was headed west driving a truck loaded with everything we owned but with no job or place to live in store for us. Since that cross-country trip five years ago, I have wrestled with my identity because for the previous 26 years my selfhood was attached at the hip to ministry and pastoring. I have been staring real life in the face – life without the titles and the status or the position.

Once again, “the thing” was elusive.

I have realized that the greatest temptation in my life is to seek approval through my performance. So what did God do? On the surface it looks like a cruel insidious joke but in reality it has proven His presence and work in my life. He placed me in Washington in the workforce as a cell phone store manager – an environment that is completely run on performance and numbers. Not only am I judged by my personal and store sales, but I must also evaluate and judge my team based on their selling performance. My store is run on a profit margin with quotas, goals and limits on staffing and hours, and it is all about juggling the bottom line to be in the black. I must confess that it disagrees with me, but I play the role of performance and still am learning to draw the line between the tension of *being me* and being what my boss wants me to be.

Sometimes deep inside I feel that whatever I do in life, there is a panel of judges waiting to flash up their scores and tell me how well I did. Then those scores are drawn up in comparison with others and the ones with the highest scores are the most valued and cherished and the ones

with the worst scores are rejected and seen as failures. I live for the days when Simon and Paula and Randy cheer me on and fear the day they tell me I am an incapable performer. My work ethic becomes my worth ethic.

There is no doubt that I live in a consumer oriented society built upon getting “the thing”. Within this society I am tempted to have substitute relationships with things. The longing of my heart has been interjected into products and performance. What I have lost is the interior person when people are depersonalized and viewed as things on the way to success.

The American fairy tale can be told as a story that begins with two major themes: more possessions mean more happiness and more production leads to more importance.¹² Within this commodity form of living, I have lost my own self. My being is in producing and having. I have achieved success if I have reached status in a job, make significant money, and am still climbing the ladder to bigger and better things. Every time I talk to another person who brags to me about their perfect job or who comes to the mall to spend excess fun money or who just bought a 72 inch flat screen television, I feel the tension within me of producing to be successful.

This commodity thinking is alive and well within the Christian church today as well. If my false self is compensated through the art of what I do, then our churches are measuring spiritual maturity and growth through performance measurements. These measurements of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, witnessing, serving at the church, and giving are the standard rule for spiritual maturity. I end up feeding my false self and creating a veneer Christian clone that is compared to others in a hierarchy of spiritual maturity. I take the Bible and turn it into formulas to achieve my American dream. All meaning is lost and I develop fodder for my head with little or no impact on my life. One out of three Christians still believes they will go to

heaven if they are good enough to earn a place there.¹³ Apparently grace dissipates and performance rules in my commodity world.¹⁴

Contributing to this performance based lifestyle is the American brand of individualism. Individualism draws lines between people to compare and measure the haves and the have-nots. Being my own person feeds the image of the false self in order to pursue status and wealth within the community. I line up and stare across at others at the starting line of life and vow to beat them to the finish line of success and performance achievement.

I can't overestimate the effect advertising and the media have in creating a false image as a standard for me to compete against. According to researchers, the average person is exposed to more than 3,600 commercial messages each day.¹⁵ This media sets the standards for me for what is considered beautiful – an impossible and unrealistic standard to measure against. From billboard advertising to the evening news, from movies to songs on the radio, I am, now more than ever before, confronted by the media at all turns. What was to be a marketplace of ideas, has been reduced to simply a marketplace that has replaced creativity and uniqueness with bottom lines, performance goals and comparisons.

“The thing” that I was seeking as a child and as an adult was very simply acceptance through my performance. This was my life motivation to succeed and perform well. It drove me in academics, athletics, ministry, and the work force. When I performed with excellence I was worth something, I was valuable, and I felt good about myself. When I failed, I beat myself up and lost any feelings of value.

School and the writing of this book have fallen into similar categories. As I write these words, I envision those that will read and critique it. I critique myself and place my value and worth on what you think of these words and my story. Even as I open up my life through

personal accounts, faults, and failures, I wonder how I will be judged by the readers. I realize that the process of writing includes all of these exercises in order to be completed...yet, I wonder if I am still seeking “the thing”.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Naked Drawings”

Undergraduate school at the University of Toledo was a wild trip. I stretched my four-year undergraduate degree into six long years of changing majors and directional uncertainty. When it was all said and done I finally finished with a Bachelors degree in Fine Art with an emphasis in drawing and acrylic painting. As a fine art major we did all of our studying in the basement of the Toledo Art Museum – considered one of the finest art museums in America.¹⁶ In some of my classes we would go upstairs into the galleries and draw from real sculptures or receive walking lectures through the halls. During my first trip as a student I walked up the stairs into a large gallery room filled with masterpieces and I was awestruck and inspired at the same time. In the Great Gallery I walked from wall to wall to soak in a 15’ tall Rubens, El Greco, or an intimate Rembrandt. I then weaved my way into the modern art galleries standing inches away from a swirling Van Gogh, linear Matisse or angry Pollack. Downstairs lay all the classrooms for learning how to become the great artist I aspired to be. These rooms were the vehicles for practicing and fine tuning my inherent skills that needed guidance, training and sharpening. It wasn’t enough to have artistic abilities brought into the classroom because I also need to know and learn human anatomy in order to understand how to draw the human body – like the greats upstairs. With that came my practice of drawing of live models.

In our first drawing class I sat with about 25 students on the outside of a group of tables arranged in a rectangular fashion with all of us facing toward the middle. In walked the teacher assisted by a female in a white robe. My drawing instructor spent some time talking through the preliminaries on how the class would be structured while her assistant sat quietly in the corner. All the time she was talking I looked at the girl in the white robe and wondered what her purpose

was. Then the time came for all of us to start drawing. The white robed female walked into the middle of all the tables and dropped her robe to reveal her naked body for all to see. She then climbed up on the table in the midst of our group and took a pose while we were expected to begin drawing.

With my puritan background, it was safe to say that I struggled to justify that what I was doing was morally okay. After all, this was not sex class but serious classroom teaching about how to draw the human anatomy. Yet, I was raised in a moral atmosphere where nakedness was a taboo subject, and it was never discussed by my parents or in church. I understood how the body worked sexually because of my sex education in junior high both in the classroom and in the locker room (I may have learned more from my friends). My parents never discussed the subject and secretly hoped I would learn from somewhere else so they would not have to discuss such awkwardness. Now I know they understood the process because there were five children in our family—they had to come from somewhere.

In order to depict a female body, it was necessary to study the precision of muscles and lines in movement that were all part of understanding design and presentation. I had varied subjects through the years from young women to senior-age women, young men, and even a nine-month pregnant lady. It was all about learning the differences in anatomical construction between the varied subjects and then drawing them with purposeful design and accuracy on paper. That all sounds justifiable enough, but the truth of the matter was I felt uncomfortable and awkward throughout the entire process.

I live in a culture that has established the moral code that nudity is taboo and that clothing is acceptable. This code may fluctuate between world mores (when I was in Africa I experienced somewhat different standards). But when it comes to being naked I tend to be quick to cover-up

the parts of my anatomy that I either don't want others to see or that I feel are necessary for modesty. In a very real sense, clothing shields me from revealing my true self. After all who would want to see that I have some weight around my stomach or that my chest may not be as fully developed as other men? My insecurity about my personal nakedness is compounded by the standards set by society today. Every time I go to the grocery store I have to endure looking at the display magazines near the checkout line. I see cover pages with perfect bodies for men and women and I begin to feel the urge to be that smiling model and have that faultless body. I instantly make a commitment at the checkout line to go on my crash diet and to renew my membership at the YMCA. Then I would go home and look at myself in the mirror and get depressed and proceed to celebrate my depression by eating delicious cheesecake. I guess that perfect body can wait.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to be Adam and Eve in the garden where nakedness was the norm and clothing stores were non-existent? There was no television as a guide for fashion or advertisements for flex machines or diet pills for weight loss. Brad and Angelina were not present in their latest film to make us feel even worse about our imperfect looks. The garden couple was two people totally naked and completely open and honest before one another. A nude Adam sitting on a rock with an unclothed Eve serving lunch was the norm. Absent were hair salons, body tanning, nail and tattoo parlors, leg shaving, body creams, perfumes, and jewelry stores. What do you think they talked about? "Hey, looking good today Eve". "Looks like you need to lose a little weight around the middle there, Adam – too many fruits and vegetables." As uncomfortable as that conversation would be to us today (unless you were a member of a nudist colony) the couple probably talked of the garden, the animals and their relationship with each other and their Creator. What else was there to talk about? It was an

environment with few comparisons (there were only two people), little pressure to conform (no media to set the standard), and a lack of fear of exposure (all they knew were each other unclothed). That kind of environment seems very surreal and other-worldly.

Being naked is usually very uncomfortable for me. Relegating nakedness to the shower is about as far as I want to go. Being naked relationally is equally uncomfortable and poses a real challenge to my personal world. As I travel on the journey to *being me* I know I haven't arrived because my relationships are so messed up. I struggle in my relationships with God, with myself, and with others.

I find myself carrying a loincloth with me into my time alone with God. My personal struggle to relate to a God that I cannot see, touch, or hear reveals itself in my desire to want to hide in the bushes whenever I'm around him. I sit in my office facing an empty chair and imagine God sitting in that chair. My head is stooped in defeat as I endeavor to communicate (after all I'm supposed to as a Christian). The conversation goes like this:

God: "How's it going today Jeff?"

Me: "I worship you today; You are the Almighty God."

God: "But how are you really doing?"

Me: "I sing your praises; I thank you for who You are".

God: "Is there something you want to tell me?"

Me: "Just that I've blown it again, please forgive me, I know I'm worthless."

God: "But you are my son, I have already forgiven you."

Me: "I know you'll punish me somehow so I promise to read my Bible and pray and go to church and..."

I have lost that garden nakedness and am afraid to be in the buff before God. I view God as the one holding a great standard above my head expecting me to fulfill it. Deep inside I know that I cannot hold up to that standard. When I come before God I try to brush off my real self and replace it with a saint who memorizes verses and is faithful to read and pray. Yet after such

spiritual exercises I still walk away covering my nakedness and living in fear of rejection. I grow weary of this game and life of living a standard I cannot keep.

This has been transferred to my relational nakedness before myself. I am scared because I am afraid I will not be received by God or other people. I have missed the point of intimacy and replaced it with clothes of insecurity. My relationship with myself is unsafe because it is based on concealment. Only when I feel safe with God will I feel safe with myself. Yet many times God's silence contributes to my insecurity. How can I be me when God continually wants me to become someone else? As I stand and look in the mirror after a shower I see all my imperfections. There are no clothes to hide or conceal them. I know what they are and where they are. Yet after putting on those clothes I forget all about them and inherit an attitude about myself that portrays one without imperfections. I pursue changing my appearance and try to be the one I admire the most. Without being naked before God, I cannot accept my own nakedness before myself. The ultimate ending is that I struggle with intimacy in my relationships with others.

Spencer Tunick, a photographer from New York City, has become famous for photographing thousands of naked people in public settings worldwide from London and Vienna to Buenos Aires and Buffalo.¹⁷ He set a record for naked photography with a photo of 18,000 people in the buff in Mexico City, and he recently photographed over 2,000 nude women on bicycles in Amsterdam. Tunick's goals are to get people to shed their inhibitions within nude group settings. I believe many of these people volunteer to be part of these photos because being known and accepted before others in the nude is as open as you can get. It is an innate drive that we all possess but in Tunick's case he creates scenarios for people to practice physical nakedness in the place of relational nakedness. Whereas I don't approve of Tunick's photo shoots, the need

for relational nudity is a huge challenge in our society and churches today. Fear of being unclothed relationally leads to a lack of intimacy and ultimate dysfunction. Conflict comes about when we begin bumping masks together or operating behind fig leaves of insecurity. Maybe we should set up a nude congregational shoot on a Sunday morning to begin the practice of open relational sharing – sort of like an object lesson. We could call it “Adam and Eve Sunday” or “The Garden Party.” Then again with me in the front as the pastor we better not.

Because of fear I end up feeling guilty and anxious about being discovered by others that the image I am portraying is not necessarily truly me. This dividedness and turmoil leads to a depression that originates from denying my true self. The truth is that I don’t want to be naked relationally before other people. Being naked relationally means that others will see me as I am – flabby personality and all. So by covering up and concealing secrets from my wife and friends, I become supersensitive to what they think and live in a world of comparison.

When I was pastoring my last church I quite frequently would attend pastor meetings where all the local pastors would gather and pray and plan events for the community. The conversation between such “differentiated” men and women focused on lining up all of our accomplishments in a sort of comparison game of whose church and activities were the greatest. All talk of problems and personal struggles were laid at the doorstep on the way into the conference. Being naked before other pastors was not the way of gaining respect and status, but propping up our church’s victories became the badge of honor to wear. We all made sure we were clothed appropriately and hid in the bushes when necessary. Then when we left we could once again drop our guard and let go of the fear of being found out. If this is what our godly pastors are like, then what are church people experiencing?

As a Christian I have become very sophisticated at comparing my spiritual journey with others. I view those who practice the “four horsemen” (pray, attend church, give, serve) as spiritual and acceptable. They are upheld as examples and promoted to levels of leadership. True relationships are held with ideas, beliefs, prejudices and feelings, and not with people. I want control, not relationship. I hide behind the clothing of games while ignoring real men and women.

A direct result of ignoring relational nakedness with others is the conflict that eventually ensues in my life. There will be conflict when several masked men and women start butting heads in order to preserve their status and opinions. I view others as competitors and become judgmental and harsh. It’s all about keeping up my image by tarnishing the image of others. I’ve participated in many church fights over insignificant issues such as pews, music, Bible versions, clothing, and labels – all because I was seeking to keep up my image.

Another problem in my relationships is that comparison and competitiveness lead to a basic selfishness in me. In drawing the right picture I paint one that is fully clothed and one that presents me as the main character of the play. Life becomes all about me and the propping up of my false self. My false self defends against intimacy and lives in a thin world of self promotion. It’s my needs that need to be met by others and when those needs are not met I become demanding and self-serving.

There are certain personalities that I wrestle with in personal associations that cause me to avoid relational nakedness. The most prominent personality is the strong choleric driver who is self-assured, opinionated and always right. When I was first married to Julie we were enjoying a physical relationship that was kept from us because of the nature of our ministry. We had only kissed once and never touched until after we were married so we would take such opportunities

to hold hands even if it was in public. So the time came for us to be part of a team picture of our singing group. As we posed Julie and I were seated next to one another and quietly held hands during the photo shoot (we were still feeling physically deprived). We asked if the hand holding would be in the final photos and we were told they would not, so we indulged. When the director of the ministry discovered that the final pictures did contain the image of us holding hands he blew his top and called us into a meeting to ream us out. His personality was confrontational and my response was always to be mousy and repentant. It did not matter what I thought and to keep the peace I would give in because that was the “spiritual thing” to do in my rationale. The truth of the matter was that I did not have enough courage to say what I really thought and to defend myself. I put on my peacekeeping loin cloth and gave in quietly. We left feeling defeated and unaccepted and certainly lived in fear of even holding hands on campus again.

Confronting another person is about as much fun for me as banging my head against a brick wall. I avoided it through the years and constantly hoped that situations would just disappear and problems would go away. I would think of the eventual meeting for days ahead of time and dread the moment when we would meet. I would get nervous and experience sweaty palms and lose my appetite. The main reason I would dread these relational situations was because I was constantly living in fear that the person I would talk to would no longer like me. That fear drove me into living a false front which eventually caused many more problems than the confrontation would have ever led to. My last church was such an example. For a number of years my lack of confronting problematic people and situations led to the eventual problems that showed me the exit door. I lived this in my marriage, at church, in the ministry, with my work associates, and within my family. Fear would grip me like a stranglehold and the freedom to be me was hidden in the vegetation.

Society has formed me and left me as an aggregate that has lost all my uniqueness. When it comes to knowing God, I struggle with His reality and love because He is not touchable. So I replace him with spiritual activity to offset the fear that He will no longer love me unless I am once again performing the role of Christian in an award-winning performance. Without the relational nakedness of knowing myself and God, I wade through my interactions with people in fear and trembling.

Maybe that naked photo shoot of our church congregation might do me some good.

CHAPTER SIX

“Clone Wars”

Cloning is a hot-button topic these days. Between sheep, dogs, cats and even droids (the movie *Clone Wars*), America is fascinated with cloning. The idea seems far-fetched for a human to be considered as a possibility for cloning and scary at that! Consider the pros and cons of cloning Madonna or Brett Favre or Billy Graham? Can you imagine someone wanting to clone me? The whole world would be filled with curly red-haired skinny guys with extremely white freckled skin. The only upside to that would be that I certainly would become popular and fitting in would no longer seem to be a problem. After all everyone would look the same (picture me as a girl in a dress) and comparisons would no longer be necessary (On second thought, forget that image of me in a dress).

In a sense I would lose my individuality and physical appearances would be normalized. I would be considered both beautiful and ugly at the same time because there would be no more variations. Everyone would have matching DNA so our personalities would all be Jeff-like with the same jokes, funny actions and habits. That means everyone would get up at 5 am everyday and skip lunch and follow sports (including being a sad-sack Detroit Lions fan). All other sports teams would cease to exist because they wouldn't have any more fans. I guess that means the Lions finally wouldn't lose a game. The tanning boutiques would go out of business and men's clothing would all be the same sizes. Everyone would wear a size 9 shoe and specially-made glasses with only one eye (I am legally blind in my right eye). We would all drive the same Saturn (silver in color) and like old movies and read the same Jules Verne novels – libraries would have to severely restrict and limit their reading sections. Our names would all be the same except there would be Jeff 1 and Jeff 2 and Jeff 10,381 and so on – certainly we would all know

how to say and spell Zakrzewski because it would be recognized world-wide and we would all get lots of phonetic practice. A world filled with nothing but Jeff's would eventually be somewhat boring and very vanilla (even though I do like vanilla).

I have often wondered if that describes "Christ-like" in Christianity. To become Christ-like could be like a Jesus-clone. In churches I was told to think like Jesus and to act like Jesus. The church has profited from the WWJD (What would Jesus do?) slogan on clothing, chain bracelets, belts, and Bibles. I am first to think in life situations of what Jesus would do and then choose that action, choosing to be a Jesus-clone. Since Jesus loved His enemies, I then must choose to love that guy at work I don't get along with. Jesus worshipped His Father and prayed the "Our Father," so I must also worship and pray "led me not into temptation" even if I don't feel like it. As a Jesus-clone I welcome children and love and help widows and learn to lay aside the self to serve others. I volunteer all my spare time to focus on such projects for those in need. I would practice forgiving people because that's what a Jesus-clone would do. When Jesus said He would lay down His life for His brothers, Jesus-clones would also have that same mentality of self-sacrifice and give up fun money in order to donate to a charity. I would carry the same version of the Bible, adopt Biblical values and principles, and attend churches that worship. My cloned pattern would be self-sacrificing love that is willing to financially give out of my need. When someone persecutes me, I would bless them. I would not let status become my guide but instead choose to give up positions of glory to become just plain vanilla. I possibly could even grow a beard and wear sandals like the Man and memorize His words and quote them.

When I became a Jesus-clone I inherited His spiritual DNA and therefore become like Him in all of life. Like the Jeff-clone, there is a certain perspective that views this as somewhat boring and uniformed. In order to fit into the Jesus-clone culture, I must assume knowledge of

Jesus and let His spiritual DNA become mine. Jesus Himself even speaks of losing me in order to gain a new identity – becoming a Jesus-clone. The Bible talks about being in the Jesus-clone nature (“if any man be in Christ he is a new creation (Jesus-clone)”¹⁸ and urges us to remain or rest in that Jesus-clone nature (“abiding in Him”).¹⁹ As a member of the church I actually become a member of His body and have taken up the weapons of soldiers to participate in the Clone Wars against the evil forces of this world (Jesus-clones against Satan-clones). In order to fit into the Jesus-clone culture, I must assume knowledge of Jesus and let His spiritual DNA become mine.

I have often wondered if I become a Jesus-clone does that mean I am to lay down my individuality at the Jesus-clone church door and pick up a new identity. After all to become Christ-like or a Jesus-clone we must assume that spiritual DNA and pattern our lives after the Son of God. It seems as though my personal rights and individuality are discarded never to be seen again - I have no rights or choice to be different. I belong to Him and am expected to show commitment behind the purposes of the mission – furthering the kingdom of God. I have been made and am called for such a Clone War as this.

Jesus-cloning has made the church disturbingly confusing and unappealing. On the one hand I am told to use my spiritual gifts and talents for the edification of the church and the glorification of God; yet on the other, I am taught to become clone-like and if I choose not to follow I am considered disobedient children. Churches have a fancy term for this following of Jesus– it is called discipleship.

I grew up in a Baptist church where I became a Christian at the young age of seven. When I was only 13, I was already teaching Sunday School with children only four years younger than myself. By age 21, I had already taught a number of classes, participated in the

choir and special music, led worship in the services, and oversaw a junior church for over 100 children. I had been exposed to the teaching of hundreds of sermons, lessons, tapes, and seminars. My journey to find and be myself was through foundational teachings that continued in my years with Light Ministries. Being a seasoned Jesus-clone I was taught two different approaches on how I should view myself: as a sinner or a saint. Light Ministries as a sister ministry in California grew out of Life Action Ministries from the East coast. It was with Life Action that the sinner tag was emphasized. Since it was a revival ministry the sinner was in need of repentance. The saint tag grew out of several seminars I attended with the ministry in Colorado. In that regard life is like a battle between attachment and detachment. A sinner detaches from sin and a saint attaches to who he is as a Christian. Jockeying between these two philosophies is directly connected to the diverging views of how I perceive myself as Jesus-clones. Let me explain.

For four years I traveled and participated in a revival ministry on the West coast called Light Ministries. Our purpose was to join together with a local church for weeks at a time and seek revival in our personal lives and corporately in the church. Much of what we did came straight out of the Charles Finney philosophy of revival: if you do “A and B you will get C.”²⁰ Cloning was simply a formula. As a ministry we focused philosophically on identifying and rooting out sin in the lives of people. We had what we called amongst ourselves, a “sin night.” This was the night we would pass out the “sin sheet” which was a list of dozens of sins that we were supposed to check off that we had participated in. Then, we were to seek God for the repentance of those sins. As a team, we personally reviewed the sin list almost every day resulting in countless hours in the Prayer Room groveling before God and seeking forgiveness for sins committed. This was the formula to achieving the status of Jesus-clone. Secretly I always

had a dream that one night I would take the sin sheet and find I had nothing to check off, but then I would wake up and discover that it was only a dream.

This teaching and practice produced a personal identity that never quite matched up with God’s plan for *being me*. At an early age it drove me to adopt the practice of performance as a way to achieve God’s acceptance. I had to work hard at being a Jesus-clone and all the control of my work was centered on me. The frustration over and over again was that I could never quite match up to that Jesus perfection, so I would beat myself down with spiritual disciplines and even more hard work. Personally, this was a performance way of holding down the self that had threatened to overtake the Jesus-clone control. I fasted, I memorized Scripture, I spent the night in prayer, and I abstained from television and worldly music. I was a frustrated and unhappy Jesus-clone.

With a sinner Jesus-clone identity, I confused my real self with the self I was supposed to deny. I became puzzled and struggled to understand and receive God’s love. How could He love me and expect me to deny that same self? God’s road to acceptance was to follow the Bible’s admonition “to not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...”²¹ The more I could beat myself down, the more God might like me. Our purpose as a church community was to gather together, admit our sin, seek forgiveness, and invite others to become Jesus-clones with us...God’s love somehow lost in that translation. The purpose of our meeting together became nothing more than “sin management” in which I focused on getting ready for heaven without giving attention to the eternal kind of life now. I sin and I seek forgiveness and do penance over and over again. There was no joy in that lifestyle only the fear of sinning again. And the way to obtain that full forgiveness was to work for God in the church as a volunteer – a sort of payback to overcome His hate for my sin (which I associated

with my real self). These thoughts drove me to seek God but it was under the disguise of a person seeking to find himself. I became uncomfortable in my relationship with God because it was based on what I did. Meanwhile I lost myself in the world of being a Jesus-clone.

Two years into my time with Light Ministries, a new perspective on the Christian life was introduced by our ministry leaders. Popularized at the time in a book called *Birthright*, David Needham wrote that as Christians we were no longer sinners at all.²² A Christian is a person who had become someone he was not before—a saint. These truths were not just positional but they were also experiential and actual. When we become believers we transform into a new Jesus-clone on a spiritual level. In a sense, as a clone I become God's ultimate spiritual masterpiece because I had the spiritual DNA of Jesus. Instead of pursuing detachment, I was to run after attachment – attaching myself to the reality that I was actually a Jesus-cloned saint.

This attachment became more of a mental adjustment that repeatedly reminded me who I really was. I would carry around cards with positive affirmations on them about who God thought I was. I would quote them and read them in the morning, afternoon, and at night. I memorized them and used them to reprogram my thinking.

While these thoughts changed our ministry philosophy and practice, and greatly freed my spirit, they also continued to present problems in my concept of self. I still battled with living up to who I really was in the eyes of God. So am I the one God sees as a cloned saint, or am I the one who seems to battle choices between sin and holiness? It seemed that I needed to battle in life between the two. If I was a saint, then why do I still sin? And if I still sin then how can God look at me as a saint?

Others have taught the concepts of imitating Jesus through the exchanged life.²³ If we all resemble Christ, then there is no need to be me. I just exchange my life for Christ's and then

become the ultimate Jesus-clone. In the film *The Sixth Day*, Arnold Schwarzenegger was cloned and all of his memories and experiences and individuality were downloaded onto what was called a Sim-cord.²⁴ That Sim-cord was then inserted into the clone and the clone became that person. In the exchanged life there was a certain sense where the Jesus Sim-cord is just inserted in me and I become a “little Jesus.” Spiritual formation is popularly defined as a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.²⁵ If that process is goal-oriented toward living up to who we really are, then it resulted in my frustrations checking into a reality show – for the most part I never could achieve acting to that standard. Exchanging my life and becoming Christ-like meant losing my identity and submitting to the world of being a Jesus-clone.

The ultimate basis of a secure and healthy sense of self-worth is directly related to the acceptance and understanding of our being image-bearers of God. A positive sense of self-esteem is based on who I am as a person in God’s image. I was born with an innate ability to think, to communicate, to be self-aware, to be morally aware, to be spiritually aware, and to be creative, all of which are inherent Jesus-clone traits. As an image-bearer I am simply a reflector of Jesus as another way of being a Jesus-clone. This self-perspective became a positive self-image presentation. Coupled with my reading of books on leadership and a positive attitude, being a saint or image-bearer certainly appealed to my affirming self-worth so, in my zealotry I presented these ideas to the pastor of the fundamental Baptist church in Ohio where I was raised. It was in this church that I was originally taught the sinner philosophy. The pastor wrote me a scathing letter practically calling me a heretic that took several years to relationally resolve. But if we can convince ourselves that we are Jesus-clones then sometimes that has more influence than actually living as a Jesus-clone. I have met many Christians who

speak “Christian-ese” but fail to back it up with the Jesus-clone lifestyle. Our churches are filled with people that look like clones in church but assume another clone nature throughout the week.

Sinner or saint...my confusion between the two blurred my identity perspectives as a Jesus-clone even more through the years. Then I had to face the teachings and concepts of the church as a corporate identity. As a church we were supposed to think and act as one body. We were all supposed to belong to one another and serve the Jesus-clone cause of the kingdom. Sure we had differing gifts, but somehow they got lost in translation in a plain church producing and spitting out Jesus-clones. The church is one body and we as Jesus-clones are members of it. So then we seem to become simply part of a greater clone society. That clone society has a higher purpose we are taught and a responsibility to create more Jesus-clones in a clone-less world. But it is so difficult to convince a non-clone who is exhibiting more individuality and personality to join the ranks of the vanilla Jesus-clones. What would be the point of losing themselves to become like everyone else in the clone culture? The church I grew up in regulated clothing standards, entertainment choices, and habits in order to form a more perfect clone society.

So the fundamental tension I faced in life was, “How can I pursue *being me* when the church wants me to be a Jesus-clone?” The whole process of discipleship and following and obeying seemed to result in a Jesus-clone. Whether I was a sinner or saint as a Jesus-clone, the real me was somehow gone. This spiritual process (although never taught or spoken) seemed to insinuate that being a Jesus-clone superseded *being me*. *Being me* was considered a rebel who bucked against the ranks of discipleship and truly following Jesus. I saw the church respond in kind to such mavericks by making them feel guilty or excluding them from the ranks of the Jesus-clone privileged. They would be left off of church boards and leadership committees and demoted to the status of new Jesus-clone. As a new Jesus-clone they would not be allowed to

serve in leadership positions unless they had earned the status of seasoned Jesus-clone. And of course in order to arrive at that position they must work hard (and achieve by their own works) the privilege of losing themselves for the sake of the clone society.

It's no wonder I struggled with *being me* in the midst of the Clone Wars. *Being me* somehow went AWOL as the war progressed and being a clone became the mandate. I followed blindly as a good clone should and served the ultimate cause. But in my confusion I somehow lost *being me* on the clone battlefield.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Labels”

I often wonder about my thoughts as a newborn baby. Before I could speak, all of my thinking was without words and labels, and all of my associations were related to images and tone of voice. My association with names came later and is a learned response. At that point my name then became who I was and am. But who was I before I learned my name, my label that I would be called the rest of my life?

I was called Jeff when I was a baby, but I didn't know at the time that I was “Jeff.” Does that mean “Jeff” didn't exist? If I was called Jeff as a baby, then I did not exist until Jeff the person was able to acknowledge and understand the name Jeff. Jeff the name existed but Jeff the person did not. Perhaps you should try to convince my parents that all those dirty diapers didn't really exist.

I have always had this disapproval of being called the name Jeffry. Somehow while growing up, Jeffry sounded somewhat juvenile or immature and I always wanted to appear older and more adult. As a result, I cringed whenever a teacher in school would call me Jeffry and I would immediately correct them and say, “Call me Jeff.” When a telemarketer calls and asks for Jeffry, I know immediately that they don't really know me, because all of my close friends call me, Jeff. I always liked the name Geoffrey and wished my mother had given me that name. After all, she was from England and that name would be so much more distinct and unique and, well... English. But instead she chose to name me after a British actor in the 1950s by the name of “Jeffrey Lynn,” (Lynn is my middle name). Just recently I have started introducing myself to new people I meet as Jeffry. I guess you could say that I've finally accepted that given name and have reached the stage in my personhood evolution where Jeffry is kind of cool.

Now, my last name, Zakrzewski, is always a discussion starter, whenever I make a new acquaintance. The conversation immediately gravitates towards how to say it, as well as its ethnic origin. In school, during class roll call, the teacher would camp out on my name, saying, “Jeff” followed by a long pause. I would immediately say, “Here,” in order to spare them the embarrassment of trying to figure out the Polish phonetics.

Until I was forty years old, I always pronounced my last name “Zag-zes-ski,” which was my parents’ Americanized version. There was a time when. In the 1970s, I seriously considered changing my last name to Bronson. Charles Bronson was the big movie star of that time and I always thought Bronson had such a masculine sound. So if I changed my first name and my last name, my new identity would be Geoffrey Bronson; a name people would love because it sounded solid and manly. But instead I held onto my given name and tried to improve on it through the years. For example, I met several Polish people who taught me to say my name with a Polish bent, “Zock-chev-ski.” I modified my name label because to me it sounded so much more cultural and fascinating, thinking it helped create a more appealing me.

I have often wondered if my personality changes according to the label I’m called. For example, as Pastor Jeff I have a feeling of status, prestige, and respect and I put on love, kindness, and spirituality. As Jeff, I am plain old Jeff and I put on the robe of plainness and I am that goofy, friendly, and regular nice guy. Then there are those times when my wife calls me Honey which conjures up a feeling of intimacy only designated for one particular person – Julie. I also love it when my daughter calls me Daddy which reminds me of the days when she was just a toddler and would sit on my lap with her “binky” (blanket) and watch television. With that name I am a caring father who shares a special bond with his daughter (as well as sometimes sharing a good smelling “binky”).

As I have grown older, younger people call me Mr. Jeff or Mr. Zakrzewski which is similar to saying, “You need a walking cane and a senior citizen card.” In a matter of a few short months I will be assigned to a whole new label, that of Doctor. I’m not sure if Dr. Jeff or Dr. Zakrzewski will be intimidating to others I meet. I am sure it will establish within me a feeling of accomplishment or status but deep down inside I am still plain old Jeff. With or without the label the real me never really changes.

Don’t you just love it when someone remembers your name even though you don’t know them very well? “Hey Pollack, how are you doing?” When Dr. Jerry Falwell called me that it was not because he did not know my name because I was on his staff. One of the many gifts that he had was that of remembering names. He would meet you one time and then several years later see you again and somehow remember your name. There are a number of times people walk up to me and greet me as Jeff and ask about my son in Iraq. While I am struggling to even remember how they know me, they can call me by name. It brings an immediate sense of intimacy and relationship when someone calls you by name. Meanwhile I have to rely on my wife to bail me out during those awkward moments. The opposite is true when people that you see every day can’t seem to remember your name so they skirt the issue and say “How are you doing” or “See you later”. Names do matter as labels and they can bring a feeling of immediate intimacy and warmth.

In my life I assume other labels or titles that become associated with my perception of who I am. Whether I am a student, pastor, assistant pastor, worship leader, manager, administrator, director, assistant manager, sales associate, custodian, team leader, or scheduler; I associate these roles in my life with who I am. Even today as a cell phone store manager, I tell people that I am actually a pastor who has worked in ministry for 26 years and with that I place

on my back a pastor mantle that serves as a label for my identity that eventually affects what other people think of me. When I left the pastorate in 2003 and moved to Washington, I lost the title of pastor but I have attempted to hold on to it by informing people that being a pastor is really what I do; not managing a cell phone store. My identity was wrapped up in that title, so when I left that profession it seemed like I lost my identity. What we do as a job or profession ultimately becomes not only who we think we are but also who we want others to think we are. *Being me* is what I do as well as the label attached to the jar, but the label does not always identify the contents.

A number of years ago my father was battling a stomach ailment that caused him to have to eat baby food temporarily. Every meal he would pull out the baby food jars and began to consume creamed peaches, peas, sweet potatoes, prunes, or corn. One time he was preparing to open up a jar of peaches by unscrewing the lid and stirring the contents. Diving in with his spoon he ate almost the entire jar and arrived at the bottom when he discovered a rat's tale. Needless to say he lost his lunch and decided to stop the baby food diet. The baby food company's label on the jar did not say anything about a rodent surprise at the bottom of some of their jars. Sometimes the labels that we impose on each other conjure up images that we automatically associate with that person. But beware of surprises!

About a year ago I had hired a brand new employee that seemed outgoing and energetic about sales. They had a successful sales background and on the surface appeared to fit the label of "sales associate," but after a few short weeks, I discovered that the real person did not fit the outside label. He was continually late to work and seemed agitated quite a bit. He took many breaks and was gone for long periods of time. Before all was said and done, I had to fire the

employee for taking money from an associate's purse and stealing several phones from the store in order to support a drug habit. It was a surprise label indeed.

A signature is proof positive that my label is really me. Putting my name at the bottom of an email or check (who uses those anymore) or important document is making a significant statement: I am really Jeff. We use labels for all kinds of objects and we associate that label as the identity of that object. For example, a jar of pickles has the label pickles on it and it creates an expectation that when you open the jar you will see and eat pickles. Now if the jar said pickles but you opened it and ate a prune instead you would become confused as to the real identity of the jar of pickles. Would it mean that pickles aren't pickles until the name pickles on the bottle matches the contents inside the jar?

When I first began in ministry, I became acquainted with Tim LaHaye's books on personality labels based on the designations of Choleric, Melancholy, Sanguine, and Phlegmatic.²⁶ A choleric was goal-driven, a Melancholy emotion-driven, a Sanguine people-driven and a Phlegmatic dependability-driven. The books portrayed combinations of these four personality traits as labels we can place upon each other in order to understand our unique behaviors. At first I thought I was Choleric-Melancholy because of my tendency to be goal-driven but moody. Then I considered the label of Melancholy-Phlegmatic, because at times my emotional moods change yet I can still be very steady and easy going. When I was a pastor I adopted the roles of a Sanguine and became very outgoing, because that was what the people wanted in a pastor. The problem was that while I was studying these labels I became very confused. It almost seemed like I could adapt myself to any of these personality labels to fit situations and roles that I played. I still wasn't sure if the label on the jar really matched the contents.

Then I read the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator²⁷ personality labels and learned that through them I could possibly find myself. I took the personality evaluations and the results came back indicating that I was an ENFJ (extrovert, senser, feeler, and organized). So as I read about what this meant I wondered if this could be correct for I didn't think I was truly an extrovert. I had to be an introvert, which would then label me as an INFJ. Again the more I studied and read, it seemed that the more I really became perplexed as to who the real me was. When I would meet others who were familiar with the Myers-Briggs labels they would immediately say what type they were. I would quote my label and they would look at me with a half smile as if that label told them all about my life and personhood in four short letters. They are not aware of all the personality combinations that I have lived in the spaces between those four letters. I learned to even give the personality evaluation to all my potential hires at work as a short cut into their personality. My discovery led me to believe that people with the same lettered labels can even be quite different from one another. It seems in life that pickles may have different tastes even with the exact same label on the outside.

I also studied another set of scientific tools called skills or gifts assessments. When I studied the varied spiritual gifts I concluded that I must possess the spiritual gifts of leadership, teaching, and administration. But then according to another spiritual gifts survey called Network,²⁸ I also had the spiritual gift of creative communication. The more I read and surveyed these spiritual gift labels the more I discovered that my pursuit of the right label for my Jeff-jar was becoming a blurry enterprise. All these evaluations listed different spiritual gifts, which made me even more mystified if they were the right labels. As I pastored, I used spiritual gift assessments as an important tool for placing people to serve in ministry, in spite of my uncertainty. I also taught that the search for the right label and ensuing position was a trial and

error road of finding out who you were and where you should serve. I soon discovered that people aren't always what they appear to be on the label.

When I was in a parachurch ministry, my job was to count the money and to make sure we had enough funds to keep running as an organization. My director saw my organizational skills as an early team member and moved me up in leadership with this new label—administrator. Through the years I did my job well and certainly appeared to be that person he wanted me to be for the role I was being paid to perform. However, I was very frustrated. We would travel around the world on evangelistic mission trips taking large groups of students with us. My inner desire was always to speak and be directly involved with these ministry opportunities, but because of my label, my director kept me boxed into my role. Now mind you, my role was a very important one and very complicated. Figuring out a budget and managing the itinerary for five different teams in 4 different countries as part of the same mission trip was very demanding—imagine all the different currencies and you get the picture—but I really wanted to preach and work with the teams in hands-on ministry. My director picked others to do these jobs and I soon realized that he was comfortable and content with me to remain labeled as an administrator. But I was not satisfied and upon seminary graduation I moved into a new role with a new label - pastor.

Labels can be very helpful in understanding each other because they paint visual images that we then associate with people. But whether it is my given name or common name or my labeled title at work or role I play in life or a personality description, a label sometimes can let me down. When it does my personhood and perceived identity become confused and suddenly I realize that labels are simply a creation of humankind. Because I have made these labels up for my own convenience, they do not always reveal the true inner person. But it is almost impossible

to think of one another without these labels. They have become a necessity of life in order to function otherwise I would address people as “Hey you” and my conversations would never center on what I do or the role I am playing. Now mind you, I love being called Jeff (or Jeffry) because it is sweet to my ears – it is my name. But the real me is not that name but the person behind the name. The real Jeff is not a pastor or assistant manager or father or husband but a living unique person.

So what would it sound like if my conversations focused on who I really was and not what I do? The possible scenarios of conversing without all the titles and roles as labels seem to lead me down a road of perplexing interactions. What would I say and what would I really talk about? Labels are a necessity in life and I cannot exist without them but they have a definite potential danger of becoming my real self. After all, what if I take off my label to reveal the true me inside the jar and what if the true me does not match my label?

My fear and insecurity is that when you remove the outside label you will eventually find a rats’ tale at the bottom of my jar and reject me. That fear is very real and binding. No, I think I’ll hold onto labels because I can create the image that I want you to see and hide all of my secrets.

Geoffrey Bronson still has a nice ring to it.

PART 1I: A JOURNEY AROUND THE MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Blockhead”

One of my favorite artists is Michelangelo who is best known for his work in the Sistine Chapel along with sculptures like the *Pieta*, and *David*. As an Italian painter, sculptor, architect, poet and engineer, Michelangelo lived and created during the 16th century Renaissance period. Since my undergraduate degree was in fine art, I spent many hours studying the masters and their creative expressions. In my office today I sit looking at a mini-statue replica of Michelangelo's *Pieta*, depicting Mary holding a lifeless form of Jesus just after the crucifixion. In particular, I admire his famous statue of *David* which stands over 17 feet tall and resides in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence for all to admire. This one creation alone by this famous Italian artist took him over three years of long hours to complete. David is pictured in the nude standing with his sling over his shoulder ready to battle the giant Goliath and the Philistines. Michelangelo was a perfectionist even to the point of sometimes spending many months just selecting the marble he would use for his sculptures. Can you imagine the meticulous chiseling and chipping and carving that would take place day-by-day in his process? I can picture some days he might only have worked on one finger or a toe and on another day just one eye. It took tremendous amount of patience, skill, and imagination to complete such a masterpiece. Michelangelo described his process of sculpting as an encased release:

In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to hew away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it.²⁹

In the mind of Michelangelo, he envisioned what the finished product would look like and his job was to release that figure from the marble that encased it. In the same sense, God, the Master-sculptor, has in mind what I have been created to be. In my life journey He provides as a

gift a glimpse of the sculpture of *being me* through understanding that this was His original plan, that *being me* is a lifelong journey and an innate drive within me. I am encased in marble and the job of the Creator is to release *being me* as he intended. My journey is to let the Master-sculptor work on me day-by-day patiently chipping away at the false encasements of who I think I am.

Even though I was an art major in college I never really had a lot of experience in sculpting. The closest I ever got was when I was a kid. I had a deep desire to have my own superhero toys, so I purchased a bag of ordinary army men and then took a razor blade and trimmed off the appropriate places to make the figures more superhero-like. Then I painted them to look just like Spiderman, Captain America, Superman, and Ironman. In a sense as I sculpted with my blade, I released from the army figures the picture of what I wanted my play toys to be. To me, those figures were intended to be those superheroes.

My family heritage provided an important stone marble from which I was hewn. That marble was obtained from a combination of Polish and English ancestors. My mother was born and raised in Bath, England where she grew up in a family of eight children. She had to leave school at the age of fourteen in order to work for a printer to help support her family. After another job at a watch factory she finally ended up making ammunitions during World War II where she eventually met my father. My dad was born into a Polish family—a total of seven children, half of which were born in Poland. I still remember when I was very young meeting my dad's mother who spoke only Polish. She was a very domineering woman and as a typical European mother she ran the show for the entire family. My father also did not finish high school because of the need to provide money to support the family. When he was drafted into the army he participated in the World War II operations of the invasion of France and Germany. He met

my mother met while on leave in England in a story that sounds like a great movie script for Hollywood.

He was attending an armed services dance in which my mother was also present in Bath. Because of the day-to-day stress of the air raids from German bombing, the weekly dance became the highlight of the week. It was an opportunity to live normal lives in the midst of a time of great fear. All the soldiers were dancing with the English girls while some were sitting anxiously waiting for an opportunity. The upbeat music forced the couples to enthusiastically move to the rhythm of the live band. My mother was the outgoing person and my father the shy soldier sitting with a cigarette but they both were sitting down without partners. The two of them were watching and hoping when they both leaned out and glanced directly at one another. Their eyes met and soon they polkaed around the dance floor. Their dance was followed by a whirlwind courtship and soon they were married two weeks later at a justice of the peace. My father immediately had to return to his duties on the front in France while my mother waited anxiously for what would happen next.

When dad left the war to return to the States my mother purchased tickets for the Queen Mary and sailed to New York City where she arrived and then took a train to Ohio to meet up with my father. They were supposed to live in the house that my dad had purchased before leaving in the Army. He made arrangements for his mother to purchase the house for one dollar just in case he did not return. He didn't know that this strong European woman paid the dollar and took over the house shortly after he left for war. As a result, when dad returned the house was no longer his. His mother did not like his new English wife and eventually kicked out my dad and my mom from the house that was purchased by my father. I am still amazed at my mother's courage to travel around the world to a new country all alone in order to start a new life

and in the process leaving behind friends and family. It took a tremendous amount of courage to survive such a rude welcoming by her new family. I have come from a heritage of bulldog parents that worked hard and faced their fears head on.

Scientists say that the DNA I inherited from my parents is the link that creates the resemblances and likenesses that I have with them. If you met my mother and father you might say that I resemble them in several ways. I inherited my father's lanky figure, curly hair and definitive nose. You will also find his melancholy nature and sense of humor as well. From my mother, I inherited her organizational skills and short stocky hands and feet. In the same sense I have passed that DNA on to my children as well. Many people throughout my life have commented that my son Jeffry, who not only bears my name, but also bears my image. Now that my son is a grown up man serving in the Marine Corps, sharing his photos with my friends he has always ended up with the following observations, "He looks just like you" or "He's a chip off the old block" or blockhead if you will.

God's original plan was that I would look like Him as a foundation to *being me*. When I was born the Master-sculptor had a likeness of me in mind that resembled Himself. His DNA is inbred in my personhood and in that sense you could say I have been created to be a "little god." When the marble is chipped away I resemble my Creator and carry His spiritual DNA. In the movie *Bruce Almighty*³⁰ Jim Carrey is able to experience all the powers of God for a brief period of time. Given the powers of God for a week, Bruce immediately uses his new-found powers for personal gain: he sabotages a colleague named Evan, who cheated him; he takes revenge on a street gang who badly beat him up earlier in the film; he transforms his car from a Datsun 240Z to a Saleen S7; and allows his favorite hockey team, the Buffalo Sabres to win the Stanley Cup. Being created to be "little gods" is not becoming another Bruce with selfish powers to release

upon others at the whim of a notion. It simply means that what every human being shares is a definite connection to God because we look like Him. However you want to define that likeness (there are many interpretations) God's stamp of His personal selfhood is impressed upon us as humans. If God had a picture of me in his wallet and pulled it out for all to see, others would comment "Jeff looks just like you."

The ultimate basis of a secure and healthy sense of self-worth is directly related to the level of accepting, understanding, and experiencing the truth of our being "little gods." No matter what my experience is in life, I do not cease to be made in His image. However most of the time I confess I feel more like a blockhead rather than a finished masterpiece. My experiences shout out to me that God must have been a mistake or that He broke the mold because my design was faulty because I am a little thick between the ears. From what I know about God the surface there seems to be some family resemblances: We both express emotions and thrive on relationships; we both are described through bodily descriptions of eyes, ears, arms, etc.; we both use verbal communication and express the use of our senses; we both operate out of a moral right and wrong; and we both have a spirit that is everlasting. In those cases He is my Father, I have His DNA, and we do resemble each other, but when my blockhead-minded thinking enters the picture I see a vast gulf between me and God. I see my likenesses as rough hewn stone that bears little resemblance to an Almighty Creator. God as the Master-sculptor created me for the purpose of knocking off those rough edges so that the real me can be seen as He created me to be. *Being me* is a journey of being released from the confines of other people's viewpoints of me as well as my own perceptions. It's seeing the figure in the marble slab as the "me" God intended. God's plan in creation was to integrate His DNA into our likeness of Him.

Not only have I been made to be a “little god” in my resemblance of the great Creator but also His fingerprints are all over my uniqueness. Fingerprints offer an infallible means of personal identification. They have served as a science for tracking identification of criminals over the last 100 years. No two fingerprints have ever been found alike in many billions of human and automated computer comparisons. In fact right now in the largest AFIS repository in America operated by the Department of Homeland Security, the US Visit Program contains in itself over 74 million persons’ fingerprints.³¹ In the way that my fingerprints serve as a one-of-a-kind identification of my identity, God has stamped me with a personality and physical fingerprints that separates me from any other human being. What unites me with other human beings is that we share being “little gods.” What makes me unique is my individuality in appearance, personality and giftedness. A psalmist from recorded in the Bible how this uniqueness appeared even as I was being sculpted in my mother before I was born in the following:

Oh, yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother’s womb. I thank you, High God—you’re breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I’d even lived on day.³²

I am born with a seed of selfhood that contains the spiritual DNA of my uniqueness; encoded with the birthright knowledge of who I am, why I am, and how I am related to others. That DNA of being in God’s image is the seed that gives fruit to my unique individuality. No matter how I try to categorize myself: male or female; straight or gay; married or divorced; parent or single; introvert or extrovert; athletic or academic; I am beyond categories because there is no one else like me. I am a product of God’s fingerprint, which was created for me and

me alone. No one else has the combination of my genetic background, my personality, my giftedness, and my emotions like I do. That means that God's fingerprints are all over my red hair, fair and freckled skin, skinny shape, and humor. He made Jeff in such a way as he has made no other (the world is grateful for that). I am a unique slab of marble with a person to be released that is as individual as a fingerprint.

When I endeavor to become like someone else, I reject the uniqueness that God has intended for me to be. I may want to pattern my life after a role model because I admire their courage or speaking ability. But I am not that person. If I am to define myself as one loved by God and that this is my true self then every other identity I strive for is simply an illusion. God's intention was to fashion me uniquely and to love my uniqueness unconditionally. I believe the journey of *being me* is man's primary spiritual journey because God's DNA fashioned me as a "little god" and with His fingerprints made me completely unique; that was His intention—for me to be me, and that is what gives glory from the creation to the Creator. I was created with a definite purpose of *being me* in a world that wants me to be someone else. *Being me* then glorifies the Master-sculptor in the same way that the finished *David* pleased Michelangelo.

Deep down inside of me is a driving force to break out of that block of marble, revealing a unique masterpiece that is admired and accepted. I want to shed that blockhead image and know that not only God likes me as He created me but also others accept me for the person I really am. When I choose to live my life in light of *being me* as a chosen sculpture I am released into a life of openness void of fear. However, when I chose to live life as a bound up blockhead I form an illusion of the self I want God and others to see and live in fear trying to maintain it. I am deceived into thinking that my self-worth is a result of my performance plus other people's opinions. The resulting problem is that I seek *being me* apart from God, which ultimately is the

nature of sin. I was wired to be secure in God's love and acceptance in a sense like the nude *David*. When that was broken I sought that acceptance and worth in other things and built a wall of marble around my true self.

The life apart from *being me* is one that places more value on the perceived realities of society above the reality of God's desired relationship with each of us. We all have that inner drive but when we seek to fulfill it apart from God, we live within the confines of fear and measuring up. The nude *David* is covered up with the image I choose others to see and I live in deception and fear.

On the other hand, to live my life within the freedom of *being me* is inevitably counter-cultural. As humans we are lodged in culture but we are not made in the image of any culture. Culture is not our image because we are the image of God. This is the true picture of a battle we fight in order to *live me* in our culture. There is always the pull to be changed into someone else, to encase my real self with a phony, to become a blockhead. To live my life in the light of *being me* means to accept God's fingerprints and image and to extend that relationship with the Creator God into my world of human relationships. The encased marble breaks away to reveal Jeff as he really is.

Michelangelo's *David* was a project that took him over three years to complete. With each careful chip and carve, the sculptor took precious time and care to release his creation. There was much thought and planning into each action and step. The material of marble had to be the finest in order not to break away or crack thus ruining the finished product. As a grade school student I was walking to school when I passed by a grocery store entrance that looked rather odd to me. The glass door seemed to be full of cracks and curiosity got the better of me. I went up and touched it with my finger and it all came crashing down and glass went everywhere.

As I sat in the principles' office it occurred to me that just one improper touch could cause disaster.

In a similar way I have feared most of my life that God made me in a way that was full of cracks. As he was sculpting the Jeff he wanted me to be, I was viewing it as a cracked disaster ready to crumble at any moment. I did not trust him to finish the project so I grabbed a hold of the sculpting tools and began to fashion the self I wanted to be. That released sculpture was the person I thought God and others would think was wonderful and culturally relevant. I fought with God over whether my sculpture was a better representation of the Jeff I thought and ended up with a cracked marble piece that seemed impossible to repair. In my fear I did not believe that God would like the real me or that others would find me acceptable as well. So I continued to grab control of my self-image and re-sculptured again and again. My resulting image always seemed to resemble that same old blockhead I envisioned so many times before.

Then I realized that the sculpting is a process that takes a considerable amount of time. God's releasing me from the block of marble is a lifelong process that requires my patience and trust in his hands and His skill. He knows the final result of the masterpiece better than I do. All I can do is to accept what He wants that final masterpiece to look like and to rest in His skillful hands.

Recently I was looking through some family photographs. I was struck by two things: first, how much we still look like those pictures from decades ago; and second, how much we look different and have changed. My hair is no longer reddish but more of a blondish light brown and I certainly weigh more than I did when I got married. Twenty-seven years of eating my wife's fantastic cooking has finally caught up with me. I have more wrinkles in my face and my hair is also thinning compared to the big "fro" days. Life has provided me with scores of

experiences—good and bad—along with growing opportunities. I am the same Jeff that organized all of his little toys and played with them for hours alone but life has made me different and God has worked in each circumstance to sculpt away at my rough marble. I have that same childlike creativity but I see relationships and life circumstances through the eyes of a Master-sculptor that has worked on me for years. The times I have grown the most in *being me* have been those times when I have rested in the change and not fought it. When I fought it I was miserable, restless, and operating out of performance.

As I consider the work of God as the Master-sculptor I have often thought of Him as the one sculpting the real me out of my life. Yet, the truth is that God as that sculptor already has an image of what He has created me to be. That created image in God's eye is the one I have built marble around and have been trying to replace it with my own masterpiece. So in effect what God does with our lives is really to chip off the surrounding replacement marble and rough edges that we ourselves have built up over time. That tough layer is my protective piece from exposing the real me from perceived rejection. My journey in life is to let God chip away at my illusions and to reveal the true me which He always loves and accepts. It is the pressure of our world to encase our true identity and therefore, that is the battle we face as we grow in our relationship with Him. Those are the times I lay down my blockhead identity, and stand nude before Him as the unique *David* realizing that I am His wonderful creation.

CHAPTER NINE

“Nose Watching”

The discussion with my daughter the other day started like this: “Let me ask you a question, can you see your nose?” “No” she replied, “not unless I look cross-eyed.” Then suddenly it occurred to me that in my fifty-fifth year of existence I see something that no one else normally sees. When I look out at people or trees or the sunset or my wife, I see my nose very prominently. (Or is it my nose that is prominent?) Here’s the reason: I was born with a growth on the backside of my right eye’s lens that resulted in an underdeveloped retina. This birth defect has left me legally blind on my right side. Back in the 1950s, laser surgery or lens replacements were nonexistent, and my parents were not aware I had this problem until my right eye turned in when I was a toddler. The eye problem existed because of a lack of use and I was left traveling down the hospital path of eye surgeons and office visits in order to correct the problem. I even had to wear a patch over my good eye for a period of time-doctor’s orders. I can still scare others by turning in only one eye—one of my many unique talents.

I have recently imagined what it would be like to be able to see the world with two good eyes. Two eyes working together create the correct perspective to see objects in all three dimensions; with just one eye your dimensions become distorted and flat. Two eyes working together would produce a panorama viewpoint that I have missed all of my life. I could have achieved so much more in sports if I had the use of two eyes for the proper perspective. When I was playing certain sports that required quick movements and reflex response I would struggle but I adapted in softball with my foot speed by playing in the outfield. I played left field with my right eye defect and my brother-in-law played center field with a cataract in one of his eyes. It is

a wonder we both played so well and made it to multiple all-star teams with just the two eyes we had between us. Instead of playing between the foul lines we had to play between the noses.

A two-eyed perspective of God-sensing that sees past my nose is the most vital perspective on my journey to *being me*. Aristotle classified the traditional five senses as sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste and these senses are windows that work together to give me a complete experience of life.³³ When one of my senses is not performing properly, it has a profound effect on the rest of my life experience. My nose and the sense of smell affect how I taste food and my sight and touch work together to stay away from a hot stove top. Since I have moved out to the state of Washington I have had a number of problems with my sinuses, affecting my sense of smell and taste. (I wish I could say I have lost a great deal of weight as the result but that is not the case.) My wife recently asked me about the cow manure smell on the lawn beds at our townhouse and I simply said, “What smell?” All my senses work together and are vital to my life experience.

God-sensing involves using similar perceptions to become aware of His presence and activity in my relationship with Him. *Being me* originates from this awareness of living life, called God-sensing. It finds a life resulting in congruent wholeness in which what I do and what I am, are in harmony. The truth is that I CAN sense God and that sense leads to *being me*. When I talk about God-sensing, I am acknowledging that God is already present. I cannot attain the presence of God because I am already totally in His presence. What is needed in my sensing is a new God awareness—seeing past my nose.

The journey to live faithfully to my true self begins with a pursuit of knowing and experiencing God through the disciplines of solitude and awareness. I take time to be quiet before God each day early in the morning. I either sit quietly with my eyes closed or lay on the

couch downstairs. During this time my mind is not fixed on a problem or even on God and who He is. I am simply sitting or lying in His presence. During this time, my fears and pretenses are exposed and His love is applied like a soothing balm. As God's child I experience a sensory rush of a relationship that was meant to be. I am His. He truly loves me just as I am. I am His child and as I see God for who He is, the truth of *whose* I am becomes a reality in clear focus.

Knowing God in such an intimate fashion leads to knowing me as I really am. It is only when I feel safe with God that I will feel safe with myself. As I sit or lay quietly I am at peace with who I am. Once while being quiet before God early at 5 am in the morning, the cell phone rang. As I answered it the voice said, "Hello, this is God speaking." My friend knew I what I would be doing at that time and called me as a joke. I wondered if God had a Sprint or Verizon phone.

I was raised in the church and became a Christian at the very young age of seven years old. Because of the many years of learning that my relationship with God was built on doing the right things (according to the church I grew up in), my perception of God became distorted. I was taught in church to read my Bible, pray for others, and memorize verses as part of what was called a quiet time. When I did this exercise every day God would bless me and when I was too busy God would not bless me. As I now sit in quiet before God, there are moments of deprogramming. It's a place where the doors of awareness are cleansed and everything appears to me as it is. This is the time when Thumper wants to make an appearance to get busy doing even in my relating to God. I want to read a spiritual nugget or get an Aha moment to take with me throughout the day. Instead it's entering a whole new reality that is not based upon performance permeating my thinking and practicality. I've come to the conclusion that my longing to know who I am will never be satisfied until I embrace solitude.

Making time for solitude is the practice of creating space for me to sit before God every day without the noise and interruptions of life. I do not necessarily speak to God (like Moses and the burning bush) or ask for His help like a child on Santa's lap. Instead I sit and wait and enjoy just being with Him. Many times in my relationship with my wife Julie, I've enjoyed the quiet moments of just being together without pretense, without words, without tasks—just presence. Being together has underscored the fact that she accepts me as I am and loves me for being that person. There are no demands or pretenses—just love. The solitude of the mystical experience produces an overwhelming consciousness of God and one's soul. I don't always understand this experience and I can't manufacture or control it. Sometimes He overwhelms me with a feeling of His calming presence and I just sit and enjoy it. And there are other times when nothing happens and there is no voice or feeling. At that place I know what is God and what I am. I can love God and not just think of Him or know about Him. Solitude brings a whole new two-eyed perception. It is in that quiet solitude that my eyes are opened to who He is and who I am. In my open nakedness He sees all and yet loves and accepts me as He made me.

When I began practicing the discipline of solitude I noticed several physical and mental reactions. My leg began to twitch nervously (remember Thumper) and my mind wandered incessantly. In my mental and physical seizures against such prolonged time of “doing nothing” I was reacting in guilt. My conditioned mind constantly links time with doing tasks or double-teaming (doing two things at once). To sit passively was absolutely foreign because I want to look at the time and get restless to do things and meet deadlines. Yet as I continue to grow in *being* with God, I have experienced a whole new awareness of Him as well as myself. It is out of this solitude as the foundation that I can journey into new life awareness. When I meet God in solitude and silence, he adds balance to my life. It's when I don't incorporate the importance of

solitude in my practice that I get out of balance in my living and my boat rocks incessantly. Without a foundation of *being me* in quietness I enter my job at the mall and become anxious about sales and fearful of not hitting goals. My focus turns outward at what I can't control and I worry. Solitude gives me the mapping necessary for the spiritual journey itself. Solitude is essential to my personal integration and with solitude comes the means to see with two eyes through awareness. Nose watching is replaced with perceiving a world filled with God's touches and presence.

The Bible shares an event that happened after the resurrection when two disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus.³⁴ On that walk a stranger joined them. After an in depth discussion they saw the stranger (Jesus) break bread and "their eyes were opened and they recognized him." *Being me* is all about waking up to the fact that God is walking with me through life each and every day. One day I was sharing with a customer about my concerns for my son serving as a Marine in Iraq. I verbalized my fears and wishes for him to come home safe. My customer turned and looked at me and said, "Don't worry the same God who is with you here today is with him in Iraq." My eyes were opened and in that customer I heard God speaking to me of His presence not only with me but also with my son. I now wear my son's dog tags as a bracelet to remind me that He is both present with me and with my son. There are now many moments when I am strolling through the mall that I am thinking about God being with me. I am aware of His presence through other people and I begin to notice His touches and His works. Like a walk on the Emmaus Road I talk with Him throughout my day at work and have enjoyed seeing past my nose of sales into a world of His ever-present love and care.

One of my many dreams is to be able to visit the Louvre in Paris.³⁵ If I were to make such a visit, I would need a tremendous amount of time because I would stop to soak in each and

every painting and masterpiece. I would first walk the courtyard with great anticipation becoming overawed that I was really there. In the courtyard I would first walk into the Pyramid and then head straight to main building where the painting and drawing galleries reside. To walk through the Rembrandt room would cause me to just sit alone on a bench and stare at masterpiece after masterpiece that I had previously only studied in a textbook. I would want to see the Mona Lisa up close and muse upon that mysterious mouth. The tapestry smells and the masterful visuals would overload my senses until I would have to just sit and smile and drink them all in. Every day in my life there are rich paintings of my personhood on display and with each and every encounter I need to stop and see them with fresh new eyes – the eyes of God’s fingerprints on that painting and on my personhood. To see new and afresh is to recognize God’s presence and work like a fine painting. Now this presence is not necessarily in the fantastic or bizarre, but in the littlest of things – like the smile of a small child or the gift of a friend. It is in the ordinary and mundane moments in life that I see God’s extraordinary existence. I experienced God’s presence recently on a simple walk from the parking lot into my work place. Outside as the sun came up the white snow was gleaming off the trees and on the mountain ridges on the horizon. As only God can do, he painted a rich tapestry of color on those trees and mountains that underscored his presence and touch in the gallery of life.

Perhaps the simple seeing of a child is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a child will not enter it.”³⁶ A small child sees the world with innocence, without pretense and without self-consciousness. When my son Jeffry was just three years old we stepped into an elevator while my wife was holding him. Standing next to us was a rather large lady upon whom my son blurted out, “You’s fat isn’t you.” He verbally said

what we were already thinking, but he saw things as they were and to our embarrassment vocalized what he saw.

I lost my father to emphysema in 2003 and recently my mother gave me his wedding ring. A jeweler friend of mine at the mall offered to take my father's ring and size it to wear on my small finger at no charge. Such a visible act was seen as the presence of God; that He cares about the small things like a ring. This type of seeing involves the development of a trained eye that sees as God sees. When I see God in life around me, it's with the same eye that God sees me. With that seeing comes not only awareness but also the receiving of love and acceptance from the eye of God.

When I was young, my older brother would sleepwalk occasionally. There were many times I had to stop him from using the closet as the bathroom. In the same way, I tend to sleepwalk through life with blinders on. I am so focused on controlling situations and meeting deadlines (nose watching) that I walk right by the luminal places where God is residing. Those insignificant events and meetings are where I don't look for the image of God. But when I see the image of God where I don't want to see the image of God, then I will see with eyes not my own. Normality is the way things appear but God can be experienced through the mundane and the average. To see with new eyes is to live at the overlap between heaven and earth. The Celtic tradition speaks of such luminal places and describes them as the place where the water from a wave stops on the beach. As I stood on Cannon Beach in Oregon and watched that wave come to a stop I understood that this is place of seeing past my nose. This is the place I need to see God with new eyes in my life-where heaven and earth touch.

The Christian band, *Casting Crowns* released a song a number of years ago describing a person facing difficulties in life and being tempted to listen to the waves telling me, "you'll

never win, you'll never win."³⁷ Life is full of such noise and false voices that affect how we feel about ourselves. The song continues, "But the voice of truth tells me a different story, the voice of truth says 'Do not be afraid!' And the voice of truth says 'this is for my glory,' out of all the voices calling out to me I will choose to listen to the voice of truth." My perception of who I am and how I relate to the society around me is many times influenced by these voices. Each day it's absolutely crucial for me to listen for God's voice, affirming that I am God's beloved child. Only then can I resist the temptation to become someone else. God-sensing involves not only seeing with new eyes but also listening that is attuned to a whole new awareness.

When Samuel of the Bible was a boy, he heard the voice of God clearly in his innocence.³⁸ Now at first he thought it was the voice of his mentor Eli, but it actually was the voice of God. His response should be my response, "speak for your servant is listening." Now effective listening for Samuel had expectancy and quietness, patience, activity, confidence, dependence, openness, attentiveness, carefulness, and submissiveness. Such listening skills to the voice of truth would change dramatically my perception of God and me. Samuel did not listen to confirm his beliefs but he was aware to discover the new ways that God was working in the present. Spiritual learning is actually unlearning or listening. Samuel had to unlearn the hearing of a man's voice in order to recognize God's voice. When I choose to listen to God's voice of truth I am reminded once again of God's DNA inbred in my personhood and His fingerprints stamped on my identity. He wants me to be who I am and to resist living under the rule of money and status and make the transfer to living under the fluidity of relationships. To do so involves a keen awareness of listening to what God is doing all around me. It's discerning the echoes of what He is doing and responding in genuine integrity of being myself. I can be described as a

resident alien³⁹ endeavoring to live as an authentic self within a colony of distracting noises.

Every object, every person, every situation speaks of God if we only learn to listen like Samuel.

To live a meaningless life is to live away from listening or completely without hearing. What makes my life meaningless is my unwillingness to hear the voice of God speaking to me about me. An ancient practice of quoting the Jesus Prayer (“Lord, Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner”) is a method of using my recitation and subsequent hearing of the prayer to stamp upon my mind the reality of God’s presence.⁴⁰ It is hearing the voice of God as a form of a heartbeat (through my own voice) as the prayer is recited throughout my daily walk. To live a life attuned to listening is placing my ear close to the heartbeat of God about who I am, who He is, and how He wants me to become part of what He is doing in the world around me. Listening in the noisy world for God’s voice is a practice of *being me* that results in peace in the midst of turmoil.

Recently I spoke with a person in the mall where I work who is seven-feet tall. He explained to me that because he was so tall he was always able to glimpse farther ahead than most people because he could see over their heads. The problem would arise in that he would miss out on the people around himself or even run over them because of his height. To compensate for that problem he has chosen to stoop—the practice of bending down to focus on the people immediately around himself—thereby engaging others in the now. Stooping into the attentiveness of other people’s lives provides opportunities to touch their lives in love. This sense of touch is part of the process of *being me* and how *being me* can be discovered. Stooping includes paying attention to the individual person, the situation, and applying understanding and caring. It is taking the time to pose intimate questions; stop tasks to spotlight a person; and to demonstrate a loving touch of the hand. In the presence of our interaction, God is present and at work. In the presence of my interaction, I am being released to be myself.

I have found that showing a radical hospitality toward people is a way of God being present in my life and a way of discovering *being me*. It is Jesus touching others through me as He touched the sick, blind, and lame. He called them by name and lived that personal touch on their lives. Shawna is a mall regular where I work. She is one of those people that mall workers would avoid whenever she approaches them. She is slow in understanding, physically unattractive (according to the world's mold) and carries many times an odor that is as unappealing as her looks. Yet she has a sweet spirit and is a loving person. Because I started paying attention to her by stopping to talk and use her name, she now regularly seeks me out when she is in the mall. When she does, I give her a big squeeze of affection. She smiles and calls me her "Teddy Bear!" Sometimes for me it is not just a hug, but also a touch on the shoulder, a shake of the hand, or a high five to a kid. I have discovered that all my pastoral training and experience mean very little. My vulnerability through the simple touch has become my connection and extension of *being me* to the spirit of others. When I open my arms and mind to squeeze all kinds of people, I open myself to *being me*. At such a point of touch, God is creating me in that present moment. My presence is the presence of God. I find my true self not in the guise of spirituality but in the loving touches of life itself.

God-sensing originates from purposefully looking for God out of our solitude and awareness. God-sensing never stands alone, as there is never a time when I decide I am not going to see and not hear or taste and not smell; they all interweave and work together just like my physical senses do. Just like we unconsciously do not always perceive these senses, we many times choose not to perceive sensing God in life. We may even choose not to recognize His work and ignore His presence. The monkey's, "Hear no evil; See no evil; Speak no evil," becomes my choice to "Hear no God; See no God; Speak no God." The discovery of *being me* comes from the

times of sensing God as I choose to reside in my life under a new awareness. Without God-sensing, *being me* gets lost in nose-watching.

CHAPTER TEN

“Looking Under Rocks”

I grew up in a fundamental Bible-believing Baptist church back in Ohio where the lines were clearly black and white between good and evil. Satan certainly was the enemy but he was also a clever opponent. At my church I was taught that Satan lived at the movie theater where he polluted the minds of young people with filthy movies. He also resided in cigarettes and liquor, which were his open door to the dark side. Once, while working as a stock boy at S & H Green Stamps, a catalogue rewards store popular in the 1960s, I snuck a cigarette in the back incinerator room where I would burn boxes. Daily I would carefully burn boxes from the shipment (this was before the days of recycling). Satan must have been in that cigarette because as I was burning boxes in the back room an accident occurred. The result was a fire that started through swirling winds that blew hot ashes on the roof and the smoke damaged the entire store. The store had to be cleaned thoroughly and every bit of merchandise replaced. In my mind God was getting His revenge on my flirtation with the Evil One.

At that church I was also taught that Satan lived in women's makeup and pantsuits. When someone became a Christian at an altar call, the first point of discipleship you were taught as a woman, while sitting in the front row, was not to wear a pantsuit or makeup the next Sunday. Now there's a priority item for spiritual growth and the purpose-driven life. The devil lived in miniskirts and long sideburns and the only way to overcome your love for money was to (of course) give 10% to the church. That tithing somehow served as a penance for flirting with the Devil throughout the week. Imagine paying off my guilt for letting him into my mind and heart during non-church days.

The biggie as a young person was that Satan sat hiding in rock music ready to jump out and twist my mind through sex and drugs. I looked for him and his subliminal messages while playing records both forward and backward sometimes wondering if John Lennon was Satan. I was in a junior high class where we actually played records backward while the teacher was trying to interpret the satanic message. I felt as a churchgoer that I was walking around on pins and needles looking for the Devil under everything including the rocks. He was in hiding and could disguise himself and then grab a hold of me in any situation. I was Satan-sensing to the max as a way of being on guard and always aware of his trickery.

Imagine how different my life would be if I would have put the same amount of energy into God-sensing to look for His presence and touch under every rock of my life. Using my eyes to see, ears to hear, and touch from loving hands reveals that already present Creator in my everyday living. He is always with me; present in every conversation, circumstance, and happening—good or bad. However, I am not always looking under the rocks for Him even if it is a blessing or a suffering. When I use to go fishing as a youngster my brother and I would walk the yard looking for worms. Inevitably we would find fat worms under the rocks that would not be seen unless we looked specifically in that place. Those worms made us expert fishermen because we practiced worm-sensing. You can sometimes be quite surprised when you begin to practice God-sensing.

When Julie and I first became interested in one another we were part of a revival ministry on the West coast. We had a courtship that existed under the strict rules of a ministry but as older members of that ministry we still had to follow the same guidelines as everyone else including no holding hands, hugs or kissing. During the six months we were engaged we only kissed and touched once – when I asked her to marry me. I obtained permission from my

ministry director to propose to her and he said we could seal it with one kiss. (By the way that one kiss overlooking the Puget Sound under a bright moon was without a time limit so we took advantage to make it last. After all one kiss is still one kiss!) We were both without any money living on support so when the special gifts from others came we were surprised over and over again. When we looked under the rocks we found a God who provided a wedding dress, flowers, a rehearsal dinner, and money for a ring-all as special gifts. Our relationship was intricately tied into a God relationship and some of the pre-marriage touches by Him still astound me today.

We officially became engaged in March and planned on getting married only three months later in June which is a short time to coordinate a wedding while on the road as a musical group. We were doing one-night concerts in the Los Angeles area and had a scheduled meeting at a Friends church on Sunday night. While the team slept in from the long trip the day before, the church requested that Julie be available to sing a special that morning during the services. Through that special assignment a woman of the church came up to her and took an affinity immediately because she reminded her of her own daughter.

This lady, Sharon, invited Julie to go out the next day on Monday to look for bridesmaid dresses. Sharon came and picked Julie up along with several girls from the team to look for dresses. They came upon one particular shop where they searched and found prospective dresses that were reasonably simple and economical. Julie and Sharon asked the owner if the dresses could be obtained in time for the June wedding. The man indicated that the dresses, mauve-colored formals sizes 7-8, two 9-10's and one 11/12, had to be ordered from the New York warehouse and cost \$78 apiece (which the girls didn't have anyway). The owner seemed negative about the possibilities of really getting these dresses but said he would call the next day. He indicated that it was well past the deadline to place an order to receive them for a June

wedding. So the ladies all left and Julie was dropped off back at the house where she was staying.

The next morning Julie received an early call from an excited Sharon who could hardly contain herself. She just talked to the store owner who had indicated that he had never seen anything like it in his 40 years in the business. The store owner called the warehouse in New York and was told that there were only four dresses left of that style in the entire warehouse. They happen to be all mauve and they were the exact sizes 7-8, two 9-10's and one 11-12. Julie was shocked and excited but then reality struck and she said, "That's great but how are we going to pay for them?"

Then Sharon said "Don't worry it's taken care of."

"What do you mean they're taken care of...dresses just don't pay for themselves," said Julie.

"I'll pay for them," said Sharon.

This woman who had only met Julie two days before had volunteered to personally pay for all those bridesmaid dresses. After that blessing from God there was no doubt that Julie and I were supposed to be married in June.

When God revealed Himself to us in such a spectacular way, it was easy to see His hand. He was not under a rock but sending an open caring touch for Julie and me to see that He indeed was blessing us. His presence was more like a plane writing in the sky "I am here and I want to bless you." Those are the obvious miracle touches that are easy to see that He is close and here for us. Such miracles have built my trust in Him as my God and reminded me over and over that He loves me for *being me*.

You have already met Shawna my friend who is a special person that I see almost on a daily basis at the mall. One day she was sharing with me how that she had lost her job and was now without work. Work would be difficult to find for her because of her definite physical and mental limitations. The very next morning I was feeling somewhat melancholy and depressed when I walked Shawna. In her hand was a cup of coffee she purchased for me at the donut shop across the street. She gave me the coffee and told me that it was only a nickel because of a special they had going on indefinitely. To think that she took the time to think about me and to get the coffee was a moment of encouragement and lifted my spirits for the day. God was present in Shawna that day to remind me that He is there with me even when I am depressed. He knew what I was feeling and reminded me that being a sales manager has many opportunities for ministry. He was seen in her caring and giving heart and warmed my spirit for the day. I lifted the rock and He was there in a cup of coffee and when I saw Him, I experienced first-hand *being me*.

In my job as manager of that cell phone store, I recently sold several phones to an older couple, who upon taking their phones home, discovered that the service was not strong enough in their home. They brought the cell phones back to return them because it was within the 30-day trial period. These are the aspects of my job that is one of my least favorite duties. You take a personal hit with your own sales and then the store takes a dip in total dollar volume as well. This older couple really adapted a strong affinity to me during the original sale and felt bad about returning the phones. So one of them asked how much commission I lost because of the return. When I told them, they sat down and wrote out a check for that amount and gave it to me personally. God was there even in the midst of a negative return to give me a positive touch through taking care of my financial needs

Each and every day as I live life I encounter opportunities to see God's blessings upon me. Recently we had a wonderful Thanksgiving meal at my home with my wife and daughter (our son was in Iraq). The juicy turkey smell wafted through the house and I could feel my stomach churning. The whipped mashed potatoes were creamy and covered with thick hot gravy. The green bean casserole with the Durkee onions on top were one of my favorites along with sweet potatoes covered with marshmallows, brown sugar and nuts. There's nothing like whipped potatoes with buttered corn, sweet cranberry sauce and luscious pumpkin pie all washed down with sparkling cider. That meal continues to represent all I have to be thankful for as God has blessed me through the years. The tastes of His blessings are sometimes very evident and sometimes hiding under a rock. When I look for them and find them I am reminded once again of the fact that He loves and accepts me just the way I am. Every time we celebrate the agape feast or Communion I am reminded not only of His blessings but also who sits at the head of that table. I don't have to be a man in process of developing or reach a level of spiritual growth to know that His love and presence is real. I am reminded through the blessings big and small that He thinks about me, loves me, and is near to me every day of my life. I see God in the simple smile of a child or the kindness of a person opening the door for me. He is in a mother who calls to find out how I am doing and in a bank teller who remembers my first name. His tender care is visible in the beauty of a single rose sitting on my wife's work table or in the spectacular colored leaves of the fall. I live under the foothills of majestic Mount Rainier in Washington and I am amazed that almost every day He paints the mountain with different colors. Now for me to experience that blessing outside my window every day is a gift in my life. He is present in that daily painting, reminding me of the anticipation of His blessing today. When I sense and

recognize that blessing, I experience myself anew and afresh that I am His and He is mine. With that I can rest in *being me* and lay aside the pressures of the world to be somebody else.

The cares and troubles of this world many times bear down on me and I no longer take the time to look under rocks for God. There is an impending doom and despair that He is gone or absent and in times of suffering and difficulty it is hard to find God. If God is shouting to me in my pain then many times I am not listening while I wallow in self-pity and pain. When Mary Magdalene of the Bible anointed Jesus' feet with the sweet smell of perfume, it foreshadowed the anointing He would receive after His death on the cross.⁴¹ She took an expensive jar of perfume, poured it on the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair. With that anointing His death would carry a sweet perfume of suffering that would bless the ages. I ran into a Macy's department store to pick out a bottle of perfume for my wife. She had already given me the instructions I needed in order to purchase the right perfume; (left on my own who knows what I would pick up). To think of suffering as a sweet smell is like the odor outside my house today. The landscapers are laying cow manure in all the beds and the entire neighborhood stinks like a cow patty! That is the smell I would normally associate with suffering. Yet it is in suffering that I not only encounter and sense God, but I also discover my true self. Stinky suffering becomes a sweet smell of God's presence and has the potential to reveal the real me.

To look at problems and suffering with pure joy is to live a life out of solitude coupled with awareness. I find out truly who I am when the tough times come. Some say that everything that has happened to me has had to happen to make me who I am without exception. My premise is that happenings don't make me who I am, they reveal who I am. They are a reminder of the grace of God and His love for what I am. Tears tell me something about the secret of me. The rubber meets the road on our journey when smelling the sweet perfumes of pain and suffering. It

is because through pain and suffering God is shouting from the house tops “I love you and I am with you.” That presence is a sweet smell that wafts throughout those times of struggle and disappointment. The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of pains and joys of the here and now. Within that suffering we are His beloved and that His presence is without end. It is through suffering that we discover ourselves and sense God. He loves me. He cares for me. He will never leave me.

When Julie and I made the decision to leave our last church and move to Washington, we had a fresh vision of moving on to another church ministry that God had in store for us. Based on our past track record we had never been more than six months between churches and so there was a strong belief that God would open a door in Washington like He did in other locations. Through personal research I had discovered that Washington was one of the most unattended church states in the nation. Upon arrival I began the long process of resume submittals, applications, phone interviews and even traveling to candidate at a number of possibilities. Weeks turned into months and the months turned into years. It has now been an incomprehensible five years since that infamous move across country that landed us at the foot of Mount Rainer. The first three years I battled with my emotions and became very depressed. God had somehow left me abandoned on the doorstep and I was no longer of use for Him in the church. With every church rejection another nail was hammered in the coffin of a life without ministry. I became angry with God and avoided attending any local church on a consistent basis. Why would he give me 26 years of pastoral training and ministry to end up managing a cell phone store? I had sacrificed and served Him all of my life in the church and now even the

church was rejecting me. In my frustration I could not control these circumstances with even my best resume and interview presentation. I was experiencing great pain.

In the midst of my greatest defeat and depression, God placed in my heart a new vision and dream. That dream was one that I had actually planned as a life goal a number of years previously. That dream was to return to school to work on my doctorate and to eventually write a book. Julie and I surveyed several schools nearby to our home in Washington and settled on George Fox in Portland. Our first meeting with Chuck Conniry, the seminary director at the school, took place while visiting two different schools. Chuck's kindness and understanding in the midst of his modest office was refreshing and his realistic love for God and pastors was warmly felt. As I shared with him about working at the cell phone store and missing pastoring he said, "Jeff you still are a pastor. Pastoring is not a title, it's who you are and you can be a pastor even while working at the cell phone store." Such positive affirmation and total acceptance warmed my heart and endeared me to go to this school. I could sense that God was working in the midst of my pain to point me in a new direction.

To go to the school was a bold step because I had been out of seminary for the last 17 years and wondered how I could handle the academic challenges once again. With the financial and mental challenges before me, I took the step of faith and applied to begin the dream. In the process of an academic venture God would speak to me over and over again through the brotherhood of a group of close friends and professors to reveal my need to rest in *being me*. I met with God and faced myself through special times of study right on Cannon Beach in Oregon. God came down and met with our small cohort of seven in the midst of one of classes and bonded us together in a way we had never experienced before. The classes have been more than just academic exercises but a positive way of fleshing out my past pain and applying new visions

to where I was in the present. Through the peaceful serenity and roaring waves on the beach God reminded me of His peaceful and relentless love for me. With a focus on solitude and awareness in the midst of my suffering loneliness and rejection, God welcomed me home to a place of acceptance and peace. I lifted the rock and He shouted out to me in my pain, depression, and rejection “Jeff I love you for who you are.”

Some of my most special times with friends are in celebrating Communion together. The physical eating of the bread and drinking of the juice or wine is a reminder of the suffering of Jesus and the resulting blessing that have come from His death. During those special moments all pretense of worldly values of status, performance, and possessions dissipate into an honesty of God opening His arms to hug me. As He hugs me I sense that peaceful rest of being in His arms that says *You are my child, you are special*. As a human with many faults and deficiencies, God says, *Come to me just as you are for it is that Jeff that I love*. Being human is a glorious experience of *being me* under the everyday blessings of God through both the good times and the bad-I just need to get my nose in tune with the smells of His presence.

My wife and I enjoy taking in a movie together at the theater occasionally on my day off from work. Our movie experience is usually a total sensory experience. Our eyes feast on the screen while the sounds captivated our ears. We smell the popcorn and taste the peanut M & M’s while we touch and hold hands. *Being me* in life is released through a God-sensing that either is a surround-sound or a silent whisper. It is when I look hard under the rocks that I remember His unique presence that shouts out “I love you for who you are.” It’s at that moment when *being me* becomes a reality.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Geometric Integrity”

My first year in college was quite an eventful one. I had been out of a formal school for three years and decided to return to the discipline of study in order to better myself for a future career outside of factory work. I had been working in a factory since high school and made good money but the boring repetition of factory life was draining up my creative juices. My first year was in a community college where the coursework was more of a high school repeat of classes I had already taken. The classes were too easy and I was ready the next year to sink my teeth into something a little bit more substantial. As a freshman at the University of Toledo I enrolled in Calculus, Chemistry and Psychology that first quarter. My grades that first year reflected the standard of difficulty I faced in tackling the mathematic bents of calculus and chemistry (both of which I had all three semesters). I was a pharmacy major and so the road to black and white figures and formulas began. I soon discovered that the math life was not for me and I quickly moved on to another major.

In high school and in college I endured geometry, algebra, trigonometry and calculus where I learned the importance of straight lines and circles. Since then I have noticed how both straight lines and circles are seen everywhere in life. For example, I have seen how the straight line is of utmost importance in the world of sports. In football the field is gridded off in straight lines and your success is measured by how well you maneuver past the hash marks. In baseball the foul line marks off what is in play and what isn't. Hitters run in as straight a line as much as possible between bases or to catch the ball before it drops. The shortest route to each location both defensively and offensively often determines the winners from the losers. In basketball the circle becomes even more important. You have a round ball that players are trying to put through

a round hoop with a three-point line marked in a circular line. I have often wondered what the game of pool would be like without round cue balls and straight-lined angles. Many sports use a circular ball that must be hit, caught, kicked or dribbled. When I engage in each of these sports my mind automatically incorporates the use of math. I use calculus, geometry and trigonometry to shoot a ball, throw a ball, and to calculate distance and angles. Our brains begin doing math as early as infants in determining angles and distance. As an infant, my son's first word was "ball" and he continues to talk about "ball" even as a Marine in Iraq. I recently received a picture of him with some children in Iraq as he was teaching them the Texas "hook-um" symbol with his fingers. Even in war he has football on his mind.

Those dreaded colored traffic lights are round and many helpful road signs are circular. Whenever you get caught weaving in and out of traffic you are asked by the policeman to get out of the car and to walk the straight line. In the military your commanding officer may ask you to line up in a straight-line formation. A carpenter plumbs a straight line in order to accurately plan out his work. We have circular stadiums and arenas, circular pans and plates, and some might even say my head is circular (even though I would strongly disagree). My wedding ring is in a circle (symbolizing a love without beginning or end) and my tires are round enough to keep me moving on the highway in a sort-of straight line. I was watching a western on television when the cry to circle the wagons was made by the wagon master. Buttons are round and the blinds on my windows are in straight lines. Circles and straight lines are everywhere!

It is not that I am fascinated with circles and straight lines but when the two come together they create a sense of wholeness and integrity. Geometrically a circle is complete and inclusive leaving nothing out. A straight line is true to what it is and never deviates from that form. It represents the quickest way to get from one location to the other without any variation.

The circle and the straight line also speak of a congruent wholeness that only comes from living a life of true God-sensing.

A friend of mine told me the story of a beautiful fresh looking orange sitting on the table.⁴² It was juicy-looking with an orange glow that made it look fresh and inviting. As it sat there he asked a very simple question concerning that round piece of fruit, “What do you get when you squeeze the orange?” “Orange juice,” I said obviously. He looked at me with a smirk and began his reply, “It sounds logical but that answer is incorrect. You see when the orange is squeezed what comes out is what is on the inside. But this particular orange had apple juice on the inside so when it was squeezed apple juice came out.” The story about the orange tells me a lot about myself when I am living outside the world of God-sensing. When my life is lived on the outside circumference I become nothing but a show piece that responds to what the world wants me to be. As a showpiece my life can become very fragile and thin layered. When I am living from out of the center my identity moves in the direction of a straight line from the inner world of knowing God to the outer circumference of loving people. The two have a sense of congruence and wholeness where what I am on the inside is not an apple juice surprise when it hits the circumference. This is living a life of integrity where who I am matches what I do. The juice on the inside matches the fruit appearance on the outside.

When the pressures of life come along and begin to squeeze me through difficulty quite often the real me is what comes out. I may lay down that veneer of control and calm and respond in anxiety shouting and anger. The outside of the orange is polished daily and kept looking fresh and inviting to keep up a good appearance. Our friends like that appearance and believe that that orange illusion is the real me. But when the pressure comes I struggle to maintain that illusion

and eventually it happens—what was on the inside is really what comes out resulting in insecurity and embarrassing adjustments like blaming and placating.

When I was working my way through college I had a job as a janitor at my home church. I worked hard and was a versatile paid employee who took care of the church grounds both inside and out. That meant keeping clean a rather large facility through daily sweeping, mopping, cleaning rest rooms and glass doors and emptying trash. On the outside church grounds I had to keep the grass cut and trimmed, the hedges cut back and in the winter the large parking lot cleared of snow. Our church had a day care so the challenges of keeping it clean were formidable to say the least. I would clock in, do my work, and then clock out. However I got into the habit of sometimes clocking in and taking breaks without clocking out. I would walk across the street to the store and hang out for long periods of time while still on the clock; sometimes I would even drive off in my car while still clocked in.

Nobody knew that I did this because on the surface all was well; my clean cut image as a spiritual young man was intact. Everyone respected me as a leader in the church and I was trusted as a spiritually-minded person, but on the inside I was deceiving the church pastor and taking money for time not worked. The day came and I finally confessed it to my pastor, he forgave me, and I changed my ways. The truth was that what was on the inside was not what you would have expected. When guilt finally squeezed me I revealed my true self with fear and trembling.

When I am spending time in solitude and awareness with God in a relationship on a consistent basis I begin to operate as a person from the inside out. When that foundation of acceptance and love is formulated and reinforced the pressures to adapt on the circumference begin to fade away. If wholeness can be defined as an integrity that comes from being what you

are, then spiritual formation or the process of *being me* is the journey of becoming whole and not divided. It's very simply put as having your "being" match your "doing." As a circle of integrity my life originates out of the gauntlet of solitude and awareness resulting in wholeness. The problem I face without God-sensing is living life on the circumference.⁴³ I am a person who perceives the circumference with little access to the center. I live on the outside edge of my life confusing edges with essence. I am too quickly claiming the superficial as substance. The answer: God-sensing takes me away from the circumference so that I will know myself and God. Living on the superficial will lead to incongruence. Living out of the center leads to wholeness where the inside juice matches the outside fruit appearance.

The experience of *being me* is blended with experience of knowing God. These two experiences seem to move forward together and shape a life of wholeness. A life of *being me* is a life lived in the intimacy of God—"I" becomes the "I of God" and I am joined in a mystical union with Him as His child.⁴⁴ Incongruency and the false self identify me as separate and apart from God. The false-self will compensate through performance and because of that performance I will become changeable as circumstances warrant, thus leading to inconsistent living. Taking God with me into life is the answer to battling living on the circumference. Without that union with God through God-sensing my identity becomes culture driven and divided.

For years I lived my life upon the circumference. I would start from the outside and then try to change the inside. Whether it was a new program or spiritual discipline I would impose a change on the behavior and then assume change also would come in my inner life. Bible reading will make me spiritual; prayer will bring me closer to God; church-attendance will relieve my guilt through service; and the latest seminar will provide another "how-to-program" for church growth. The problem was always that of control. I wanted to have control over every aspect of

who I was and who I wanted others to think I was. All the while I knew that my inside was hollow and empty and without substance. That clean cut guy who taught Sunday school and prayed in public was living on the edges and greatly influenced by what others thought. I had a resemblance of control over that image but underneath lived fear and anxiety. When I am with God in a very real relationship my perspective of myself changes because it is not based on just doing but being with Him. I am no longer afraid to live *being me*. That road of control always seemed to pass through performance and doing for God and others. That was something tangible that I could organize and check off my task list. But to spend time with God and do nothing but be with Him was a whole new revelation of peace and rest.

As a pastor the congruency of my life became even more strained. The rigors and demands of ministry constantly pulled me to the circumference away from my center. Being a pastor tempts a person to become political and changeable in order to keep the peace and keep up appearances. I was constantly busy preparing sermons but not making time to see God in life. A successful day was one in which I had completed the most tasks, made the most phone calls, visited the most people, or organized the most events. Where was God-sensing in all of that?

My incongruent life really was seen in a 24-hour day of prayer that I once conducted at the church. I had organized the event as a special time of seeking God as a congregation at the start of a new year. I had all the sign up boards organized and hour-leaders assigned. I purposed to attend every one hour session to show the people my zeal for prayer. But when I came to pray during those time slots it was like returning to an empty center. It was easier for me to move back to the outside and stay busy doing tasks and jobs assuming the role of Thumper once again. Being with God was too passive and quiet so my solution was to organize my prayer time to such an extent that every hour I would spend five-minute intervals doing different “tasks” of prayer.

My goal was not to meet with God but rather to spend all 24 hours in prayer as a form of example and to keep up appearances as a holy man. When I stayed on the circumference the time in prayer would pass quickly and I would also feel like I was accomplishing something. People would then keep that image of me as a man of God held high and my false-self would again rule.

In the 1960s, I frequently watched *The Match Game* on television after school. Hosted by Gene Rayburn, the game show paired celebrities with contestants who would speak a word that the contestant had to match accordingly. The two words went together and as a result you had a match and money was won. Ultimately, the inner desire of people is to live a life in which the inside and circumference match but fear can block the match. That match is the place where *being me* is realized and life is lived without fear of discovery. In such a game a card would be held up that says, “Jeff” and another to match saying “pastor” or maybe “Bronson.” As much as I would like this to be a true match, a more likely match would be “kind” or “caring” or “afraid” or “depressed”. Admitting who I really am and being at rest with that with others is what the circle of integrity is all about.

Another end result of God-sensing is that my life will no longer be compartmentalized into religious and non-religious or public and private or serving and playing. By compartmentalized I mean that we are not always the same person as we pass from role to role throughout the day or week. Congruent wholeness will evidence itself in a stabilized life that is consistent. The great constant that stabilizes is first the presence of God and second *being me*. This is the straight line of life consistency that comes from *being me* on Sundays and being the same me on Monday through Fridays. Where I am no longer determines what image I have to portray or mask I must wear. In a sense I can't completely eliminate compartmentalization. When I go to work I am expected to wear my uniform and perform my job according to the

standards and expectations of the company. When I am at home with my wife I may kick back with sweats on and relax watching television. The temptation is to let these potential compartments drive myself to the outside and I end up playing roles. I am confused which roles become me and I put on those faces at the appropriate time in order to blend in with the expectation of others. To juggle these masks leads to fear and ends up organizing my responses appropriately to the right people. To church people I speak one language, to people at work I speak another leading to role-playing like a chameleon. We all have to code-switch naturally at times to live a role but am I being consistently me in the process? God-sensing becomes the stabilizer and my life can be lived like a straight line rather than a long and winding road of inconsistency.

Danny Deckchair is an Australian film about a man living on the circumference with a compartmentalized life.⁴⁵ Danny Morgan works as a construction worker who lives with his girlfriend Trudy (Clarke) but is unhappy with his life. His unhappiness is tied to the fact that all of the important people in his life do not appreciate his inventiveness and the person he is. He feels that his job holds him down and he wants to pursue other dreams, which are laughed at by his girlfriend and friends. Danny is also an inventive character who, one day, ties a bunch of helium filled balloons to his deckchair during a party. His friends hold down the chair but inadvertently let go and set Danny on a ride across Australia that causes him to become a national hero after he lands in another place where he finds true happiness with another woman named Glenda (Otto) and new friends. He lands in Glenda's back yard after fireworks burst his balloons. Glenda, the town's only traffic cop, introduces him to the people of the town, and he becomes involved in an aspiring politician's campaign. In his new town the prejudices others had toward him and expectations to be "just a construction worker" are laid aside as he is open with

welcome arms for who he is. The people see his creative genius and perceive him as an important politician to lead their community and a man with special gifts.

What made the difference for Danny between the two towns? In one he was operating out of the expectations of others and living on the circumference. He was walking through his roles in life like an actor, but inside he was not being the real Danny. When he was spectacularly flown to his new town he was accepted for who he really was and his real self rose to the surface from the inside out. His life became one of integrity and wholeness. Maybe I could attach helium balloons to my real self and let them float to the surface of my life. The key to the rise of my true self comes from a centered reality with a God who loves and cares for me. That inner reality rises to the surface like balloons into an outside life that matches who I really am. It is experienced first-hand from the inside out through God-sensing.

When I do the math and add up all the facts and figures of my life I end up with incomplete circles and crooked lines. Throughout the years as I have sought to grab a hold and control my spiritual appearances and yes even my relationships with results that have not always painted a pretty picture. To consider a life of wholeness would be too revealing of the real me. It is much more convenient to stagger along in a world of compartmentalizing like an intoxicated man trying to walk the line. All throughout the journey I have not been happy with myself or at peace with who I am. There was always something missing. Years of habit patterns had to be overturned and a new circle reconstructed that allows the real me to shine on the circumference. The path is simple and avoids all the traps of performance. The path is simply recognizing and receiving God's gift of me. It is a straight line of *being me* that only can come out of a center filled with God's presence. It is a circumference released into serving others without fear.

Studying at Cannon Beach, Oregon was not only a physical treat but also a spiritual experience. Every day I would watch the circular sun slowly drop in the sky to meet with the straight line of the ocean horizon. Wholeness and peace come when the circle of the sun meets with the horizon lines in our lives and those geometric shapes come to represent the integrity of a reality in my experience of *being me*. It was in those moments that a genuine sense of God's presence overtook me and I sat quietly and soaked it all in. It is then and only then I am overwhelmed with the fact that this wholeness was not of my doing but orchestrated by a caring God that so desperately desires for me to live a life where the sun touches the horizon—a fulfilling life of *being me*.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“Avoiding Like Me Buttons”

Bosses always have to face difficult decisions and confront problems head on. Donald Trump as a ruthless and cutthroat boss has no difficulty facing tough problems. He became famous for saying those two words, “You’re fired!” on *The Apprentice*. As contestants failed to complete business assignments as part of the show, The Donald would confront them in the boardroom and eventually dismiss a bright young business hopeful. Having others like him was not high on his list of being successful. While I am no Donald, I faced a difficult task at my small business of uttering those same two words to one of my employees.

The salesperson in question had worked for me for a better part of a year and proved to be very successful in the business. He was people-oriented and had a way of connecting relationally with others through his sales. Married with a young child and working his way through school, he had a bright future and hopeful optimism that was captivating. And then I discovered (accidentally) that he was adding on lines of service in his name, cancelling the accounts, and then dispersing the phones to friends. When accounts are cancelled the customer is required to return the phones to the company. Because he chose not to do this he was caught in performing a fraudulent activity. I had to face my biggest fear as a store manager—saying “You’re fired” to a friend and family person. I’d much rather have him like me than to face him in that meeting.

I have had to confront others in this same job at times with their lack of performance and many times have failed to fire them out of similar fears. Some would say that I am very patient in my dealings with my associates. I believe I give them multiple chances and slowly work with them to nurse their numbers back to health. Quite frequently *my* boss thinks I am too gracious

and soft. I think that it is because my *Like Me Button (LMB)* gets pushed and I ignore the potential conflict.

Sally Field in her 1985 acceptance speech for the Academy Award for her role in *Places in the Heart* felt so overwhelmed that she blurted out, “You like me; You really like me!”⁴⁶ Sally Field saw her peers’ approval at the Oscars as the ultimate *LMB*. They actually had to vote for her which could have placed her in a vulnerable place if she had not won. When I am confronted with facing a choice about whether to be myself or be what others want out of me, I choose the safe route that avoids conflict. Then when the other person is happy because of my compliance I inside shout, “They like me; they really like me.” I fish for comments or reactions that will eventually push that button that strokes my ego. Getting that button pushed is the way to feeling good about ourselves.

To me the importance of the *LMB* is grossly overrated. The perception of living to get that button pushed in order to feel approval is a mirage. I give in to others in the midst of conflict or disagreements as the best way to solve problems. It creates a sense of immediate relief but does not take care of the overall problem. Whenever I struggle with heartburn I pop in some Tums for immediate relief, but the relief is temporary and another painful gurgitation comes along. So then in goes more Tums. The real solution to my heartburn was to seek out medicine, which may not have immediate effect but will eventually take care of the problem in the long haul. The *LMB* give immediate relief but the overall stress of living up to the expectations of others and their desires are overwhelming.

The desire to have my *LMB* pushed is strongest in the midst of confrontational relationships. The sharp edge of the difficult people in my life will force me to make decisions about myself. Will I choose to be myself in freedom or will I choose to buckle under the pressure

of fear and choose a path that is not me but safe? With every confrontation with difficult people comes a decision. The relationship to self is brought to fruition in relationship to others. The choice to consider pushing the *LMB* comes out of the following potential scenarios: Will I forgive that person who wronged me? Will I choose to respond in anger by how I was treated? Will I act out of fear because I am living under a performance standard? Will I choose control of my way or the highway? Will I continue to make believe I am that person others like rather than who I am in reality? Will I join in with others and make fun at the expense of someone else?

These types of responses could possibly expose the imposter that wants to replace my true self with a veneered replacement. In other words, those types of relational scenarios drive me to seek others to push that button. The imposter in me cannot experience intimacy in any relationship. An important aspect of *being me* is calling out the imposter and embracing and accepting him. In a relationship when I keep on that mask and use the button, I ignore who I am and endeavor to live a picture of who I want others to think I am. To tear off the mask is to accept the reality of my shortcomings and to accept my authentic self. When I have to confront people in a relationship, the tendency is to ignore the situation and put it off. The hope is that it will disappear and the problem will go away. When I am practicing God-sensing, I will recognize God's work and presence and respond to confront the situation without fear and rejection. Others can become an agent of grace toward my wholeness as a person. Therefore, when I run from confrontation I put on my false-self, shirk intimacy and never live in the freedom of *being me* and I eventually miss out on experiencing His grace.

For years, I lived a life of fear and compliance built around a *LMB*. Whenever I had to face confrontation in a relationship, I would immediately give in to become the "peacemaker" because it conveniently made me look godly. And after all, appearances were of supreme

importance especially as a pastor. When, out of fear, we avoid conflict and appease people, we become false peacemakers. This confrontational approach to *being me* came to a head at my last church. Consistently during board meetings and in decision-making with the congregation I lived a life of compliance and apparent peace. In particular during those meetings two board members constantly ganged up on me and challenged my decision-making and personal leadership. One even sat down with me over lunch and told me “If you follow my example as a leader, you will be successful.” During those confrontations, I usually would give in, nod my head, and go along just to keep the peace.

Mahatma Ghandi was an ultimate peacemaker in India when it was much more popular to give into the status quo.⁴⁷ As a major political and spiritual leader Ghandi led a peaceful resistance movement to protest government abuse and to ease the nationwide poverty that plagued the people. He also led the civil disobedience movements that eventually led to the withdrawal of the British of the control of India as British province. Ghandi was a practitioner of non-violence and truth, and advocated that others do the same. He lived modestly in a self-sufficient residential community and wore the traditional Indian dhoti and shawl at a time when the British were trying to “modernize” the people of India. He ate simple vegetarian food and also undertook long fasts as a means of both self-purification and social protest. In the midst of the pressure to become more British, Ghandi stood strong as a peacemaker for being himself as an Indian. He did not just nod his head to go along to keep the peace but withstood the British peacefully ultimately leading to imprisonment, suffering, and ultimately the freedom of his people.

But for me I knew I wasn’t living up to being the true me. I was wearing that mask in order to avoid conflict and to avoid the fear of rejection. So I consistently used the *LMB*. I think

the greatest fear of all is that if I expose the imposter and lay bare my true self, I will be abandoned by my friends and ridiculed by my enemies. When I was pastoring my church in Ohio, I repeatedly faced the desire to push that *LMB*. I was following the popular older pastor who had led the church through its glory days and the people still endeared him. When I started my six-year ministry there the people of the church consistently wanted me to change my style of speaking. The former pastor was an expositional teacher while I focused mostly on storytelling and visual presentations. They would complain to the elders that they were not being fed and the elders would then confront me. Many times I would listen and give in without discussion in order to keep the peace. One young elder sat down with me over lunch and told me that my leadership style was not the proper way to lead the church. As a leader of a large child care ministry he told me in arrogance, “Follow my lead and example in leadership. Let me teach you how to be a leader.” I sat stunned and became very angry at his attitude of pride but said nothing out of fear.

It was during my last 12 months at the church that I made a significant turnaround. I began to see the value in confronting *being me* in the midst of the meetings and relationships. During one important encounter, our group of elders sat around a table at a restaurant creating a methodology to keep me accountable. They gave me a whole series of questions that they wanted me to answer in essay form and to submit to them about my relationship with God and others as a form of “accountability.” Reluctantly I pushed my button and complied to “keep the peace.” But as I thought further about it, these men were a group of elders and who was keeping them accountable? So as an exercise I responded back to them by stating that I will complete their exercise but that I also wanted each of them to complete the questions as well. Since we are all equal elders in leading the church, then we need to all be willing equally to be accountable.

Interesting enough, they decided to drop the whole request for both me and them. It is much easier to ask others to open up and share their weaknesses when we are hiding our own. These men desired for me to open up and share my struggles but they were unwilling to be part of the process themselves.

While the end result may not look favorable in the eyes of most people (I resigned the church and was rejected and judged by many church members), I began to be true to myself. In my own India I had to choose a peaceful way to confront the situation without splitting the church. My choice of resigning was out of strength of choice to be me. Many thought I was running away from the problems and the situation but I knew that the church needed to totally change its methodology and return to a teaching oriented ministry. While I value that approach of ministry I believed God had led me to use a different style that was truly me. So to leave was peacemaking out of strength of *being me*. I was beginning to learn how to avoid pushing the *LMB*. That process continued throughout the next two years as I dealt with depression and rejection. We had moved 2,500 miles to the state of Washington to be near my daughter and start over again. It was through my times of solitude and confronting relationships that God was releasing me to be myself. It was through my experience at George Fox over the next two years and the relationships I developed there that God deepened my journey to *being me*. I have come to a place of truly loving others through *being me* and not out of a staging a veneered performance.

When I met my wife Julie 30 years ago, I found a person that loved me for who I was. Her unconditional love and caring for me has become God's tools for shaping or releasing me to be the person God planned. As I have learned from her love, my love for others has matured and developed allowing me to express with freedom as God meant for me. Practically an example of

this shows up in how I just physically express affection for others. Julie has always been very affectionate—willing to give hugs and lend a tender touch. I was raised in a home where I never saw my mother and father hug and kiss and as a result their affection toward us was accepted and known but not expressed physically. To this day if I hug my older sister she will stand with her arms straight down at her side during the embrace like a dead fish. I have always been very emotional but did not have the freedom or knowledge of how to express myself. Julie taught me through example how to express my emotions and helped to shape my true self that was inside me all along. This was a way of her loving God through her relationships with me as the proving ground of her love for Him. She taught me how to lay down the *LMB*, which looks at hugs as a form of approval or threat that makes me uncomfortable in order to truly give hugs out of a heart of love and security in *being me*. When I am at work I freely hug others and gently touch their arm or shoulder in order to show true affection and care. It is liberating to live life in this manner without the like me hook.

I attended a number of men's conferences while serving as a pastor and enjoyed the brotherhood and challenges that we received as men. One of the strongest pushes we were challenged to take away from the conference was the establishment of accountability with other men. A series of questions created a sense of a legalistic record of rights and wrongs that became rather awkward for me to be part of in a group of men as a pastor. Keeping track of our behavior together was another method of works and performance that I had already been living for years. To place myself within that format only produced more of the false-self living a mirage. Our group would sit over breakfast and the interrogation began. We tended to play games with one another and say only that which produced likeability. If I share all the real stuff going on inside me, I will no longer get the respect and their perception of me as a strong leader will diminish.

So I only share some little insignificant things; that is just enough for you to think I am being open and honest. My selfish perspective looks at these encounters as a threat because it forces me to choose whether or not I will reveal the real me. When I cover-up and choose the *LMB*, my real-self remains hidden and I continue to live in the fear of being found out. *LMBs* can create legalistic barriers that hold me back from opening up my true self to others. I was created to reveal the true me within the context of our relationships but fear of rejection holds me back.

Within our marriage Julie and I have learned how to forgive one another and resolve our differences through non-fearful interactions. Because our love is based on acceptance we seek resolution when disagreements arise. With each resolution comes another touch by the Master Potter in shaping *being me*. The practice of forgiveness within relationships is a proving ground for the extent of how deep God's forgiveness of me has been experienced. Broken relationships can either bind or release *being me*. When another person has hurt me my response tends to feel violated and threatened and I retreat into my shell, ignore the hurt and hope it will go away. On the hand if the *LMB* was not pushed I become angry and seek revenge on the other person.

When I forgive those who have hurt me, I acknowledge that I too have needed forgiveness and that I am not as different from the offender as I might like to think. There is a natural tendency in me to excuse my own faults and to blame others for their faults, an inclination to reach for grace and understanding in my own situation and to reach for justice and possibly revenge when the same wrong is committed by others. To forgive others is to release them from any obligation to make up to me what they have taken from me. When I release the wrongdoer from the wrong, I cut a malignant tumor out of my inner life. I set a prisoner free discovering that the real prisoner was really me. When I have experienced the freedom of not

having to perform for the acceptance of God's forgiveness personally, I will also live the freedom of not expecting others to perform for our forgiveness as well.

Within this context relationships reveal my humanity. With relationships come tears and laughter, joys, and pain. Relationship was part of the way in which I was meant to be fully human, not for my own sake, but as part of a much larger scheme of things. When I sense failure in my relationships, there is an urge to be released as a truly self-differentiated human being. Periodically I have made choices to step away from the *LMB* but the results are that I get burnt. When I served as an administrator for a ministry at a university, I encountered a difficult choice. My boss wanted to purchase jackets with the ministry logo on it for our entire singing group and staff. The problem was that it was going to cost five-thousand dollars and it was not in the budget. The monies in our budget were actually gifts from people that had chosen to support this mission ministry. They had given in good faith believing that these funds were going to spread Christianity around the world and not buy unneeded jackets. I walked into his office to confront him knowing that his manner of leadership was to give orders and take no questions. My palms were sweating and with a nervous voice I confronted the issue and he proceeded to ream me out from top to bottom. He stood up and went face to face as his neck quivered while shouting and imposing guilt on me for disobeying him. In fear I complied and gave in to his request and decided to go ahead and get the jackets to keep the peace. *Being me* made a brief appearance and was rejected so with each and every such case that happens, my practice became to avoid the confrontation in the first place and to just comply. Temporary peace was obtained, but the victory was hollow and my real-self was again suppressed.

So I want you to imagine another button. This button, the Like You Button (LYB), could replace the LMB. The *LYB* is pushed whenever opportunities come to love others by *being me*.

Notice that the difference in the two buttons lies in my motive and is built upon how free I am to love myself and God. Instead of protecting myself and shielding it from others and subsequently operating under the approval mode, I can truly love others freely without any hooks. When I try to love others under the guise of pleasing others, I am constantly seeking ways of compliance or performing in order to gain approval. With the *LYB*, I am free to be myself and my focus is not on that hook but on the needs of others and true love flows smoothly.

My district boss at work has been a great help to me through the last several years and so I wanted to truly show my appreciation for his assistance and also to invest in his life. So periodically I give him a leadership book that could help him in his difficult task of running a district. Now if I was operating out of the *LMB*, I would be giving him the books in order to have him think well of me and like me better than other managers. The gift would have a hook in that it would present me as a good guy with no faults. Liking me would lead to him not being as judgmental of me when my store is not performing as well as expected. But if I give that same book out of the *LYB*, then my interest and thoughts are not on myself at all. They truly want to help him become the best leader he can be and thoughts of approval through giving are not part of the picture.

Every day I face relationships that draw the line between operating in the *Like Me or Like You Buttons*. Relationships automatically create tension within me and cause me to make a choice. Do I live those relationships focusing on protecting myself or focusing on loving other people? When my attention is on me, I operate out of creating false scenarios of approval by living the expectations of others. This temporarily makes me feel better and peace is obtained. But deep down inside I live in the fear of exposure and rejection. When I look at relationships as an opportunity to live *being me* then I truly have the freedom to love and serve others without the

anxiety of discovery. Ghandi was an example of a person who focused more on loving others out of a differentiated self that was not afraid of discovery.

With each loving relationship God brings into my life opportunities to travel down the road of people-loving toward *being me*. Relationships can confront me, shape me or release me in this process. With every relationship I am faced with the choice of living me or living an expectation of my mirage. In reality I can't relate to myself until I love others and likewise I can't love others until I learn to relate to myself.

I like me, I really like me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Running Alongside”

Gym was not always my favorite high school class. Now most teenagers did and relished the thought of not having to pick up a book and just go outside over the course of an hour to play games. I guess because it was based so much on performance and everyone was openly compared with everyone else I sort of shied away. Our school was huge on gymnastics because they conducted a “gymnastics circus” every year drawing from each gym class to provide the performers. Massive human pyramids would be built and there was vaulting and parallel bars and so on. God did not make my body very flexible so I struggled with simple activities like somersaults or standing on your head. Needless to say my role in the circus could have been that of a clown, but I just chose the easy route and avoided the whole thing.

Then there was my experience with the wonderful world of golf in gym class. We were outside playing golf in an open field, shooting at makeshift flags in the ground that served as holes. I stood at the tee and took a nice swing at the ball and saw it flying high and long right toward the hole. Now what they didn’t tell you was that other people were shooting at the same hole from another angle. So while my ball was flying toward the pin, another student walked up to the hole to hold the stick while someone else shot from another side of the hole. I frantically yelled “Fore” and the person holding the stick turned to look at me. The ball sailed high and floated down in slow motion toward his head until it cracked his skull just above the eye and then quickly shot off in a different direction laying him out cold. I decided golf must not be for me as well.

So another day we had a wrestling tournament in gym class. So I tried my hand at jostling someone else down on a mat. It was a tournament and everyone in the grade had to participate

whether they were on the high school wrestling team or a school geek. The first kid I wrestled I took him down in nine seconds and thought, “I should be on the wrestling team.” It was a school record! The gym teacher posted the pairings for the next round only to reveal that I had to face the state champion. I thought, “Now is my chance to prove my worth.” As we both walked on the mat to shake hands, I remember my palms being sweaty as I feared for my life. The whistle blew and the match began. Even though I was pinned rather quickly, I was proud of the fact that I had lasted longer than my own record of nine seconds. Goodbye to wrestling.

What I was good at was running. I happened to be very fast and could beat out a lot of classmates racing on the track. My gym teacher was also the high school football coach and even though I weighed paltry 135 pounds and was six-foot tall, he consistently invited me to join the high school football team. I never really believed that I was good enough to play so I just ignored his requests. However I still ran fast in gym class. One day in the midst of an extremely hot spring day (in the 90’s) we were required to run a mile around the track. A mile around the track was four times around on a day when even the flies sought relief in the shade. As I was running, I watched most of my classmates stopping and not finishing. Many were bent over and vomiting and suffering from the unbearable heat. When I hit my fourth time around the track I hit a wall and starting feeling like I was running in slow motion. With an eighth of a mile to go my gym teacher came up to me and ran alongside me (maybe a fast walk was more accurate). He was shouting out, encouraging me saying, “Come on Zak...You can do it...Come on...You can finish.” His willingness to run alongside me down the final stretch helped me to be one of the few to complete the mile run. Crossing that finish line created many pictures of me winning future state meets, while music played and water splashed from beneath my feet as the *Chariots*

of Fire theme song was playing. In reality I was just lucky to complete four times around, yet I discovered that I was built to run.

Having someone else run alongside us to give encouragement becomes vitally important in our lives. When that person is missing many times we struggle and when they are there with that extra push of encouragement it would be enough to give us the confidence and perseverance to go to the next level. I experienced both with bike riding.

My first experience riding a two-wheel bike was an interesting adventure. It was a bright shiny red bike with balloon tires and a large seat. After multiple times trying and falling over I finally got the bike to stay up. I was so proud of myself that I continued to ride around the block where I lived enjoying my victory in life. By the third time around I realized that while I had learned how to finally stay up on the two-wheeler no one had taught me how to stop the bike. After my fourth time around I decided to try to stop the bike by turning into my parents' driveway. As I made the turn I went too fast and without knowledge of how to use the brake I crashed into the fence and went flying off the bike into the bushes. The rim on my new bike was bent and my pride damaged even more. I sure could have used someone to run alongside me that day.

My daughter Janelle was at that young age when she was learning to ride a two-wheel bicycle all by herself. She was afraid and struggled with keeping the bike upright so I did my fatherly duty to try to help her. I kept having flashbacks of my first time riding a bike and wanted to spare her the embarrassment. So the best way for me to help her stay up was that I would run alongside her and steady her bike when I needed to and encourage her to keep peddling. I was so proud of her effort and glad that I didn't have to help mend any knees or rims when we were done.

Whether it was my coach running alongside me at the track or myself as a dad helping my daughter, there was a sense of freedom in choosing to focus on serving another person without any expectation of a pat on the back or sign of approval. My teacher was not running by my side because he was waiting for me to say thank you or hoping that as a future track star I would give all the credit to him for getting me started on the road to success. He genuinely ran alongside me to encourage me to complete my task without any expectations of approval. Many times I serve others but my motivation is to receive a pat on the back or a word of thanks. I give you a gift and so ultimately I expect a gift in return. Somehow a “kickback” of approval becomes my true motivation instead of expressing love and serving out of a heart that has been set free.

Within our world of human interaction, freedom is the key word that describes a life of people-loving based on God-sensing. A life lived under the guise of the false-self is one that is living in bondage and fear. For me to choose to serve others with that kind of a mask is one that is always questioning and wondering if what I did was right. Did I do enough and how did I look in the eyes of others with my service? I live many days with the approval addiction that becomes my motivation for service. *Being me* seems to be meant to be lived in a world of relationships where it is defined in service with others. In complete freedom I can run alongside others and encourage and help them with my concentration on the other person and not me.

We were meant to truly define *being me* through the group participation of *being us*. In order to join and participate with a group of *being us* we must first have passed through the test of *being me*. The temptation in joining a group in order to serve is that it is easy to go along with the majority and still feel very selfish about my own personal needs in the midst of focusing on others.

When I was 35 years-old, I helped lead many student trips overseas that centered on helping people in need in foreign countries. We would go through a tremendous amount of effort to raise thousands of dollars, make enormous organizational plans, go through weeks of rehearsals and planning meetings, praying and working together, communicating long distance with missionaries, and then showing up with food, supplies, bibles, and providing medical services, helping build buildings and churches, and giving concerts.

In the midst of all that effort toward *being us*, I sometimes reverted to whining selfishly about the “tough” conditions I had to live under. My housing in a Seminary on such a trip in Uganda was not very ideal. I stayed in very dark facilities powered by generators sharing restroom and shower facilities that were communal with other seminary students and not very sanitary. The girls especially struggled with simple things like having enough power to dry their hair in the morning. I would shower in the dark and noticed that all the local students would wash themselves in one large tub of water. I wanted to criticize our hosts and look down on the missionaries and their efforts to take care of me. When you prop up the self, the tendency is to tear down others in order to gain approval. Those who served in genuine times of *being us* became focused on the overall goals and were self-differentiated enough that their personal needs were not of prime importance. In those moments true serving took place and genuine love was given with no hooks attached. I had such a team on one of my trips in Japan.

Our rag tag team of fifteen was not the glamour team of the overall trip. The glamour teams were in much higher profile locations in Korea and the Philippines. Attendance to their events was in the tens of thousands and with the director of the trip traveling with them they had many fun days of visiting all the wonderful sights, including the Olympic Stadium. Our team performed in front of small crowds and worked hard with a taxing schedule. Over the course of a

10-day trip in Japan we sang in four different locations every day (usually four different cities). We traveled by train everywhere we went and had to carry our equipment and luggage on and off the bullet train. During our days of service we battled jealousy of the other team and struggled thinking of ourselves. Working hand-in-hand with a missionary who had served in Japan for over forty years helped us to realize that this trip was not about us. He shared with us the successes of the last five years and how we were contributing a major part to the establishment of new churches in a difficult mission setting. By the end of the trip all the fun times the other teams were having didn't matter to us anymore. We were learning how to truly serve others in the context of *being us* without any thoughts of our own welfare.

My wife Julie went with us on that trip and it was very demanding physically and emotionally. She left behind two small children for three weeks back in the U.S. to participate on this trip. One night we were so tired and looking forward to staying with a missionary and eating "normal" food. On the way over to the missionary house she was informed that she would have to stay with a Japanese family that night just like the rest of the team. A family was promised an English speaking female but there were not enough team members to go around. As a married couple we would be split up with me staying with the missionary while she spent the night in a Japanese house. She soon discovered that the ladies she stayed with spoke very little English and the experience of sleeping on a mat at night with a glowing idol in the same room was one to remember (she did cover the incandescent glow with a handy blanket). What we had with that team was a group that had learned the sacrifice of *being us*. Like Julie, each gave up personal needs in order to make the overall goals of the trip a success. To do that effectively there has to be individuals who have learned the *being me* life of peace to contribute to the *being us* goals.

Near the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, James and John as two of the disciples entered into an important discussion about what they perceived was the coming kingdom of Jesus' rule.⁴⁸ That discussion centered on who was going to have favor and power alongside Jesus in the rule of the King. "All we ask, Jesus, is that the two of us be able sit on either side of you when you are ruling. We can be your helpers as your right and left hand in authority." Of course, the other disciples became angry and criticized this request even though they secretly wanted the same. Jesus' response was poignant and direct: "I came to serve others. Is that your motive in asking?"

It reminds me of an elder at one of my churches who was the director of a state-of-the-art day care center located right behind our facility. He was well respected in his field and worked with children for a living. At that time in the history of our church we were in the process of considering renovating our facility, which included the children's areas. Tagged alongside that was the need for leadership and direction for developing a children's ministry that could reach behind our building to over 400 families at the day care center. I asked him if he would consider leading the children's areas at our church and helping with the renovation of those areas. He replied, "I believe that leading the children's areas would be a total waste of my talents. I believe that I have bigger things to do." I had watched his life over the span of several years and had noticed that he liked to serve the church but only under his conditions and only if he had complete control. In this case I was only asking him as an elder to help oversee current leaders and to give some needed direction. Through other conversations I soon discovered that what he really wanted was to have decision-making power and control by sitting in the leadership of the church and sharing the pulpit rather than to serve the overall vision and goal unselfishly. Now I am okay with leaders making choices out of time restrictions and prioritization. But in this case, through years of observation and discernment, his focus was self-centered, operating out of

insecurity and motivated out of approval and status. Because I was also insecure and centered on approval, I never really addressed this problem.

Soon after the disciples' selfish request, we see a visual picture portrayed by Jesus himself of what serving is all about.⁴⁹ Foot washing was a customary part of hospitality in the ancient Near East, but it was obvious that if the disciples were fighting for a prominent place, none of them would volunteer to be the servant of all. Their embarrassment heightened when Jesus arose from supper, laid aside his garments, tied a towel around Himself, and began to wash his disciples' feet. Many would interpret this lesson as this: If Jesus can serve then they should as well. But I would interpret the more important lesson in this classroom as *being me* through serving. Jesus had no concern for what they thought. He had no thought of jockeying for approval and position at the head of the table. He did not demand that He be lifted up and served as a means of feeling better about His personal identity. Instead He chose to serve in complete freedom. He did not let what they thought affect His choice to serve at all.

My son Jeffry loved to practice serving when he was a little boy. At the dinner table he always desired to be the one to serve the food, carefully dividing up the food and placing it on everyone's plates. Although in the process, it was clear that his motivation was not exactly serving. As he placed the food on the plates he could then have control and power over who obtained what. And if there were a little more mashed potatoes to be scooped, he would be able to get them for himself. I smile and laugh at his behavior but the truth of the matter is that when I grow up I do the same thing with my serving. I serve others but I still want to control my service and it would be good if I could get a large heaping of mashed potatoes as a reward! Serving under the freedom of *being me* releases a person to truly focus on the needs of others and removes all concern for how I appear in the process. Choosing to serve and being treated as a

servant are two different concepts. I can select to serve and still nurture my self-concept in the process. Being treated as a servant can be a blow to who I am in my own eyes. It can damage a life that is not centered and congruent. That is why self-sacrificed servant-hood is the high road of *being me*. It is operated under complete freedom and originates out of a centered God-sensing relationship with the Creator.

I sensed this kind of insecurity in one of my congregations where I served as a pastor. Church had become a club for the undifferentiated and the way to cope was to clone and judge. This brought a sense of false security and the illusion of control. My way of addressing it, was rather radical at one church service. I found a Hispanic man to dress “like the street” and to just walk into the service and sit one Sunday night. This experiment was meant to confront the selfish and protected identities of people who were mostly white and middle class. When I walked down the aisle and had that person stand and started talking to him, the congregation was wide-eyed and worried my life may be in danger. No one had talked to this person or greeted him since he arrived, but they were talking about him! In my interaction with him, he disclosed that he was training to be a missionary to go to South America. You could just feel the wave of the collected sigh of relief sweeping the room! Interestingly enough, after the service everyone stopped to talk to him. As a people they were comfortable with each other and felt secure. This “stranger” invaded their security until his real identity was revealed. If the church’s practice in the world is that of being the church then being community is the key to *being me* and serving our world. That includes welcoming and reaching out to others that appear totally different than me.

In 1923, the great Jewish theologian Martin Buber wrote a brilliant but difficult book, called *I and Thou*.⁵⁰ Buber described the most healthy or mature relationship possible between two human beings as an “I-Thou” relationships. In such a relationship I recognize that I am made

in the image of God and so is every other person on the face of the earth. This makes them a “Thou” to me. Because of that reality, every person deserves, treating them with dignity and worth. I affirm them as having a unique and separate existence apart from me. According to Buber, many of us treat others in an “I-It” relationship. Truly serving others stemming from *being me* respects the image of God in others and treats them accordingly with love and giving. God fills the space in our relational service, and His is revealed. The heart of service is not only a focus taken away from our selves, but also is a centering on the value and respect of others as human beings.

So how do I resolve the journey of *being me* with serving others? All my life I have chosen to participate in serving people. I taught children at church beginning at age 12 and was running a full children’s church program for over 100 children every week by age 20. Church was my platform for all my service whether it was singing in the choir or doing custodial work. When I moved out to California in 1979 I began a 26 year adventure into full time ministry that has included serving others at every turn. Through pastoring, administration, mission, music, and financial work, people have been my focus. So why did I struggle with *being me* in the midst of all that service? I was busy with people but lost my perspective of who I was in the process. Service was just another way of me seeking attention or a pat on the back. But that pat on the back did not come that often and whenever it did come it was not enough.

When I left my last church and moved from Ohio to Washington in 2003, I went into hibernation from people. I stopped going to church and being a part of local ministry. I was depressed and angry at God for abandoning me after all my service to Him most of my life. My life as a pastor was stripped away from me and I had lost all identity of my personhood. The key to my change lay in a crucial decision I made in the summer of 2006.

That summer God brought special people into my life to run alongside me and to encourage me to move into the next step of my journey to being me. In July I made the decision to go back to school and to work on my lifelong dream of earning a doctorate. The significant meeting with Chuck Conniry at George Fox set the stage for the changes that soon would come for me. He encouraged me in that meeting to be myself at my work as a cell phone manager. “You are a pastor no matter where you are at,” he said. I knew that the next two years was going to be more than just an academic exercise. The experience of meeting my classmates in my cohort (only six of us), my spiritual advisor, and my instructors introduced me to a whole new world that had been missing from my entire ministry life of serving people. We learned to sit and be quiet before God. We walked on the beach and practiced a God awareness I had never experienced before. Through their instruction and the actual practicing of solitude at Cannon Beach my inner world began to be reconstructed.

One day off was spent down on the beach talking and just being with God. I was at peace with who I was and with where I was at in my life. The anger and depression dissipated away in the ocean mist and God reaffirmed me of His presence and love. In a another class together with Dan Brunner as our teacher I was so overwhelmed with his personal story of perseverance through medical trials with his wife that God suddenly came down and visited us in a special way. A holy hush fell over us as we just sat and soaked up His presence. God’s presence in that room was all I needed to become content with where I was at working in sales instead of the church. I felt His presence reassure me “I am with you. I love you. I made you. You are special to me. Rest in me.”

Through the next two years my classmates became close friends because of a special bond we had experienced together – the bond of *being me* and *being us*. As we became at peace

with our own identity we were moved to serve others in freedom. Once we discovered a special financial need of another student and collected enough funds amongst ourselves to underwrite that need anonymously. We were then able to run alongside that student and become an encouragement to them in their school journey. No pats on the back needed, just *being me* through loving people. We have stayed in touch from a distance (we live in five different states) through phone calls, encouraging emails, and text messages.

This is where the journey to being me made a significant turn and it was all because of people running alongside me, encouraging me, saying, “Come on Jeff, be yourself, be who God created you to be, you can do it!” If that change truly has originated in me from the center and is operating away from the circumference then the issue of *being me* has been resolved. When it has been settled, I live my life in the complete awareness of other people’s needs and give of myself to the service of people. Fears fade away and freedom to serve makes its home in my heart. I can run alongside others with integrity of wholeness that their interests are above my own. In a world of serving mashed potatoes for the sake of others, I can serve up helpings without a hidden agenda that is secretly centered on me getting the largest scoop (and I love mashed potatoes).

Now that is the freedom of *being me*... that is the benefit of *being us*.

CONCLUSION

“It Ain’t Over ‘Til It’s Over”

Yogi Berra’s famous quote, “it ain’t over ‘til it’s over” was a play on the more popular used expression of “it’s not over until the fat lady sings.”⁵¹ Such profound insight applies to my journey to *being me*. What once initially began as an unassuming entrance into the world has continued as a journey of ongoing process. The fat lady has not yet sung but *being me* has become more of a reality because of that summer of 2006.

After a lifetime of searching for shortcuts, my journey has settled on the long way around of learning how to be myself. If *being me* is my primary spiritual journey then what does it look like? That journey begins in my personal time alone with God every day. As I practice moments of solitude and meditation I begin to quiet the Thumper that wants to run before walking. During those quiet moments a foundation is set of a relationship set upon God’s love for me. He created me to be me and nobody else. That foundation is brought with me into my daily living with other people. I take that solitude and awareness with me at work, the mall, the theater, and the restaurant. The road is a long one because it requires a discipline of mind and heart to be centered everyday and at peace with personhood. This is the place where I daily bury fears and insecurities.

I’ve also listened less to what others wanted me to be and relaxed in who God made me to be. At my job managing a cell phone store the daily grind of sales is a world of goals, numbers, and comparison. Every day when I go to work I must pull up the numbers from the day before, record them, and then total the monthly figures. After comparing them to the goals, I also need to compare them with what the rest of the district is doing. If we are doing well, this is a process that is enjoyable. However, if we are doing badly then the pressure starts to mount for

me to produce and become something that I am not at that moment – the top sales store. I feel pressure to produce and live up to the expectations that the company has set for me as a manager. On slow days and tough stretches of slow sales, I can begin to stress and worry about the numbers. Then my boss calls me for a middle of the day update and again I start apologizing for the low numbers and make myself look better by telling him everything we are doing to change the situation. Those are the times when I start practicing God-sensing in the middle of the mall where I am located. When I look for God in people, circumstances, customer service issues, and relational interactions, I realize God's presence with me in the midst of my struggle. I am comforted to be reminded that my sales numbers do not determine who I am and my value. I begin to paying more attention to what God thinks than what others expect resulting in me being more relaxed and at peace.

I've also discovered how to love others unselfishly without fear and insecurity. Recently I had to make a business decision about some personnel changes at my store. Such challenges to me in the past have produced great anxiety and procrastination. I dreaded meeting with these people and having to tell them I was letting them go, reducing their hours, or demoting their position. I would be afraid that they would not like me anymore because of my decision. When I made these decisions recently I was at peace realizing I was helping my salesmen realize that this job was not for them but that they had another job that would be even better by making this move. I would then give them a hearty recommendation to their future employer as they sought another job. Then I had to demote my assistant manager to a regular sales clerk because his administration focus was getting in the way of his expected production by the company. He has had numerous challenges in his personal life but I have shown him a love that is unselfish and

insecure by keeping him on and running alongside him in encouragement. He has responded by leading our store in sales last month.

The reality in each of these circumstances is that *being me* is not a one-time event or spiritual high but a continual process of a spiritual journey that is moment by moment. I still wrestle with fears and insecurities on a daily basis but my perspective on the journey has changed dramatically. I am reminded by God daily that as his creation I am not perfect and I am prone to falter in life. I have had years of choosing shortcuts to reprogram and change. But with every positive decision I enjoy the freedom and peace of *being me*. With each time I falter or return to those fears and insecurities I am reminded of His grace and presence. Both experiences contribute to a life of God-sensing and people-loving. As long as I live in this life I will face the temptation to be someone else until I leave this world into a whole new world where *being me* is an every moment occurrence.

I was born again as a new baby in that summer of 2006. Instead of impersonal doctors and a cold room welcoming me into life, a personal God has wrapped loving arms around me with blankets of love and acceptance. Instead of kicking and screaming I have learned silence and solitude. God has appeared over and over again through circumstances and people to teach me His presence and to lay down all my fears, insecurities, and life of performance. The innocence of practicing a naked life before God and others since has led to a whole new chapter of *being me* in my life journey. That is what I am created for. That is my purpose in life.

I think I'll keep the name Jeffry Lynn Zakrzewski.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Michelangelo created his masterpiece in the painting of the Sistine Chapel, all we tend to remember are the finished works that were and are magnificent in scope and creativity. We have imprinted on our minds the hand of God reaching out to Adam and all those marvelous frescos that consume the ceiling and walls. What a story of humanity they tell! We tend to forget all the work that went on behind the scenes to support the masterpiece of the great artist. Helpers were present to provide the proper scaffolding, painting supplies, food, materials and a place to sleep. There were friends who gave a word of encouragement as well as advice and critiques. It was truly a team effort to make the Sistine experience a feast for the eyes for generations.

While I would never compare this thesis and project to the Sistine Chapel, I would like to acknowledge a team of people who have made this effort possible. First and foremost is my wonderful and supportive wife Julie who sacrificed scores of hours throughout this year to leave me alone in my research and creative frescos. Her love and acceptance of me for 27 years have proved to be a primary contribution to my experiencing *being me*. Through her I have first-hand experienced God-sensing and people-loving. I also would like to give a hearty thanks to my daughter Janelle who as an English major at Seattle Pacific spent many hours reading and giving editing suggestions. Thanks go out also to my son Jeffry who is now serving in Iraq with the Marines. Your courage and perseverance provided me the stamina and motivation to see this goal through to the end.

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to the guys of Cohort H at George Fox. The experience of meeting, studying, worshipping and just hanging out together with my fellow Beach Fathers - Mike, Dave, Cranston, Chuck and Fil - has changed my life forever.

END NOTES

¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life for Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2006), 74-78. Scazzero's premise is that these three cultural philosophies are temptations that lead to the false self.

² Steve McQueen was especially famous for that endless car chase through San Francisco in the 1968 film *Bullitt* in which he drove a Mustang and did all his own stunts.

³ The story of Saul and David is found in the Bible in 1 Samuel 8-31. The battle with Goliath of Gath was one that took prime importance in the story. Whoever represented Israel to defeat this giant would claim victory for the entire army. No one, even King Saul, had the courage to fight this nine-foot warrior. That's what makes David's choice to take him on in his own way even more remarkable.

⁴ Adam and Eve's relationship with God and each other can be found in the Bible in Genesis 2-3.

⁵ *Bambi* was a 1942 animated film released by Disney Pictures starring a white tailed deer named Bambi and her good friend Thumper, a pink nosed rabbit. Thumper is best known in the film for nervously thumping his leg.

⁶ *Americans Just Want a Good Night of Sleep*, [Online Data Base] (The Barna Update, 2006, accessed August 29 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=247>.

⁷ More information on this research can be found at <http://odeo.com/episodes/22054129-Sleep-On-It> and <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sciencenow/3410/01.html>.

⁸ This information was presented by Dr. Norm Wright as part of his *So You're Getting Married* premarital counseling video series.

⁹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* / Kenneth Boa (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001).

¹⁰ Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* / Ronald J. Sider (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2005), 13. Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, elaborates on this disconnection that "Whether the issue is marriage and sexuality, or money and care for the poor, evangelicals today are living scandalously unbiblical lives...the data suggests in many crucial areas evangelicals are not living any differently than from their unbelieving neighbors."

¹¹ This description of the incarnation or Jesus becoming a man is described by Paul in his letter to the Philippians 2:6-11. These verses have originally been thought to be a hymn sung by the early church.

¹² John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*, 25th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 25.

¹³ *Born Again Christians*, [Online Data Base] (2007, accessed August 29 2008); available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=8>. This was part of Barna's research conducted in 2007.

¹⁴ John F. Kavanaugh emphasizes how grace dissipates while performance rules in his book *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*: "The civil religion of America worships the god of progress and inspires us to compete, achieve, and win for the sake of competing, achieving and winning. Life for many people in the business world has been colorfully described as a matter of 'blowing & going, plotting & planning, ducking & diving, running & gunning, slamming & jamming, moving & shaking, shucking & jiving'".

¹⁵ *Bond Trading*, [Online Data Base] (Beverage World, 2006, accessed August 22 2008); available from <http://www.beverageworld.com/content/view/5901/151/>.

¹⁶ The Toledo Museum of Art, founded in 1901, is just two hours down the Ohio Turnpike from Cleveland. The museum houses a diverse collection of art with special emphasis on 19th and 20th century European and American paintings. The new Glass Pavilion displays the museum's extensive collection of glass art. The museum is free and makes a nice day-trip from Northeast Ohio.

¹⁷ More information is available about Spencer Tunick at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spencer_Tunick.

¹⁸ Found in 2 Corinthians 5:17 the verse reads, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come."

¹⁹ The picture of abiding is found in the imagery of John 15:1-17 when Jesus teaches the parable about the vine and the branches. As a branch we are connected to the vine or abide in it drawing our life and nourishment.

²⁰ Charles Grandison Finney was a leading revivalist in America during the Second Great Awakening in the 18th century. He believed that revival could come about if men and women followed certain formulas for repentance.

²¹ From the Bible, Romans 12:3.

²² David C. Needham, *Birthright: Christian, Do You Know Who You Are?* / by David C. Needham (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1979), 47.

²³ See Kenneth Boa's book, *Conformed to His Image* for a chapter on this style of spiritual formation. Boa claims "exchanged life spirituality" is but one of 12 facets that describe the spiritual life. This exchanged life centers on resting in what God has already done for us. Our identification with Christ leads to and is the basis for our imitation of Christ.

²⁴ *The Sixth Day* was released in 2000 by Phoenix Pictures.

²⁵ M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* / M. Robert Mulholland Jr (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 15.

²⁶ Tim F. LaHaye, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, by Tim LaHaye, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1967). His book takes these four temperaments and shows what they should like when a person is Spirit-controlled.

²⁷ Isabel Briggs Myers; Mary H. McCauley; Naomi L. Quenk; Allen L. Hammer, *Mbti Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1998), 1-4.

²⁸ *Network* was a spiritual gifts assessment that several of my churches used that was compiled and released through the Willow Creek Association out of Chicago, ILL.

²⁹ *Thinkexist.Com Quotations*, [Online Data Base] (Thinkexist.com, accessed October 25 2008); available from http://thinkexist.com/quotation/in_every_block_of_marble_i_see_a_statue_as_plain/148720.html.

³⁰ *Bruce Almighty* was released in 2003 by Universal Pictures.

³¹ Greg Moore, *The History of Fingerprints* [Online article] (May 18 2008, accessed October 25 2008); available from <http://onin.com/fp/fphistory.html>.

³² Psalm 139: 13-16 from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson.

³³ *Sense*, [Online dictionary] (Wikipedia, accessed October 25 2008); available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense>.

³⁴ The story is found in the Bible, Luke 24:13-36.

³⁵ Take an actual visual tour of the Louvre at <http://www.louvre.fr/llv/commun/home.jsp?bmLocale=en>.

³⁶ Found in the Bible, Mark 10:15.

³⁷ *Single of Voice of Truth* by Casting Crowns from the self-entitled debut album *Casting Crowns* released 2003 under the Beach Street label, produced by Mark Miller and Steven Curtis Chapman, written by Mark Hill and Steven Curtis Chapman.

³⁸ The story is found in the Bible, 1 Samuel 3.

³⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, a Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* / Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, ed. W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989).

⁴⁰ *The Way of the Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. M. E. F. c. 1965 (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998). The anonymous pilgrim recites the prayer over and over until it becomes like his heartbeat and changes his whole outlook on life.

⁴¹ Documented in the Bible, John 12:1-10.

⁴² This story was used as part of a Light Ministries Revival Crusade based out of Redding, California.

⁴³ Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* / Richard Rohr (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1999).

⁴⁴ Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation* / Thomas Merton; Edited and with an Introduction by William H. Shannon, ed. W. H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 210.

⁴⁵ The film was an Australian comedy made in 2004 starring Rhys Ifans.

⁴⁶ Her gushing acceptance speech is well-remembered for its earnestness. She said, "I haven't had an orthodox career, and I've wanted more than anything to have your respect. The first time I didn't feel it, but this time I feel it, and I can't deny the fact that you like me, right now, you like me!"

⁴⁷ Ghandi, who died in 1948, was a leader of the India Independence movement. He was the pioneer of Satyagraha – resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience.

⁴⁸ This enlightening and interesting interaction is found in Matthew 20:20-28 in the New Testament.

⁴⁹ John 13:1-19.

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *Ich Und Du. English I and Thou* / Martin Buber; a New Translation with a Prologue, "I and You" And Notes by Walter Kaufmann, ed. W. A. Kaufmann, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

⁵¹ The expression "it ain't over until the fat lady sings" originated from watching lengthy Wagner operas in which they would conclude with a rather large lady singing and aria. The phrase is thought to have first be coined by Bill Morgan at a Texas Tech Red Raiders basketball contest. Yogi Berra's "it ain't over 'til it is over" is thought to have been used years before the fat lady made her appearance.