

2009

Sacred Flow: Discovering Life in God's Rhythm

Arthur T. Sposaro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

SACRED FLOW:
DISCOVERING LIFE IN GOD'S RHYTHM

A WRITTEN STATEMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
ARTHUR T. SPOSARO

ATLANTA, GA

MARCH, 2009

PORTLAND CENTER LIBRARY
GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY
PORTLAND, OR. 97223

DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

ARTIE SPOSARO

DATE: MARCH 10, 2009

TITLE:

**SACRED FLOW:
DISCOVERING LIFE IN GOD'S RHYTHM**

***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 IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE***

Carole D. Spencer

SIGNATURE

3/10/09

DATE

Charles K Church

SIGNATURE

3/10/09

DATE



GEORGE FOX
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

For Elizabeth, Lydia, Lincoln, and Elgin.

Your inspiration, patience, support, laughter, and love have seen me through.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM	1
A Recent History	10
SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS	20
The Exchanged Life	20
New Monasticism	24
The Emerging Church.	26
SECTION THREE: THE THESIS	29
Flow Defined	32
The Characteristic Effects of Flow	34
The Elements of Flow.	39
Jesus as the Logos-Flow	43
Jesus Flows	46
Sacred Flow	52
Reorienting Christian Mysticism	54
In Christ	57
Christ in You	60
Christ as Life	62
Elements and Characteristic Effects	66
Postures and Practices.	69
SECTION FOUR: THE PROJECT	76
SECTION FIVE: PROJECT SPECIFICATION	78
SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT	83
BACK MATTER: BIBLIOGRAPHY	88
TRACK 02 ARTIFACT: SACRED FLOW	106

Abstract

Today's Christian spirituality largely neglects or misappropriates the believer's mutual indwelling with Christ, thus leading to a legalistic spirituality. This project employs a phenomenon commonly known as flow or peak-experience, as described in psychological research and illustrated in particular in sport, to reorient Christianity. Flow is a harmonious state of consciousness and experience in which one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, and where the mind and body are working together effortlessly. When integrated with Christianity, flow's nature, elements, and effects inform and inspire a faith of full engagement and graceful rhythm. This project engages decades of cross-cultural psychological research findings related to peak-experience in order to establish and expound sacred flow, a Christian spirituality absorbed in and empowered by God's presence (the mutual indwelling) manifesting a life in harmonious rhythm with God.

Section One: The problem

Christian spirituality has marginalized the mutual indwelling of the believer with God. It underemphasizes union with God often presenting it as conditional. Christians trust self-effort rather than the Spirit to guide and empower them.

Section Two: Other Proposed Solutions

Each of the other proposed solutions offer potentially valid solutions for the ministry problem. A spirituality characterized by sacred flow both grounds and enhances each of these approaches to Christian spirituality.

The Exchanged Life

Proponents of exchanged life believe that the Christian's life/strength is exchanged for Christ's. The Spirit of the indwelling Christ serves as one's source for guidance and empowerment.

New Monasticism

New monastic communities are creating spaces for communal lives empowered by grace. These communities are blending practices both ancient and contemporary as a means of experiencing God and living out their faith.

The Emerging Church

The emerging church refers to any Christian church whose theology, model and/or methodology is evolving. Emerging expressions are making way for a re-centering of Christianity's mystical core.

Section Three: The Thesis

This project claims that expressing Christianity through the framework of flow will inspire Christians to reorient their spirituality around Christianity's mystical core; the experience and expression of the believer's mutual indwelling with Christ.

Section Four: The Project

The project is a book engaging Christians with the intent of transforming their experience with God, themselves, and others.

Section Five: Project Specification

The project is a book meant to reorient and rouse Christian spirituality. Audience: Christians. Scope: 175-225 pages. Content: 9 chapters. Budget: \$500. Standards of Publication: George Fox Seminary. Action Plan: submit January 12, 2009.

SECTION ONE

THE PROBLEM

Much of current mainstream Christian spirituality marginalizes Christianity's mystical core – the believer's mutual indwelling with Christ. The mutual indwelling with Christ denotes the central Christian belief or doctrine that the believer has been spiritually placed into Christ and Christ into him.¹ Marginalization of this central belief and its manifestation leads to spirituality buried in legalism or at least hindered by it. A. W. Tozer acknowledged this marginalization of the mutual indwelling more than half a century ago. He asserts,

God dwells in His creation and is everywhere indivisibly present in all His work. This is boldly taught by prophet and apostle and is accepted by Christian theology generally. That is, it appears in the books, but for some reason it has not sunk into the average Christian's heart so as to become a part of his believing self. Christian teachers shy away from its full implications, and, if they mention it at all, mute it down till it has little meaning.²

This project means to direct Christians beyond legalism to a deeper experience, expression, and appropriation of the presence of God in their daily lives. It means to move Christians toward a Christian spirituality of rhythm and flow – sacred flow. Flow, alternately known as peak-experience, is a harmonious state of consciousness and

¹Jesus, recorded in the Apostle John's Gospel (John 14:20) states, "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Post-ascension disciples of Christ experience the union Jesus had with the Father. Disciples are taken into the Son, and Christ's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is given into them. John 14:20, Grant R. Osborne, Stuart D. Briscoe, and Hadden Robinson, eds. *IVP New Testament Commentary*, John 14:20, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=4&source=1&seq=i.50.14.2> (accessed 6/20/2008). Colossians 1: 27c declares, "Christ in you, the hope of Glory" and Colossians 3: 3 states, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." In both cases the preposition *in* denotes a fixed position of rest supporting the mystical notion of co-indwelling or mutual indwelling. Rick Meyers, *e-Sword* (Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundations, 2005), Colossians 1: 27c.

²A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), 77.

experience in which one becomes totally absorbed in what she is doing, and where the mind and body are working together effortlessly. Integrated with Christianity, flow's nature, elements, and effects inform and inspire a faith of full engagement and graceful rhythm. This project engages decades of cross-cultural psychological research findings related to peak-experience in order to establish and expound sacred flow, a Christian spirituality absorbed in and empowered by God's presence (the mutual indwelling) manifesting a life in harmonious rhythm with God.

Few Christians, leaders or laity, center their spirituality in experiencing and expressing their grace-given union with God and the Spirit's empowering presence, though these ideals serve as fundamental grounding for Christian spirituality. Minimalizing the mutual indwelling with Christ lands Christianity in a paradigm of conditional union and performance based acceptance. The mystical indwelling presence of Christ is acknowledged but its efficacy underweighted. Instead, emphasis is placed upon the Christian transforming her life with God's help.³

Abraham H. Maslow, in his influential work *Toward a Psychology of Being*, begins with a question fundamental to Christian spirituality as well as integral to this project. He writes, "How can we encourage free development?"⁴ He sought to understand wholeness; how one becomes completely healthy and her authentic Self.⁵ In terms of wholeness from a Christian perspective, the marginalization of the mutual indwelling hinders one's free development and wholeness in Christ.

³Jay Dennis, *The Jesus Habits* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 3. More specific examples of this approach/teaching will be offered later in the Problem section.

⁴Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994), 5.

⁵Abraham H. Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, 16.

Maslow regarded self-actualization as the ultimate realization of one's human potential and peak-experiences or flow as the pinnacle of self-actualization.⁶ Self-actualization is motivated by the desire to more fully become who one can be. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, self-actualization is the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all needs are fulfilled and the "actualization" of the full personal potential is realized.⁷ Paul Galbreath concludes that there is an intimate connection between the need for and characteristics of self-actualization with the need for and characteristics of becoming Christ-like.⁸ The height of freely developed human capacity in Christ, Christ-like maturity, mirrors what Maslow describes as self-actualization.

However, legalism prevents free development. Maslow posits that religious legalism prohibits one from whole health as a self-actualized peak-experiencer. Maslow writes,

Most people lose or forget the subjectively religious experience, and redefine Religion as a set of habits, behaviors, dogmas, forms, which at the extreme becomes entirely legalistic and bureaucratic, conventional, empty, and in the truest meaning of the word, anti-religious. The mystic experience, the illumination, the great awakening, along with the charismatic seer who started the whole thing, are forgotten, lost, or transformed into the opposites. Organized Religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experiencer.⁹

Religious experience characterized by rigidity and control but devoid of subjective experience stunts genuine spirituality and personal development. A graceful, charismatic,

⁶Paul Howard Galbreath, *The Christology of the Gospels and Abraham Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), 65.

⁷Abraham H. Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*. (Psychological Review, 1943), 370-396.

⁸Galbreath, *The Christology of the Gospels*, 159.

⁹Maslow, *Religions*, viii.

subjective, mystical experiencer has the proper orientation to attune with higher levels of human development, rationality, science and social passion.¹⁰

Formally, religious legalism is, “strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence or conformity to law or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.”¹¹ The *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* describes legalism as, “A relationship or ethical system that is governed primarily by obedience to prescribed laws or rules.”¹² Broadly, legalism may be overt or covert, religious or secular, based upon written or unwritten standards. Specifically, this project references subtle post-conversion legalism within Christianity rather than referring to achieving or retaining salvation through the works of the Law. Legalism then refers to attaining spiritual growth (sanctification) and/or receiving God’s favor as a result of self-effort through law-keeping.¹³

Legalism, imperceptibly more often than not, embraces rule-keeping as one’s functional empowering principle of life rather than the indwelling Christ. One expects to experience divine life by adhering to rules in Scripture. The Apostle John records Jesus discrediting this approach, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so

¹⁰Maslow refers to big “R” Religion as institutionalized, conventional and organized and small “r” religion as subjective, naturalistic, and experiential. Maslow, *Religions*, viii, xiii.

¹¹Legalism, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/legalism>, (accessed June 07, 2008).

¹²Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 159.

¹³Inherently, spiritual disciplines meant for spiritual growth are not legalistic. Spiritual practices may or may not be carried out legalistically. When empowered by the Spirit, these practices lead to enhanced spiritual union with God and others.

that you may have life.”¹⁴ Jesus is the life, the bread of life.¹⁵ The Scriptures disclose God’s story, including the gospel, offering insight into his character and providing humans with divine practical wisdom. The words themselves were not meant to provide or produce divine life. Jesus himself is the life. This does not mean the Scriptures are to be discarded or minimized by any means. God leads believers by his Spirit in keeping with his Word.¹⁶ God’s word, the *Logos*, lives within the believer, working both to desire and to do according to his good pleasure.¹⁷

Paul’s explication of practical Christian spirituality – Spirit-walking is often alluded to but certainly not the focal point of contemporary evangelical Christian spirituality.¹⁸ Instead of flowing with God, one is expected to receive Jesus by grace through faith and get to work on her soul and others’.¹⁹ Rather than teaching and modeling Spirit-walking or flow, ministry leaders tend to exegete with an eye for exposing biblical principles and inspiring godly behaviors.²⁰ Other, less Bible-centered ministries are less focused on exegesis, but give similar weight to their version of human-centered spirituality. Related to this approach Maslow asserts, “Any person whose character structure (or *Weltanschauung*, or way of life) forces him to try to be extremely

¹⁴John 5:39, 40.

¹⁵John 6:33, 35, 48

¹⁶Galatians 5:13-16.

¹⁷John 1:1-18, Philippians 2:13, 2 Corinthians 3:6.

¹⁸Galatians 5:13, 16, 25.

¹⁹Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life; What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 57.

²⁰Jay Dennis, *The Jesus Habits* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 3.

or completely rational or “materialistic” or mechanistic tends to become a non-peaker.”²¹

Legalism places rationale and human will power at the center of Christian spirituality displacing or substituting God’s revelation and empowerment and therefore hampering flow/peak experience.

The reduction of Christianity to a set of principles that when merged with self-effort produce acceptable behaviors misses the point – Jesus. Jesus was and is the full expression of the incomprehensible God. Narrow dogmatism, solid principles, and acceptable behaviors are one dimensional representations of an infinitely dimensional God. Christianity hinges on the dynamism of the living Christ. Frost and Hirsch illustrate this when they write,

Christianity is not a doctrine but a person to whom I entrust myself without reserve. If Christianity were merely a doctrine, its leaders would be just as superfluous as the teachers of any other sort of religious or philosophical system. The focus would be on truth claims, which are learned and then appropriated independently of the instructor. Since, however, Christianity is not simply a set of beliefs but is inseparably connected to the person of the Messiah, it stands or falls with him.²²

Post-conversion performance-based spirituality subtly perpetuates relational instability with God. Legalism leads to waffling union and waffling union leads to legalism. If union with God feels insecure, Christians attempt to use self-effort or performance to repair their union. Many followers of Christ spend much of their time attempting to gain or maintain union rather than authentically serving others sourced by it. Paul’s central teaching regarding the mystical indwelling presence of Christ – *Christ in you*, becomes relegated to another guilt-driven reason the Christian should perform. In

²¹Maslow, *Religions*, 22.

²²Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 113, 114.

this case, one believes he must perform so as to not disappoint his indwelling God. Jesus evaluates them from the inside and outside. Inevitably, Christians make mistakes, feel distant from God, and attempt to regain proximity. Subsequently, they regain the feeling of union only to fail again in the near future and the cycle repeats itself indefinitely. The related mystery of the believer being “in Christ” is rarely even addressed much less illuminated.²³ This paradigm of Christian spirituality is not viable for flowing with God.

Reflective of Abraham Maslow, Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow’s primary researcher over the past thirty years, begins his principal work with a similar fundamental question.²⁴ In *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, he hoped to discover when people feel most happy. What leads one to pure enjoyment, optimal experience? His research concluded that the flow state/experience is fundamental to happiness, enjoyment, development, and wholeness.²⁵ This being said, Csikszentmihalyi does not hold out much hope for Christianity primarily because he does not believe it provides consistent opportunity for flow. A Christianity racked with fundamentalist dogma and results-based acceptance (legalism) hampers flow or prevents it completely.

²³Galatians 2:20, Romans 5-8, Colossians 1: 27, Colossians 3:3, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:17. Ephesians 2:5,6, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:27, Galatians 2:20..

²⁴Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi used differing research question to glean information from respondents. Maslow’s primary feedback came from giving respondents the following instructions, “I would like you to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of your life; happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly ‘being hit’ by a book or a painting, or from some great creative moment. First list these. And then try to tell me how you feel in such acute moments, how you feel differently from the way you feel at other times, how you are at the moment a different person in some ways.” Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, 71. Csikszentmihalyi also attempted to understand enjoyment. How did people feel when enjoying themselves and why? Eventually, Csikszentmihalyi used what he termed the Experience Sampling Method to measure subjective experience. He supplied his respondents with pagers and would page them at random times. When he did so (eight times a day for a week), they were to record what they were doing, how they were feeling, and what they were thinking. This allowed Csikszentmihalyi to create a framework in which particular characteristics were occurring. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

²⁵Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 2-8.

Csikszentmihalyi explains that this form of Christianity strangles total absorption, creativity, and freedom. He declares,

But it seems clear that an increasing majority are not being helped by traditional religions and beliefs systems. Many are unable to separate the truth in the old doctrines from the distortions and degradations that time has added, and since they cannot accept error, they reject the truth as well. Others are so desperate for some order that they cling rigidly to whatever belief happens to be at hand – warts and all – and become fundamentalist Christians, or Muslims, or communists... If a new faith is to capture our imagination, it must be one that will account rationally for the things we know, the things we feel, the things we hope for, and the ones we dread. It must be a system of beliefs that will marshal our psychic energy toward meaningful goals, a system that provides rules for a way of life that can provide flow.²⁶

Csikszentmihalyi acknowledges that hope could be found in a faith that inspires total absorption of attention and provides meaningful goals as a way of life.²⁷ In keeping with this, Csikszentmihalyi and Maslow list Christian mystics as those prone to experience flow or peak-experiences. Csikszentmihalyi holds both saints and mystics in high regard as people who turned their lives into flow experiences. Their total surrender of psychic energy (attention) to the goal of following God, his will, and his ways created continuous possibility for flow.²⁸ Their holistic following resulted in a mystical-practical Spirit-led life. Maslow juxtaposes mystics and legalists historically asserting,

This cleavage between the mystics and the legalists, if I may call them that, remains at best a mutual tolerance, but it has happened in some churches that the rulers of the organization actually made a heresy out of the mystic experiences and persecuted the mystics themselves.²⁹

²⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 238, 239.

²⁷Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 238.

²⁸Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 218.

²⁹Maslow, *Religion*, 24.

Leonard Sweet, Christian writer and futurist, acknowledges the connection of flow with passion, enjoyment, fulfillment and Christianity. He writes, “The gospel is the flow experience of a living person.”³⁰ Flow relates closely with the energy of God in Christ. He writes of Christians being in the rhythmical flow of God. Sweet recognizes both the power of flow and the consequences of the church without flow when he writes,

The absence of flow structures causes what is called “flow deprivation,” with its attendant consequences of tiredness, sheepishness, decline in creativity, diminished alertness. When the church no longer becomes a flow structure, or has all the “rush” and intensity of a flow of molasses, there are high social and psychological costs that must be paid.³¹

In essence, Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi and Sweet support a Christian spirituality that induces flow. This project means to frame Christian spirituality as a flow inducing spirituality, sacred flow – a spirituality grounded in Christianity’s ancient past and poised for a thriving future. Sacred flow means to bring Christian spirituality into a *flow structure* in which one can connect with divine energy in rhythm with God. It re-centers the mutual indwelling so that Christian spirituality may be understood as a flow experience.

Unfortunately, the cultural paradigm of modernism existent over the past three hundred years has contributed to the brand of spirituality that stifles flow. The church has become home to those whom Maslow calls non-peakers. He explains,

In a word, organized religion can be thought of as an effort to communicate peak experiences to non-peakers, to teach them, to apply them, etc. Often, to make it more difficult, this job falls into the hands of non-peakers. On the whole we now would expect that this would be a vain effort, at least so far as much of mankind is concerned.³²

³⁰Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1994), 81.

³¹ Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 71.

Modernism's worship of reason and mechanizing has squelched flow and the Spirit. The section below expounds modernism's rise and fundamental connection with current Christian spirituality.

A Recent History

The subtle legalism that pervades Christian spirituality today has surfaced throughout the history of Christianity. It is beyond the scope of this project to comprehensively outline these instances surfacing within the Christian community since its origin in the first century. The following section gives attention to the more recent cultural history that has directly affected today's Christianity. The current expression of legalism has been significantly influenced by culture's shift to modernism during the Enlightenment. In order to better understand the ministry problem in current Christian culture, it is necessary to briefly describe modernism's development and influence on Christian spirituality.

Historians most often link modernism's birth to the 18th century Enlightenment and more specifically the Industrial Revolution. Some scholars mark the birth earlier with the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe (1618-1648). Simplistically, the Enlightenment was a progression of and reaction to the ideals birthed in the Renaissance (1300-1500s).³³ Explorers, artists, and inventors ruled the Renaissance. The end of the Renaissance brought the Enlightenment and along with it came emphasis upon individual

³² Maslow, *Religions*, 24.

³³ Theodore, K. Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance and the March to Modernity* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 207, 208.

freedom, social equality, and the need to dissect and control nature. The Enlightenment Revolution touched industry, society, global relations, communications, politics and culture.³⁴

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) introduced a more systematized path to discovery – experiments bearing results. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) desired to systematically discover nature’s secrets and later Isaac Newton (1642-1727) perceived the physical world as a machine with laws and regularity.³⁵ With this inertia, the organic world began to give way to the mechanistic. Modernity embraced a scientific critical way of considering life and all things in it. Nothing could be taken for granted or unchallenged by science and its methods.

New hope sprang forth that science and reason could answer most of life’s critical questions - even those typically considered by the world’s religions. The human individual, in her freedom, capability, and creative magnificence became exalted.³⁶ The Age of Reason bloomed. It was even believed this Age of Reason would inspire a new, higher morality – a virtual utopia.³⁷ This outlook was a logical reaction to pre-modern baseless superstition, mystery, and myth.

The movement was not anti-Christian per se. Many of modernism’s founding thinkers were Christians. Many theologians declared God stood as the head of a wholly

³⁴Peter Drilling, *Premodern Faith in a Postmodern Culture* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 5, 7.

³⁵Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 2, 49, 50.

³⁶Drilling, *Premodern Faith*, 7.

³⁷Chuck Smith, Jr., *The End of the World...As We Know It* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 36.

ordered mechanized universe. Nevertheless, God-centered dependence shifted to human-centered achievement. Logically then, many began to attempt to make their way to God and/or remain close to him through rational principles using self-directed will power - legalism.

Paradoxically, modernism led to the supernatural Omnipotent God and his text being scientifically evaluated. The traditional reverence afforded religious authority waned. The Bible had to be tested for its authenticity, history, and science. Reason replaced revelation as the judge and authority for truth.³⁸

The church had several different responses to modernism. First, it was dismissive, rejecting its existence. Many in the church today do this with postmodernism/emerging culture. Others overreacted. The fundamentalists and mystics alike rejected any wholesale scientific or rational valuation of Christianity. A more progressive camp embraced science as a new way of life and traded traditional Christianity for natural religion - Deism. Here religion would be relegated to providing a sound ethical framework.³⁹ Many eventually landed in the middle becoming open to reason in the midst of their traditional biblical faith. In doing so, they became accustomed to a linear, forward moving, moralistic theology.⁴⁰ This adaptation of Christian spirituality is prevalent today.

The Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) is known as a time of grace awakening but its occurrence within the initial rumblings of modernism also allowed noteworthy opportunity for legalism. Early modernism birthed the printing press and the

³⁸Grenz, *Primer*, 68, 69.

³⁹Grenz, *Primer*, 72.

⁴⁰Ibid, 63, 73.

Reformation. The new press made wide distribution of God's word possible for those who could read. Meanwhile, Martin Luther hoped to bring the Catholic Church's extra-biblical theology back in line with the Bible.⁴¹ The Reformation period would be marked by a return to the Bible as the fundamental source. The printing press began putting God's "source" in the hands of the multitude.⁴² The gospel story spread much more rapidly. Scholars and commoners alike soon engaged in critical evaluation of the Scriptures. The Word became more authoritative and venerated. The experience of the Spirit came through the Word; written, preached, and sacramental (visible words).⁴³ Reading, interpreting, and applying the Word created an opportunity for a culture of legalism – if one does the Word he is righteous and blessed, if he does not he is not. Emphasis upon the Spirit diminished and was easily lost.⁴⁴ Individuals and communities alike relied substantially on scholarly biblical interpretation and their self-effort to act upon these interpretations.

Institutional, ordered, conventional communities characterized by well established doctrines and systematic theology were the natural offspring of the period. Modernism shoved the mystical core of Christianity to the margins while a more mechanized spirituality formed. People were practically reinterpreted as machines devoid of true human characteristics such as spirit, will, passion, compassion and emotions.⁴⁵

⁴¹Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology; An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 5.

⁴²Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth & Fire of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 86, 87.

⁴³Badcock, *Light of Truth*, 95.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

Unconditional acceptance based upon the believer being in Christ and Christ being in the believer was displaced. The move to a more moralistic and institutional expression of Christian spirituality was logical given its context in modernism. Culture pushed Christianity to yield to the tangible, empirical, and linear.⁴⁶ Mainstream modern Christianity would become sound, reasonable, and principled – individually and corporately.

This modern version of Christian spirituality promotes a subtle role reversal. The Christian takes the role of initiator and sustainer rather than dependent responder or cooperator. Sweet refers to this reversal as “The fundamental heresy of our time” and the, “first spiritual law of modernism: ‘The trees move the wind.’” In reality, the Spirit-wind moves the trees whether the church embraces it or not.⁴⁷ Sweet uses the terms *underdeveloped* and *atrophied* to describe the church’s ability to trust the Spirit and follow her wherever she leads.⁴⁸ Mainstream modern spirituality suffers from a diminished emphasis upon God’s initiation, grace, and Spirit. This modern legalistic spirituality characterizes the ministry problem and the need for the solution proposed in the thesis.

A current example of the modern and subtly legalistic spirituality pervasive today is expressed by Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I here For?* The enormous success of the book exemplifies the broad attraction of the

⁴⁵Margret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way; Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005), 19.

⁴⁶Grenz, *Primer*, 73.

⁴⁷Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 64.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

current modernistic legalism. The book has sold over thirty million copies worldwide. For a substantial period in America, churches of practically every denomination participated in the *40 Days of Purpose* program based upon Warren's book. Being so widely accepted and endorsed by church leaders and congregants alike worldwide, the book's content stands as an example of how scores of Christians generally approach their spirituality. The book's success serves as a compelling example of the continuing propagation of this project's ministry problem.

Warren's bestseller embodies a modern, principled, linear spirituality and the resulting legalistic undercurrent enveloping Christianity today. Warren claims the Bible as the primary source for one's spiritual life. The Christian needs to perform particular behaviors to be purposeful and ultimately gain God's pleasure. Additionally, he relates that the Christian herself is primarily responsible for initiating and sustaining her spiritual development.

Warren asserts, "It [the Bible] is our Owner's Manual, explaining why we are alive, how life works, what to avoid, and what to expect in the future."⁴⁹ Read the Bible, understand it, and follow its instructions and one's success spiritually and otherwise is assured. In a sister book, *God's Power to Change Your Life*, Warren suggests that the Bible is the first tool God uses to change us.⁵⁰ The first tool is not the Holy Spirit illuminating God, his presence and the Bible, but the Bible itself. His five keys to perfect peace begin with obeying principles in the Bible rather than engaging God's presence or

⁴⁹Warren, *Purpose Driven*, 20. See also Rick Warren, *God's Power to Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 86.

⁵⁰Warren, *God's Power*, 29.

responding to his Spirit. The *good life* he writes about amounts to being and doing good and one learns to be and do good first and foremost by *mastering* the Bible.⁵¹

Warren admits, “When people tell me their faith is weak, I ask them, ‘Are you reading your Bible regularly?’”⁵² In addition, he notes that the two great promises in the Scriptures about success (Psalm 1 and Joshua 1:8) both suggest meditating upon God’s word as the key. Based upon Warren’s approach, the spirit of Bible reading and mastering is less about divine illumination and more about principle farming and following.

Warren writes in *The Purpose Driven Life* that the reason humanity exists, its predominant purpose, is to please God.⁵³ Inherently, nothing about this statement necessarily displaces the emphasis on Christianity’s mystical core. However, later he writes that the Christian pleases God by bringing him glory through engaging in five particular behaviors. Christians are to bring glory to God by worshiping him, loving other believers, becoming like Christ, serving others with their gifts and telling others about the Gospel.⁵⁴ This conception of spirituality takes the emphasis off the mutual indwelling and subtly leads Christians into performance-based spirituality. All of these activities in and of themselves are godly, but considering God’s pleasure and glory conditionally based upon engaging in them is nothing short of legalism.

Warren goes on to assert that God smiles when believers love him, trust him, obey him, are thankful continuously, and when they use their abilities. He writes, “The smile

⁵¹Ibid, 139, 146.

⁵²Ibid, *God’s Power*, 86, 30.

⁵³Warren, *Purpose Driven*, 69.

⁵⁴Ibid.

of God is the goal of your life.”⁵⁵ Again, this idea represents a reasonable linear and legalistic spirituality. God smiles when one does what he should do to fulfill his purpose. Doing gains one greater acceptance, approval, favor, and intimacy. Unfortunately, this behavior-focused premise sets a course that eventually derails grace-filled spirituality.

Lastly, in keeping with his premise, Warren asserts that it is the believer’s responsibility to love like God and develop Christ-like character.⁵⁶ As previously noted, the Bible is the Christian’s Owner’s Manual explaining how one is to live.⁵⁷ One is to figure out how to please God and try her best do so. Warren explains that working out one’s salvation is a spiritual workout to make the most of what God has provided.⁵⁸ In chapter twelve of *The Purpose Driven Life* Warren provides a list of “musts” for one who wants to develop a relationship with God.⁵⁹ The emphasis consistently tilts toward humanity not divinity, flesh or human will power rather than Spirit empowerment.

Warren’s theological framework subtly diverges from the ideal that the Christian brings God untold pleasure and glory by simply being in Christ and having him in her – with any further pleasure and glory resulting from God’s doing in and through her as she trusts the Holy Spirit. This ideal does not neutralize the role of the Scriptures. Christians are blessed to have access to the Bible and the Holy Spirit uses God’s word incessantly to teach them. In proper order, it is the indwelling Christ who compels his children toward godly or *good* behavior that is in agreement with the Scriptures. Jesus is the life, not god-

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Warren, *Purpose Driven*, 56, 70-76.

⁵⁷Ibid, 20.

⁵⁸Warren, *God's Power*, 29.

⁵⁹Warren, *Purpose Driven*, 93-99.

given words on a page. Paul writes, “You are now Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.”⁶⁰

The believer is Light, radiant, and a glory to the Father. As one understands her identity in Christ and embraces God’s power within, godly activities become natural by products. They are the fruit of trusting the direction and empowerment of the Spirit.

No doubt Warren’s approach is sound, reasonable, logical – modern. To his credit he has many valid integrative points that transcend cultural paradigm, but his premise reverts to modernism and easily leads to a legalism. He acknowledges the presence and power of the Spirit but not its ultimate primacy. His premise unintentionally promotes performance based spirituality.

A spirituality of sacred flow leads Christians back to the person of Christ and the way of Jesus that transcends cultural paradigms. Jesus is both the substance and the model of sacred flow for the Christian. He is the flowing *Logos* of God.⁶¹ He is the word; the divine reason, the cause, the intent, the source, the message, the mouth, the cosmic consciousness, the emanating Light, the agent of creation, the breath of God, the supernatural energy of God alive within his sons and daughters.⁶² Sacred flow imitates Jesus’ dependent lifestyle. A spirituality of sacred flow depends on the *Logos* within to guide, enable, and empower. It re-centers and properly prioritizes the reality and the dynamism resulting from the Christian residing in the Godhead and the living Christ abiding in him.⁶³

⁶⁰Ephesians 5:8, 9.

⁶¹John 1:1-18.

⁶²Meyers, *e-Sword*, John 1:1-18, *logos*. See also Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 62.

Sacred flow embodies Jesus' way of grace. By God's doing (grace) Christians were put *in Christ*.⁶⁴ His pleasure and glory in humankind relate to his own doing and humanity's being a part of his doing. Christianity was born by the grace of God through Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ The church was founded, thrives, and survives by grace – grace being both unmerited favor and God's empowering presence flowing in the lives of his people. The indwelling Christ (who was and is the embodiment of grace) flows in and through humanity establishing and sustaining both justification and sanctification.⁶⁶ Ultimately, grace through the Spirit mysteriously leads to change not simply one's will-driven commitment to the Scripture or Jesus-like behavior. Sacred flow spirituality grounds itself in cooperation with God's grace through faith.

This section has outlined this project's ministry problem. The mystical core of Christianity; the Christian's mutual indwelling with Christ and its manifestation, Spirit-walking, has been marginalized. Legalism is both a contributor to and a result of this marginalization. Legalism has surfaced throughout the history of Christianity and exists in today's church. The last part of the section briefly traced the modern cultural paradigm from its birth in the Renaissance highlighting its relationship with legalism and Christian spirituality today. Lastly, integrated with modernism, the section offered a central influential example of today's pervasive legalism.

⁶³John 14:20. This will be further expounded in the thesis section.

⁶⁴1 Corinthians 1:30.

⁶⁵Ephesians 2: 8-10.

⁶⁶*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), "grace."

SECTION TWO

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

This section will consider other proposed solutions to the ministry problem. Other proposed solutions considered in this section include the exchanged life, new monasticism, and the emerging church. These other proposed solutions are not wholly distinct approaches to the ministry problem. The solution presented in the thesis of this project offers an approach to Christian spirituality that enhances each of these potential proposed solutions. Sacred flow offers more substantive mystical-practical balance to these unique expressions. Sacred flow provides an opportunity to stimulate those who embrace exchanged life theology but are stuck in a modern methodology. New monastics will find sacred flow spirituality integrative and helpful in their new world cloisters. Finally, sacred flow will assist the emerging church in harnessing more Spirit-wind in their future-facing sails.

The Exchanged Life

The *exchanged life* refers to the believer's life being exchanged for Christ's. Through the cross, the Christian receives a new life/spirit and a new source of strength, Christ. Christ becomes one's functional source of life as related in Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3: 3, 4.¹ From within, Christ becomes the principle and power of one's

¹Though conceptually there are likenesses, the exchanged life does not fall into the same category as the Holiness movement, Christian perfection, victorious life, etc. It is clear that many who fit into the broader, more fluid exchanged life ideal may too have been or now be involved in these or other movements. The likenesses to the Holiness movement regard the preeminence given to the working and/or power of grace for salvation and the embrace of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, exchanged life proponents do not claim sinless perfection as their goal or focus. Intimacy with God and surrender are ideals that take ultimate priority. The work of the cross provides total forgiveness and freedom. One's

spiritual life. The specific wording 'exchanged life' is linked to Hudson Taylor, the renowned missionary to China, as he described his revelation and transformation born from struggle and discouragement.² He describes the exchanged life by writing,

There must be a full concentration of the thoughts and affections on Christ; a complete surrender of the whole being to Him; a constant looking to Him for grace. Christians in whom these dispositions are once firmly fixed go on calmly as the infant borne in the arms of its mother. Christ reminds them of every duty in its time and place, reproves them for every error, counsels them in every difficulty, excites them to every needful activity... Their hope and trust rest solely on what He is willing and able to do for them; on nothing that they suppose themselves able and willing to do for Him.³

Co-crucifixion and rebirth with/in Christ provides a new way of life. It is an exchange of His life for that of the believer, His strength for that of the believer. The believer surrenders to death and resurrection in Christ and then in and through Him and his strength she approaches all of life.⁴ Charles G. Trumbull explains, "Jesus does not want to be our helper; He wants to be our life. He does not want us to work for Him. He wants us to let Him work through us..."⁵ This ideal of the believer living in complete union with Christ, and Christ manifesting Himself uniquely through the believer has been

empowerment and guidance comes from God's grace and Spirit, God's law within, and is not dictated by any external moral law. This too would separate the exchanged life from the Holiness movement as the Holiness movement uses the written moral law to gauge one's lifestyle. Raymond V. Edman, *They Found the Secret; 20 Transformed Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

The exchanged life does have connection with the higher life or deeper life movement. For example, Evelyn Underhill, who communicates exchanged life ideals also writes about reaching/touching the higher life regarding experienced union with God. Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986), 39. Also, Louise Dupre touches on concepts integrative with exchanged life while writing about the deeper life. Louis Dupré, *The Deeper Life : An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (1981, New York: Crossroad, 1981), 24, 25.

²Edman, *They Found the Secret*, 13.

³Ibid, 23.

⁴Romans 6:3-11.

⁵Edman, *They Found the Secret*, 151.

embraced by many notable Christians throughout history. It serves as a mystical yet pragmatic understanding and expression of Christian spirituality.

James G. Lawson's *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* and V. Raymond Edman's *They Found the Secret* chronicle many notable Christians who have embraced the gospel as an exchanged life. Edman notes the stories of Oswald Chambers, Andrew Murray, John Bunyan, Hudson Taylor, D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, Charles G. Trumbull, and others.⁶ Lawson includes George Fox, Jeanne Guyon, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Francois Fenelon, Thomas a Kempis, and others.⁷

Currently, there are smatterings of ministries that use the term exchanged life in describing their perception of Christian theology and spirituality.⁸ The Association of Exchanged Life Ministries is a national community of sister organizations throughout the United States committed to sharing the gospel as an exchanged life. A small association of these ministries exists in Europe as well.⁹ Others outside of these associations in ministries and churches throughout the globe communicate the same perception of the gospel.¹⁰

⁶Ibid, 8.

⁷James G. Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*. 1998, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998), 6.

⁸Examples of ministries teaching from an exchanged life perspective; Grace Ministries International, Hope for Life Croatia, Image Bearers, Christian Families Today, Grace Walk Ministries, Malcolm Smith Ministries, Lifetime Guarantee, People to People Ministries, Ministry Emmaus, Grace Summit, Exchanged Life Ministries Texas, Grace Ministries Vancouver.

⁹The association is called the European Association of Exchanged Life Ministries, EAELM and includes ministries from Croatia, Hungary, Israel, Romania, and Bulgaria.

¹⁰Midtown Church, Grace Evangelical Church, Grace Life Fellowship, City Church International-Hong Kong, Grace London.

Many of the ministries offering the exchanged life perspective use methodologies based in modernism.¹¹ Sacred flow communicates the core concept of the exchanged life, more effectively engaging a range of generations and cultural paradigms. Sacred flow reflects the way of Jesus that transcends time and culture. Exchanged life ministries share a core message conducive to sacred flow and any cultural paradigm – Christ as life, Christ in you, through you, but use methodologies that are primarily effective in a modern cultural paradigm.¹²

The mutual indwelling, serving as the meat of the thesis of this project, stands at the center of the exchanged life perception. The belief that Christ means to live in and through the Christian anchors exchanged life and sacred flow. This project builds upon exchanged life concepts to express Christian spirituality through the framework of flow, ultimately claiming sacred flow as the way of Jesus. Sacred flow provides exchanged

¹¹These methodologies concern themselves primarily with information dissemination – new truer knowledge will bring new life. In some cases, a new set of right beliefs and behaviors are expected, a new systematic theology. The ministries are typically lecture/speaker based - linear in the way they communicate the subject matter. The recipient is expected to hear the spoken word and/or read the written word to gain knowledge and be transformed. Further distinctions related to modern vs. postmodern communication are laid out in Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims; First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holdman Publishers, 2000).

¹²Culture is shifting, and has done so rapidly since the early 1970s. Christendom's influence over American culture has dissolved. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shape of Things*, 8, 9. The church and many ministries are lagging behind in addressing the culture shift to and through postmodernism. The model and methodologies of ministry must emerge/evolve to reach new generations of believers and seekers. Tightly structured theology and tightly structured ministries need some deconstruction and reconstruction. One dimensional linear connection must give way to holistic authentic connection. The bibliography offers additional information about the following helpful resources: *The Church in Emerging Culture* edited by Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims* by Leonard Sweet, *The Shape of Things to Come* by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* by Alan Hirsch, *The Church on the Other Side* by Brian McLaren, *Wide Open Spaces* by Jim Palmer, *Emerging Church* by Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church* by Dan Kimball, *UnChristian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *The Search to Belong* by Joseph Myers, *Revolution* by George Barna, *Making Sense of Church* by Spencer Burke, and *Velvet Elvis* by Rob Bell. Leonard Sweet in *Postmodern Pilgrims* posits that postmodern people long for epic spirituality. Epic is an acronym for Experiential, Participatory, Image-based, Connected. Postmoderns are committed to experiencing life. They want to explore, shape, engage, and integrate. Image communicates. Metaphor carries weight with postmoderns. Lastly, stark cultural individualism has driven postmoderns back toward valuing communal connectedness. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 30.

life-embracing individuals and ministries with an approach that will further deepen their intimacy with God and their connection with the current culture.

New Monasticism

Monasticism is experiencing resurgence. New monasticism is restoring and/or re-contextualizing the essence and practices of monks throughout the past two centuries. Christian monasticism had its beginnings shortly after Christianity became a recognized religion. Some believers felt it was impossible for them to live amid popular culture and follow Christ intensely so they went to work and pray in the desert.¹³ Today, the distraction of popular culture can be unbearable and many are relocating again, at least spiritually. They are forming communities that work and pray together adhering to ancient practices, but doing so with less insulation. Most of the new monastic communities are in the midst of everyday culture.¹⁴

Monastic practices old and new are utilized in monasteries, retreat centers, churches, and homes. These age-old practices mean to help Christians recognize and experience God amidst unparalleled levels of distraction. They are meant to rekindle spiritual routine for the everyday Christian who faces 21st century culture. Many have pulled away locally to establish communities reflective of monasteries. New monastics attempt to restore wholeness to a Christian spirituality that has become increasingly fragmented.¹⁵

¹³Tom Francis, *Desert Fathers for Modern Times* (Conyers, GA: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2006).

¹⁴The Rutba House is in the Walltown neighborhood in Durham, NC. The Simple Way is located on Potter St. in Philadelphia, PA. Church of the Apostles is in the Fremont neighborhood of Seattle, WA.

Many of the ancient monastic fathers who inspire new monasticism were mystics. The mystics wrote about their experiences of union with an indwelling God and his love flowing in and through them.¹⁶ The mystical-practical nature of monasticism and its commitment to dependent living (grace) matches that of sacred flow. So, it stands to reason that New Monasticism might assist in rescuing Christian mysticism from the margins. In *School(s) for Conversion; 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, The Rutba House states their intention to recognize and live dependent upon the power of grace.¹⁷

Though monasticism of the past typically acknowledged, integrated, and engaged the believer's mutual indwelling with Christ this did not automatically convert to a rhythmic and/or flowing grace-filled lifestyle. In order to flow with God, the indwelling Spirit must serve as the center, methodology, and empowerment for the monastic community and/or practice. New monastics may continue to live in a paradigm of will power rather than the Spirit's rhythmic empowering. Internal relational conflicts and external social issues may sidetrack New Monasticism's mysticism and Spirit-orientation. Without the Spirit's primacy and energy monasticism easily drifts into rote ritual. The rule of Ignatius, Benedict, or the local community can become just that, a set of religious rules in which case an environment potentially conducive to sacred flow becomes a guilt trip and guilt trap.¹⁸ This being said, the new monastic context provides great opportunity

¹⁵Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism; What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 37.

¹⁶Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 81, 82.

¹⁷The Rutba House, ed. *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishers, 2005), 7.

¹⁸Fully acknowledging this potential trap, sacred flow means to maintain one's focus on her mutual indwelling as both her center and principle of action. The flowing person stays his mind on grace as his way of empowerment, by the Spirit.

for sacred flow and vice versa. Sacred flow would enhance the community's experience of God, their practices, and relationship to one another and the external community.

The Emerging Church

Many Christian churches are slowly emerging or evolving, and in doing so many are giving weight to a more mystical, Spirit-oriented faith. Emerging churches in the context of this project are Christian churches that are modifying their dogma, models, structures, and/or methodologies in order to move beyond modernism and engage emerging generations.¹⁹ This includes mainline Christian churches, smaller denominations, and non-denominational churches as well.²⁰

Most of these emerging church leaders would embrace the theology of the believer's mutual indwelling with Christ. These churches are moving to emerging models and structures that are more appealing to people in the emerging culture. Systematic theology is loosening to a degree and so are their modern methodologies. Many communities are becoming more conducive to flow as they emphasize God's indwelling presence and Spirit-walking as a way of life.²¹

Emerging models also include charismatic churches where the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit has been fully embraced and employed for generations. Despite their acknowledgement and employment of the Spirit, charismatic churches

¹⁹Many churches recognize the need to make adjustments to connect with the emerging culture and are doing so with the intent to create cohesive a multi-generational community.

²⁰A basic statement of faith includes any church embracing the Trinity; God the Father/Mother, Jesus as the son of God – fully God, fully human, and the Holy Spirit. These communities all profess Jesus was crucified for the sins of humanity and was raised by Father and seated at his right hand. After ascension Jesus sent his Spirit to indwell and empower those who believe in him.

²¹Galatians 5:25.

wrestle with legalism as much as any other expressions. The primary concern about these communities with relation to sacred flow is their propensity to worship experience rather than the God who gracefully initiates and inhabits experience.²²

More progressive Christian churches/Christians are incorporating practices used in other religions to assist with engaging, exploring, and personally experiencing God and walking by his Spirit. This syncretism has the potential to both facilitate and hinder sacred flow. Healthy syncretism that maintains Christianity's orthodoxy will facilitate and enhance sacred flow. A blending of core tenets of theology as well as practices would take sacred flow beyond the boundaries of this project and orthodox Christianity.

Sacred flow offers a unique opportunity for the emerging church. The emerging church has the ability to re-center the Christian's mutual indwelling with Christ while vitally engaging the current culture. The movement of the culture has opened many Christians philosophically and theologically to the mystical nature of the mutual indwelling. This being the case, sacred flow spirituality suits the emerging church well.²³

This section considered other proposed solutions to the ministry problem. In essence, sacred flow may be amalgamated into each of these solutions. Sacred flow's approach to Christian spirituality would serve to enhance the message of the exchanged life. It would help center and re-center the new monastics and the Emerging Church as each deals with their unique challenges.

²²This accusation could be leveled at sacred flow as well. After all, sacred flow may lead to plenty of ecstatic-like euphoric experiences that one would desire to repeat. Nonetheless, Flow cannot be manufactured or forced. Sacred flow shares this nature. God must be present and involved. Beyond this, sacred flow spirituality intends to establish a mystical-practical balance keeping one vitally connected to mystery or the mystical and the pragmatic. One's focuses on Christ in each moment. He receives and imparts what is experienced.

²³Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 83.

The thesis of this project claims Christian spirituality expressed as sacred flow provides a valid enticing opportunity for multiple generations to holistically experience and express the way of Jesus. Uniquely and powerfully, sacred flow uses a metaphor and a framework from positive psychology while remaining soundly Trinitarian. Sacred flow fully embraces the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the *Logos*, serves as both the substance and model for sacred flow.

Sacred flow reaches beyond cultural paradigms. Sacred flow's deep and logical connection with the Scriptures makes it acceptable and engaging for a traditional or modern Christian spirituality. Sacred flow stands firmly grounded in orthodox biblical theology.²⁴ Emerging generations will connect with sacred flow's mystical-practical expression of orthodox truths found in the Scriptures. Re-centering the mutual indwelling and articulating a fresh metaphor and framework for Christian spirituality resonates across generations and paradigms. Sacred flow invites one's whole self (spirit, soul, body) to commune with God and others freely and creatively in every moment. Sacred flow encourages a Spirit-initiated activism in each moment no matter where one is and what he is doing.

²⁴The primary biblical or theological case for sacred flow is considered in the Thesis section.

SECTION THREE

THE THESIS

Open yourself to God without measure. Let His life flow through you like a torrent. Fear nothing on the road you are walking. God will lead you by the hand. Let your love for Him cast out the fear you feel for yourself.

- Francois Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart*¹

This project claims that the integration of Christian spirituality with flow provides an effective solution to the ministry problem.² Specifically, the project claims that expressing Christian spirituality using the framework of flow – its nature, elements, and characteristics will inspire Christians to reorient their spirituality around Christianity’s mystical core; the experience and expression of the believer’s mutual indwelling with Christ and its manifestation – walking by the Spirit.³

Psychologists Abraham Maslow and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi claimed that flow could become a way of life. Maslow integrated this notion with his model of a self-actualized person. The self-actualized person is one who ‘actualizes’ his full human potential.⁴ Reflecting this, Irenaeus of Lyons famously wrote, “The glory of God is man fully alive.”⁵ Self-actualization here exists as a dynamic rather than static state, having

¹ Fenelon, Francois. *The Seeking Heart*. (Sargent, GA: The Seedsowers, 1962), 125.

²Flow is a state of consciousness/ harmonious experience where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing to the exclusion of all else; where mind and body function together effortlessly.

³Galatians 2:20-21, Colossians 1:27, Romans 5-8, Galatians 5:1-26.

⁴In short, self-actualization is the realization of one’s full human potential. Self-actualization is motivated by the desire to more fully become who one can be. In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory self-actualization is the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all needs are fulfilled and the “actualization” of the full personal potential is realized. Abraham Maslow, *A Theory of Human Motivation*. (Psychological Review, 1943), 383.

ebb and flow.⁶ Maslow found that people exhibiting traits of self-actualization regularly had peak-experiences. Peak-experience or flow is characteristic and the ultimate experience of self-actualization.⁷ Csikszentmihalyi asserted that it is possible for one to move from one flow experience to the next. With a fully attentive disposition and meaningful challenging goals one can create a flow lifestyle.⁸ He states, “Applied to the personality, *autotelic* denotes an individual who generally does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later external goal.”⁹ This project integrates flow into a holistic Christian way of life in which the believer lives fully in the present rather than obsessing over the past or the future.

Several points of integration validate the merging of Christian spirituality and flow. The nature of Christian spirituality and flow are paradoxically mystical (phenomenological) and practical. The flow state ranges from mild to mystical while the flowing person participates in practical activities.¹⁰ The center of Christianity is mystical yet Christian spirituality touches every nook and cranny of mundane human existence. The living Christ has taken up residence in humanity via the Holy Spirit. Christians are meant to live and move and have their being in him while loving the loveless or simply

⁵Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103.htm> (accessed November 27, 2008).

⁶Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, 97.

⁷Galbreath, *The Christology of the Gospels and Abraham Maslow's*, 67.

⁸Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 80. This project describes sacred flow as a way of life. It is synergistic, its primary components being rhythm and flow. When one is not flowing she is remains in rhythm with God. Ebb and flow becomes instead rhythm and flow.

⁹Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports: The Keys to Optimal Experiences and Performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), 117.

¹⁰The characteristics of flow such as; unitive consciousness, spontaneous intuitive action, self-transcendence, time alterations, etc. mirror mystical experiences.

brushing their teeth.¹¹ Jesus is the flow (*Logos*) that flowed forth from the Father and the Spirit to earth and back and now resides within humanity.¹² While in human form he flowed with the Father moment by moment modeling a mystical-practical way of life for all of humanity.¹³

The elements and characteristic fruits of flow seamlessly merge with significant aspects of Christian spirituality. When abiding in Jesus and living the dependent life he modeled, certain spiritual fruit and other experiences are manifested that reflect the characteristics of flow. In their research, Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi found many parallel results regarding the characteristic fruit of peak-experience. Specific integration of Christian spirituality with the elements and characteristics of flow will be expounded in this section. The ministry problem will be addressed and the thesis explicated in this section by defining flow, describing Jesus as flow, exhibiting that Jesus flowed, and expounding sacred flow for Christians. Flow united with Christian spirituality creates a fuller expression of both by extending flow's realm to include Christian spirituality and creatively expanding Christian spirituality's expression through flow.

Before turning to define flow, it is necessary to present a definition for Christian spirituality that relates to the project. Mark McIntosh provides a succinct and powerful definition that most suits this project. He defines Christian spirituality as "The activity of being led by the Spirit into Christ's relationship with the Father."¹⁴ James Wiseman

¹¹Acts 17:28.

¹²Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 63, 64.

¹³This sacred flow lifestyle is expounded in John 4:34, 5:19, 21, 30, 36, 6:38, 57, 7:16, 8:26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 9:4,10:18, 12:49, 50, 14:10, 14:31, 17:8, 20:21.

agrees, concluding that living spiritually is living according to the promptings of the Spirit of God rather than being dominated by bodily or human inclinations.¹⁵ In keeping with this, the project claims New Testament spirituality entreats believers to keep in rhythm with the Spirit, to abide in his flow. Paul instructs, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by/follow the Spirit.”¹⁶ Authentic spirituality consists of catching and keeping cadence with God’s rhythm.

Flow Defined

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has intensely researched flow for the past thirty years. Others have preceded and come alongside Csikszentmihalyi to investigate flow, its significance, and its applications. Most significantly, Maslow preceded Csikszentmihalyi offering valuable insight regarding individual wholeness and peak-experience. Csikszentmihalyi first discovered this mystical-practical phenomenon during his doctoral studies in human development. He studied artists as a way to consider questions regarding creativity and enjoyment. He found that the artists totally lost themselves in their work and were intrinsically motivated.¹⁷ The process of creating was far more important than the finished product or even what the finished product gleaned financially. He termed this phenomenon *flow* since this was the ideal most research respondents

¹⁴Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 152.

¹⁵James Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 3.

¹⁶Galatians 5:25, New Living Translation.

¹⁷Elizabeth Debold, “Flow with Soul” <http://www.wie.org/DE/j9/csiksz.asp> (accessed July 20, 2008).1-9. See also Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

described associated with the experience.¹⁸ Csikszentmihalyi uses the terms flow and optimal experience while Maslow and prominent sports psychologist Ken Ravizza use the term peak-experience.¹⁹ The colloquial term *the zone* is also widely used. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi offer a collection of expressions people use to describe flow that includes the following; in the bubble, complete satisfaction, focused, in the zone, total involvement, peaceful, on auto, everything clicks, switched on, ideal, nothing else matters, in the groove, unbeatable, super alive, floating, weightlessness, total control, tuned in, and optimal pace.²⁰

Men and women vastly diverse in age and culture reported optimal experiences in much the same way despite their activity.²¹ Reading and chess may induce flow as much as tennis whether one is a Chinese teenager or a fifty-five year old Canadian. Flow has broad positive appeal in today's popular culture. It is embedded into the psyche of most people. Practically anyone can relate a flow experience or ten such experiences expressing an array of vivid characteristics.

What is flow? Flow is a mysterious, often mystical, yet pragmatic psychological experience and/or state of consciousness. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi describe it as,

It [flow] is a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions.... More than just focus, however, flow is a harmonious experience where mind and body are working together effortlessly...flow is about enjoyment.²²

¹⁸Csikszentmihalyi did sampling studies and scores of interviews including cross cultural interviews. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 358.

¹⁹Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1997), 31.

²⁰Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 12.

²¹Maslow, *Religion*, 72. See also Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

Flow's characteristics lend it deeper definition. Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi discovered a number of common characteristics associated with flow.

The Characteristic Effects of Flow

A number of universal qualities mark the flow experience across cultures, ages, and activities. Combining the work of Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi the following characteristic effects mark flow: unitive consciousness, self-validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action-awareness merge, inner stillness, effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy, self-transcendence, and time disorientation.²³ The following section briefly describes each effect or result of flow. The project will specifically integrate the characteristic effects within the context of Christian spirituality.

Flow has been referred to as unitive experience. In these moments the whole universe is perceived as integrated, beautiful, and whole.²⁴ Even evil in the world is accepted as a part of this whole. One's perception of the interrelation of all things is mysteriously heightened. Maslow also calls this unitive consciousness. The peak experience catches a glimpse of godlike perspective. Maslow asked his respondents, "How does the world look different in peak-experiences?"²⁵ He categorized their responses as the

²²Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 5.

²³Murphy, Michael. *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sports* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), 9-66. See Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 48-70. See also Maslow, *Religion*, 59-68.

²⁴Maslow, *Religions*, 59.

²⁵*Ibid*, 64.

intrinsic values of Being. These values express the highest reality in an interrelated world.²⁶

Flow is self-validating. Maslow calls peak-experiences end-experiences rather than means-experiences.²⁷ They are self-validating and self-justifying. When they occur one's feels awe, grace and gratitude so much so that people live to collect more of these experiences. Maslow writes, "The peak-experiences of pure delight are for my subjects among the ultimate goals of living and the ultimate validations and justifications for it."²⁸ The experience in and of itself carries sufficient weight and meaning.

Peak-experience discloses the peaker's sense of uniqueness. One moves toward a distinctive identity, a real self not experienced or fully perceived when not flowing. She seems to be functioning within her perfect identity.²⁹ With regard to this, Maslow goes as far as to say that only peakers can achieve their full identity.³⁰ Essentially, the peaker has become more of an authentic human.

Attention invested in any moment may increase to the point of total absorption. Total absorption is the culmination of undivided attention over time. Csikszentmihalyi uses the term unified conscious to describe the consciousness when one invests all their

²⁶The following are the Being-values (B-values) Maslow recorded: 1. Truth; honesty; reality. 2. Goodness. 3. Beauty. 4. Wholeness. 4a. Dichotomy-transcendence; synergy. 5. Aliveness. 6. Uniqueness. 7. Perfection. 7a. Necessity. 8. Completion. 9. Justice. 9a. Order. 10. Simplicity. 11. Richness. 12. Effortlessness. 13. Playfulness. 14. Self-sufficiency. For more description see, Maslow, *Religions*, 92, 93, 94.

²⁷Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, 79.

²⁸Ibid, 80.

²⁹Maslow, *Religions*, 67.

³⁰Maslow, *Psychology of Being*, 111.

psychic energy in the present moment as if nothing else exists.³¹ One's consciousness is narrowed, totally focused. He may be absorbed in a sport, painting, reading, or playing chess. This absorption can happen with anything interesting enough to hold one's attention completely.³² The person gets thoroughly lost in the moment with all distractions quieted. Some athletes describe this aspect of flow as a cocoon of "concentration" or a "player's trance."³³

The merging of action and awareness accompanies total absorption. Sport's psychologist Ken Ravizza asserts that awareness is not merely focused thinking but more of a sensation, a wider perceptive knowledge.³⁴ Effective engaged awareness makes the body sensitive to needed adjustments and intuitively the body makes adjustments. In the flow state people report becoming one with their body and their present activity. The dualism between the person and activity fades. When this occurs even extremely strenuous complex activities become effortless, spontaneous, and automatic.³⁵

Inner calmness/stillness characterizes flow. This calm gives credence to the general sense of well-being or harmony often reported. Many athletes testify to experiencing deep peace or stillness, calmness within fear, in the midst of chaotic

³¹Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 20.

³²Abraham H. Maslow, *The Further Reaches of Human Nature* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976), 60.

³³Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 34.

³⁴Ken Ravizza, and Tom Hanson, *Heads-Up Baseball* (Chicago, IL: Masters Press, 1995), 47.

³⁵Andrew Cooper, *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports*. (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publication, Inc., 1998), 33. See also Murphy, *In the Zone*, 86.

circumstances or extreme risk.³⁶ The mind de-stresses when fully tuned. Fear, anxiety, inhibition, irrational restraint, and confusion disappear.

Flow provides a mystical-practical space for people to effortlessly operate even while fully exerting their mental and physical capacities over long periods of time.³⁷ Things seem to simply happen. The whole person functions in concert with unforced rhythm.

While in the flow-state individuals feel they have a much greater command over themselves and their environment. Michael Murphy explains that the power and control those in flow experience can be all-encompassing, “At its fullest, the feeling of being in control is a unifying experience involving the athlete’s entire sense of self, the environment, and even his destiny.”³⁸ Anxiety related to loss of control does not exist. When experiencing this sensation of increased mastery and supreme control, one becomes free to engage new and more extreme challenges. The person feels she is a free agent with more “free will” to exert over or into her situation.³⁹

Related to many other characteristics, peakers experience spontaneous intuitive action. They spontaneously and intuitively initiate activity and react to their circumstances. In keeping with this, Murphy observes that when athletes make extraordinary plays they do so spontaneously without regard for instruction or practice.⁴⁰ In flow, appropriate responses happen naturally with appropriate timing. Many

³⁶Murphy, *In the Zone*, 11.

³⁷Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

³⁸Murphy, *In the Zone*, 20.

³⁹Maslow, *Religions*, 67.

⁴⁰Murphy, *In the Zone*. 24.

interviewed detailed the significance of instinct. Flow draws upon instinct. Intuitive initiative leads the way for extraordinary spontaneous responses in the midst of flow. Elite athletes acknowledge this leading while flowing and are careful not to disrupt it.⁴¹

During a peak-experience a person has no psychic energy (attention) left to be self-conscious. Worry, doubt, fear, and low self-esteem subside. Negative self-talk and self-condemnation dissolve. Deep focus neutralizes self-interference.⁴² The person has no attention left to experience anxiety about the way they perceive themselves, or are perceived by others. Csikszentmihalyi explains this loss of self-consciousness is not a loss of self, or of consciousness, but a loss of consciousness *of self*.⁴³ The flowing person is actually more conscious than in any other state.

Emotional buoyancy also marks flow. One embraces emotion without being controlled. One connects, emotes, but buoyantly floats, gently bobbing within the circumstances. Individuals process and integrate negative emotion without slipping from flow.

The integration of mind, body, and movement grants a sense of self-transcendence, a detachment of sorts. Ray Murly speaks to this experience by submitting,

We are separate, yet in touch with things around us; we cooperate rather than resist; move forward, rather than backward; look for the positive, gliding past the negative; think of possibilities rather than obstacles. We are open to multiple alternatives. We feel hopeful, and experience a general sense of well being.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid, 26.

⁴²Tim Gallway, *The Inner Game of Work*, (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001), 44.

⁴³Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64.

⁴⁴Ray Murly, *In the Zone: Making Winning Moments Your Way of Life* (Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers, 1995), 21.

Some people communicate this detachment as an out of body-like experience, as if they or someone else was remotely controlling their body. The person becomes a spectator watching with amazement the action they are performing.⁴⁵

Lastly, while consumed with the moment, many people experience an altered sense of time. Csikszentmihalyi states that, “The sense of duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to what seems like hours.”⁴⁶ Time integrates into the experience. Time mysteriously warps as if it is under the control of the person flowing.

The Elements of Flow

Csikszentmihalyi discovered that flow has essential components. Through his countless interviews and sampling he found that certain elements lay the groundwork for flow. He determined that flow happens when one is fully attentive or deeply concentrated, his goals are clear, feedback is available and apparent, challenges faced and abilities possessed are balanced, and his motivation is intrinsic.

Deep Concentration

Concentration serves as the fundamental component of flow. Flow is focus. Csikszentmihalyi believes that attention is energy we choose to invest each moment, and that investment ultimately determines our quality of life.⁴⁷ This devotion of attention-energy initiates the flow state. Csikszentmihalyi believes control of attention, more

⁴⁵Cooper, *Playing in the Zone*, 117.

⁴⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

⁴⁷Ibid, 33.

broadly, consciousness, leads to flow and therefore enjoyment.⁴⁸ When attention is not directed and the consciousness unbridled, it is manipulated by all things internally and externally. Csikszentmihalyi describes this drifting as psychic entropy and flow as negentropic – bringing order to the consciousness.⁴⁹

To flow, concentration must be deep enough to block any negative self-interference. Timothy Gallwey affirms this, concluding that focus must be nonjudgmental.⁵⁰ Pure constructive concentration occurs without condemnation concerning anything internal or external. As one maintains nonjudgmental attention her concentration deepens.

Clear Goals

Goals provide clarity and forward movement for focus. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi write, “Clarity of intention helps to focus attention and avoid distraction. Because what is required is clearly spelled out, there is no need to second-guess or doubt what one is doing.”⁵¹ If goals are vague or unreachable, focus falters and flow never begins or fades quickly. In essence, goals are desires made measurable. Participating in desired activities makes focus and goal setting much easier. Goals are not meant to be pursued mechanically. While flowing individuals pursue goals with rhythmic natural action, not mechanical precision or disjointed clumsiness.⁵²

⁴⁸Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 33.

⁴⁹Again, here the term *psychic* refers to cognitive, attention and not the supernatural or telepathic. See Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 40.

⁵⁰Gallwey, *Inner Game of Work*, 57.

⁵¹Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 21.

During the course of his research, Csikszentmihalyi unearthed what he terms emergent motivation and goals. Many times people engage in activities for which motivation and goals are weak or nonexistent. Inevitably, life forces individuals to do activities they do not particularly desire. However, sometimes as their engagement in the activity continues with deepening focus, engagement may spawn motivation as well as goal setting and flow may then occur.⁵³ Emergent motivation makes flow a possibility in some the most mundane of life's activities. This will be a significant concept as flow extends into Christian spirituality.

What about goals for more subjective activities such as art, writing, prayer, and poetry? Csikszentmihalyi admits the difficulty artists and others who work in the abstract face in setting clear goals. He stresses their need to form an unconscious internal mechanism to inform their decisions and direction.⁵⁴ They must develop their own sense for what must be done each moment as well as set an overall goal even if it is somewhat abstract.

Immediate and Unambiguous Feedback

One needs instant and comprehensible feedback for flow to occur. Responses may be intrinsic, extrinsic, or both. While competing, many athletes tune into their body, evaluate the feedback, and make adjustments.⁵⁵ They may also tune into feedback from

⁵²Murphy, *In the Zone*, 86.

⁵³Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Sami Abuhamdeh, and Jeanne Nakamura, *Flow*, <http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/Readings%20251/CsikFlow%20copy.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2008).

⁵⁴Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 114.

⁵⁵Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 22.

the clock, their coach, or their team. One may tune into feedback as she works in the office or at home. When one knows how the activity is going, tweaking may occur while maintaining the flow state. However, feedback and response must happen without distracting one's attention from the goal.

For artists and the like, Csikszentmihalyi again confesses the existence of a difficulty as with goals. Who gives the poet immediate feedback? Here again, those involved in more abstract or creative activity must rely primarily on intrinsic feedback. They must know where their work is going, when it is on or off track, and when it is finished. Csikszentmihalyi calls this internalizing the rules and the judgments of the field.⁵⁶ They intrinsically know what is excellent and what is poor.

Challenge-Skills Balance

Csikszentmihalyi discovered that for flow to occur, a delicate balance must be struck between the challenge faced and one's skill level. To experience flow, an individual's skill must match the demand at hand. If the skills outpace the challenge the individual becomes bored. If the challenge overwhelms the individual's skill level anxiety reigns. Csikszentmihalyi calls this the *CS balance* and the "golden rule" of flow.⁵⁷ As one's skill grows she must engage more difficult challenges in order to intensely flow. Flow begins at low skill levels in any given activity as long as the challenge matches the skill level and the activity holds the attention of the participant.

⁵⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 118.

⁵⁷Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 6.

Autotelic Approach

The final fundamental component in defining flow regards intrinsic motivation – the *autotelic* approach. The artists Csikszentmihalyi initially studied painted for the sake of painting. Their motivation was internal and related specifically to the task being performed.⁵⁸ This drew attention as a psychological anomaly. Why would one do something so attentively, so passionately, without external motivation or expectation of reward? Later Csikszentmihalyi termed this anomaly *autotelic*, derived from two Greek roots: *auto* meaning self and *telos* meaning goal.⁵⁹ The goal is the activity itself. Activities are engaged for the sake of the experience that particular activity brings, nothing beyond. Enjoyment relates to the activity, not any resulting reward. The activity validates itself. External focus or reward corrupts one's truest experience. As stated earlier in the thesis section, Csikszentmihalyi posits that this anomaly can become a disposition. Complete attention and ultimate intention dedicated to each moment make way for a flowing lifestyle. Summarizing all of the components that induce flow, Csikszentmihalyi offers the following statement, "It matters little what you do, what matters is how you do it."⁶⁰

Jesus as the Logos-Flow

The term flow is primarily used in this project as a verb and a noun. As a verb, to flow means to fluidly move with unbroken continuity. This describes the sensation when one experiences flow the noun, a distinct euphoric experience or state of consciousness.

⁵⁸Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self*, xii.

⁵⁹Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 117.

⁶⁰Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 99.

As a noun, flow can also be considered a person – Jesus. He is the flow that flows. This project promotes Christian spirituality as a sacred flow, in which one harmoniously flows with God while experiencing flow as both a state of consciousness and the person Jesus.

The *Logos* is the flow that is both of God and from God. Jesus is the *Logos*-flow. He is both the substance and the agent of flow. John opens his gospel account referring to Jesus as the *Logos*.

In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.⁶¹

Sweet writes, “Every religion has a “root metaphor” that gives it depth and substance...For the Christian it is the *Logos*.”⁶² Historically, the Greek term *logos* has carried several meanings. The English term *word* only hints at the capacity of *logos*. In Greek philosophy *logos* was commonly understood as the coherent universal cosmic principle of order and reason, and the unifying and sustaining force of the universe.⁶³ The *logos* is to be thanked for humankind’s rational capacity. In Jewish thought the *logos* referred to God in action, particularly in creation, revelation and redemption.⁶⁴ The *Logos* is the self-expression of God, more than a single word; the *Logos* is a whole message that

⁶¹John 1:1-5, 14.

⁶²Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 62.

⁶³F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 29.

⁶⁴Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 29.

reveals God.⁶⁵ The Jewish culture also understood the *Logos* as personified wisdom, the thought of God. Then, the New Testament introduces the *Logos* as the agent of creation who later was incarnate in creation.⁶⁶ Integrating these ideas one could say the *Logos* is the divine Intent, the ultimate Wisdom, the authentic Reality, the supernatural Cause, the infinite Source, and the everlasting Agent. Additionally, the New Testament submits the *Logos* as a person – Jesus. He is the universal flow that creates and sustains. He holds all things together. All emanates from him and returns to him.⁶⁷

John describes the *Logos* as both the life and the light. John writes, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”⁶⁸ This *Logos*-life became human. The *Logos* is the life flow of energy from God lighting up all of creation including its creatures. Sweet relates the *Logos* as an energy releasing event and essential for the emergence of life, biological or spiritual.⁶⁹ The interflow of the Trinitarian energy has released “outbound flow” into humanity.⁷⁰ Integrating many of the metaphoric identities assigned to Jesus in the Gospels into the *Logos*, Evelyn Underhill writes,

The *Logos*, which is in essence the *energetic expression* of the Divine Nature, creative Spirit ever seeking to penetrate and mould the material world, he describes as Light struggling with darkness, as the “Life of men,” pouring itself out from the fountain of Godhead like “living water”; as the Bread which feeds man, the Paraclete which perpetually helps and enlightens him, the Door through which finite returns to infinite; the living, growing Vine of which men are but the

⁶⁵Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on The Gospel of John* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980), 7.

⁶⁶Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 62.

⁶⁷Colossians 1:15-17, Romans 11:36, Revelation 21:6.

⁶⁸John 1:4.

⁶⁹Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 68.

⁷⁰Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, eds. *God's Life in the Trinity* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2006), 11.

branches; and at the same time as the personal Son of God, the Saviour and Shepherd of Souls. This richly-various manifestation of Eternal Reality, he says, broke out through mankind in its perfect and “saving” form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. There the divine energy found its perfect thoroughfare, and appeared “in the flesh.”⁷¹

Jesus embodies Trinitarian energy – flow, a life force. He represents divine life in human form and offers humanity his form of divine life.⁷² Jesus is the flow of God made manifest, both the possessor and provider of God’s life.⁷³

Logos-light flowed into the world. Jesus comes offering not only life but revelation, discovery, and awakening - light. His flow illuminates everything in its path, unmatched by the darkness. *Logos*-light brings God’s reality. According to Underhill, God is the Absolute, the Ultimate Fact, and Reality.⁷⁴ The *Logos* flows, offering divine insight, supreme wisdom. God flows, inviting all of humanity to fully receive and give themselves to his eternal current. In doing so, the Christian joins the interflow of the Trinity.⁷⁵

Jesus Flows

Jesus is the *Logos*-flow of God, from God, who flowed with God as a human. The concept of Jesus’ human lifestyle flowing exists as a major point of integration for flow

⁷¹Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (New York, NY: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD., 1913), 222.

⁷²Wilson Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:18)* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006), 39.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1912), 24.

⁷⁵John 14:20. See also Demetrius Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 49.

and Christian spirituality. In addition to being the substance and agent of God's flow, Jesus modeled flow with his Father as a lifestyle.⁷⁶ Specifically related to the elements of flow, Jesus deeply concentrated upon the Father. He had unified purpose and goals with the Father. He was so intimate with the Father that he enjoyed regular feedback and conversation. He faced challenges that required him to engage his depend-ability. He was fully present to people and tasks.

Jesus' perfect union with the Father as a person of the Trinity provided the basis for his flow. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct identities participating in and with one another to the extent that all is united, shared, and mutually exchanged.⁷⁷ Paul declares in Colossians, "For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."⁷⁸ Jesus flowed forth from the Trinity via the incarnation exposing and expressing God as well as granting access to the Godhead.⁷⁹

John's gospel records many of Jesus' sayings related to union and mutual indwelling with the Father. The following verses are such examples in John's gospel.

"Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works."⁸⁰

"He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me."⁸¹

⁷⁶John 4:34, 5:19, 21, 30, 36, 6:38, 57, 7:16, 8:26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 9:4,10:18, 12:49, 50, 14:10, 14:31, 17:8, 20:21.

⁷⁷This accommodates the concept of perichoresis (mutual interpenetration) – individuality and co-penetration of life, and appropriation - each person of the Trinity involved in every outward action of the Godhead. See Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 299.

⁷⁸Colossians 2:9, Colossians 1:15-17, 19.

⁷⁹Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God; One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996), 17.

⁸⁰John 14:11.

⁸¹John 12:45.

“And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to Him.”⁸²

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.”⁸³

With confidence in his union, Jesus drew upon the infinite spiritual resources of his Father. His demeanor and soul posture allowed him to flow with the Father divinely loving all he encountered. Jesus’ complete dependence modeled a particular way of life to his followers. He surrendered his divine privileges to live as a human, but as a human operating in perfect unity with the Almighty.⁸⁴ He understood the conditions and benefits of spiritual union with the Father. He had been given the mission and privilege of flowing with his Father every moment of his earthly existence. Jesus was one with the Father in being and act and this has a resultant effect upon humanity. Thomas Torrance asserts,

Of quite crucial importance here is the oneness in Being and Act between the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, for it is in virtue of that oneness that we know that what God is toward us in Christ he is antecedently and eternally in himself, and what he is antecedently and eternally in himself he is toward us in his revealing and saving acts in Christ.⁸⁵

The Word always flows.⁸⁶ Jesus’ human flow took the form of a fully attuned person living early in the first century. Many biblical texts, particularly in the gospel of John, support the idea of Jesus flowing with the Father.

⁸²John 8:29.

⁸³John 17:22.

⁸⁴Philippians 2:5-11.

⁸⁵Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God; One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996), 30.

⁸⁶Meister Eckhart in Bernard McGinn, ed. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006), 294.

“Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.’”⁸⁷

A.T. Lincoln asserts that this text does not communicate subordination but unity of action. The son followed in the Father’s footsteps like a well attuned apprentice.⁸⁸ Jesus only chose to do that which the Father initiated, approved, or did himself. They operated in concert with one another.

“I can do nothing on My own initiative As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”⁸⁹

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”⁹⁰

Again, Jesus stresses his complete abandonment to the initiation and authority of the Father. Jesus exemplified Jean-Pierre De Caussade’s ideal that all learning should consist of finding out what God has planned for each moment.⁹¹ Jesus judged with the judgment of the Father because his role was to simply pass along judgment the Father communicated to him. He was an agent meant to carry out a commission exactly as the commissioner required.⁹²

“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.”⁹³

⁸⁷John 5:19.

⁸⁸A.T. Lincoln, in Black’s New Testament Commentaries, ed. M.D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 202.

⁸⁹John 5:30.

⁹⁰John 6:38.

⁹¹Jean Pierre De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 27.

⁹²Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 229.

⁹³John 6:57.

Jesus acknowledged the Father as his source of life. The Father of life gave life to Jesus as one whom indwelt him and one whom he indwelt. This foreshadows future believers' relationship with God.

“So Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’”⁹⁴

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.”⁹⁵

Jesus' teaching and spoken words in general were words provided by the Father. He gave expression to the Father.⁹⁶ The Father gave him what to say and how to say it. This alludes to an incomprehensible level of intimacy with the Father. Jesus flowed so tightly with the Father that he understood the tone with which the Father would have him speak.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.”⁹⁷

Jesus did not claim the work he did on behalf of the Father as his own. The Father dwelling in him did the Father's works through him. He claims the works he does are owned by the Father. The Father acted in and through the person of Jesus. Jesus acted as

⁹⁴John 7:16.

⁹⁵John 12:49-50.

⁹⁶G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 285.

⁹⁷John 14:10.

a unique conduit for the Father. The Father mediated his life to all of humankind through Jesus.⁹⁸ Jesus' whole earthly life flowed.

Jesus' life and ministry exhibited both the elements and characteristic fruits of flow. He lived in complete harmony with the Father. He was deeply concentrated upon the Father. His goal was clear – the Father's will. Clear feedback came from the Father. He lived in each moment – autotelically. He was present to everyone in his presence.

Jesus projected the manifestations of flow.⁹⁹ Jesus understood his unity and uniqueness and operated within it.¹⁰⁰ His movement with the Father as the *Logos*, the revelatory communication of God, was self-validating – an end in itself. He was fully concentrated, absorbed in his mission. His mind and body moved in unison within the leadership of the Father. He acted out of a core of inner calm/stillness. He worked effortlessly in the power of the Father. He projected control, God's control. He moved spontaneously and intuitively. He lacked negative self-consciousness. He lived emotionally buoyant and transcended himself.¹⁰¹

Jesus initiated sacred flow as a way of life – a spirituality. Thomas A. Smail expresses how Jesus' unity and flow relates to humanity, "He is of being (*homoousios*) with the Father and so belongs to God's life and not only to ours, but he brings his

⁹⁸Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 285.

⁹⁹In the project/artifact these manifestations will be considered more thoroughly.

¹⁰⁰An example of his unitive consciousness and uniqueness is expressed in John 13:3; "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His Hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God... Jesus understood his connection with all things and his uniqueness within them.

¹⁰¹ This emotional buoyancy is evidenced by Jesus in many the verses that express his flowing lifestyle. John 4:34, 5:19, 21, 30, 36, 6:38, 57, 7:16, 8:26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 9:4, 10:18, 12:49, 50, 14:10, 14:31, 17:8, 20:21.

relationship with the Father into earthly revelation and action for our salvation.”¹⁰² His sacrifice saved humanity and revealed a model for intimate relationship with the Father. Csikszentmihalyi and others have tapped into a metaphor and a phenomenon that has deep, ancient spiritual roots. Jesus’ flowing represented a lifestyle that he desired to pass along to any who would receive him, the *Logos-flow*.¹⁰³

Sacred Flow

As noted earlier, Csikszentmihalyi found that people enjoy life most when they are experiencing flow.¹⁰⁴ Enjoyment converts to Christianity in a primary expression of the fruit of the Spirit – joy.¹⁰⁵ Giving one’s whole life to living in the rhythm and flow of the Spirit leads to enjoyment, joy. The Greek word for joy is *chara*, meaning “calm delight, gladness or fullness.”¹⁰⁶ Christians have the opportunity to concentrate, engage, and flow fully in the Spirit of God. In doing so, they experience joy. Sacred flow is a fitting integration of flow and graceful Christian spirituality resulting in a daily faith characterized by *joy* – calm delight, gladness and fullness or contentment.

Sacred flow means to move people toward joy by moving Christian spirituality toward living in the rhythm and flow of the Spirit moment by moment. Rhythm and flow combine to create sacred flow. The word rhythm is from the Greek *rhythmus* or *rhythmos*

¹⁰²Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 33.

¹⁰³This dependent lifestyle is expounded in John 4:34, 5:19, 21, 30, 36, 6:38, 57, 7:16, 8:26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 9:4, 10:18, 12:49, 50, 14:10, 14:31, 17:8, 20:21. In John 20:21-22, the resurrected Jesus tells the disciples that he is sending them in the way the Father sent him. He then breathes the Holy Spirit onto them that would serve as their teacher, guide, and empowerment.

¹⁰⁴Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 46.

¹⁰⁵Galatians 5:22.

¹⁰⁶Meyers, *e-Sword*, Galatians 5:22, joy.

meaning “movement in time” or “measured flow.” Rhythm is a regular or patterned recurrence (flow) of elements (beats, accents, motifs, themes, etc) in a system of motion.¹⁰⁷ Humans are organic systems in motion; their spirit, soul, and body constantly in flux. God initiates and sustains rhythmic life for all of humanity.¹⁰⁸ Rhythm and flow are closely related. Rhythm’s first cousin is the Latin term, *rhein* which means, “to flow.”¹⁰⁹ Catching and remaining in the rhythm and flow of the Spirit is the desire and the daily end of sacred flow.¹¹⁰

Sacred flow realizes a life in which one learns to live, move, and simply be in the rhythm and flow of God’s Spirit. Sacred flow spirituality resembles a river. In areas, it flows slowly, gently, sometimes moving so slowly that its movement is barely perceptible – rhythm. In other areas, the river shakes, rattles and hums, creating rapids when quickly and effortlessly dips and dives – flow. The sacred flow Christian is a river; one, united, always rhythmically flowing, but doing so at varying paces under diverse circumstances.

Rhythm describes one’s more general underlying everyday movement with God, while flow has distinct elements and characteristics related to fully engaging in activity. Rhythm is movement with God in the commonplace; lazy strolls, time spent with family, eating dinner, brushing your teeth, reading, walking the dog, vegging out, driving to

¹⁰⁷Rhythm, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rhythm> (accessed June 09, 2008).

¹⁰⁸Colossians 1:15-17.

¹⁰⁹Rhythm, (accessed June 09, 2008).

¹¹⁰This ideal will be explained and expanded in the project. Examples of its biblical foundation are Romans 5-8, Galatians 2:20-21, and Colossians 1:27. Also, it reflects Galatians 5:25, walking by or in rhythm with the Spirit and John 15, abiding in the vine. Many other verses throughout the New Testament will be references in this section.

work, sleeping, playing with your kids, etc. Maslow calls this rhythm the plateau-experience. He explains it as low intensity peak-experience,

The less intense plateau-experience is more often experienced as pure enjoyment and happiness, as, let's say, in a mother sitting quietly looking, by the hour, at her baby playing, and marveling, wondering, philosophizing, not quite believing. She can experience this as a very pleasant, continuing, contemplative experience rather than as something akin to a climactic explosion which then ends.¹¹¹

Flow-related movement with God happens during more intense activity or challenge; busy days at the office, intense days at play, suffering, demanding service or ministry projects, renovation at home, dealing with intense circumstances, training for or competing in a competition, deep conversation, etc. In sacred flow, ebb and flow becomes rhythm and flow as one engages and pulls back, speeds up and slows down.

Reorienting Christian Mysticism

Movement toward sacred flow begins with re-orienting mysticism, or at least a more mystical view of theology. Vladimir Lossky writes, "In a certain sense all theology is mystical, inasmuch as it shows forth the divine mystery: the data of revelation."¹¹² Christianity, its theology included, is mystical at its core. Christian mysticism grows from the revelation and experience of the mutual indwelling. The Omniscient, Omnipotent God, revealing himself in the *Logos*, dwells in his people and them in him.¹¹³ This being the case, then to be a Christian is to be a mystic.

This project returns mysticism to its rightful place, the center of Christian spirituality. William Johnston offers, "Authentic Christian mysticism is nothing but a

¹¹¹Maslow, *Religions*, xv.

¹¹²Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 7.

¹¹³John 14:20, Colossians 3:3, 4, Colossians 1:27.

living of the Gospel at a deep level of consciousness.”¹¹⁴ Essentially then, Christian mysticism concerns itself with the loving presence of God; acknowledging, seeking, experiencing and expressing God’s presence.

Christian mysticism embraces three primary ideals with relationship to God: mystery, union, and love. Noted Christian mystics have expressed the mystery, union, and love of God in every generation since the death and resurrection of Christ. At the root of the term mysticism is mystery, in both its etymology and definition. The term mystery, *mysterion* in Greek, refers to a secret, to shutting one’s mouth.¹¹⁵ The true identity and availability of God, the extent of his participation with humanity and vice versa, is this mystery’s core content. Mysticism (Apophatic) asserts that God exists beyond words, wisdom, light or any other human concepts. Knowing of him leads to an unknowing darkness that is so bright humanity cannot bear it. Despite the darkness, Christian mystics seek to know and experience God as a fully as possible. Mysticism (Cataphatic) asserts that one relates to God through all that is created though he himself is incomprehensible. Here in exists the grand paradox of mystical theology, knowing God and simultaneously not knowing Him.¹¹⁶

Mysticism provides an opportunity for discovery. Mystics depend largely upon intuitive or revealed knowledge. Experiencing or discovering God to any degree is considered by mystics, a grace gift. Underhill declared mysticism as the art of union with

¹¹⁴William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 7.

¹¹⁵ Meyers, *e-Sword*, Colossians 1:27, mystery.

¹¹⁶Johnston, *Mystical Theology*, 16.

Reality and mystics are spiritual pioneers who engage in this quest.¹¹⁷ God offers rhythm, reality, truth, and love. The mystic wholly desires to receive all that God created him to receive.¹¹⁸ Christian mystics long to move beyond the biblical text and legalistic expressions of it to experience its divine author. The mystic demands more than a read through and legalistic following of the biblical text. He desires full embrace from the author.¹¹⁹

As stated above, three themes dominate Christian mysticism: mystery, union, and love, all of which are integral to sacred flow. The mystic desires and seeks more direct experience of God's mystery and love through union. Love serves as mysticism's and sacred flow's goal, method, and result. Incarnations and manifestations of loving union are central to this project.

The primary manifestation of the loving union is the believer herself. She is sent out. Christ followers have been sent out in the way of Jesus. As Jesus approaches death on the cross he prays for his followers. He asks the Father to set them apart in the truth and he sends them out as he was sent out. "As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."¹²⁰ After his resurrection he sends them again. "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"¹²¹ Typically, this idea of being sent out is related to a specific mission. In a broader sense, being sent out in the way of Jesus is being sent out to live in the model of Jesus, flowing

¹¹⁷Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 12.

¹¹⁸Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, 1961), 47.

¹¹⁹Underhill, *Mysticism*, 3, 4.

¹²⁰John 17:18.

¹²¹John 20:21.

with God.¹²² Flowing with the Father is an imperative. Demetrius Dunn affirms, “If we enter by faith into that flow of life between Father and Son, we will be empowered to perform the very works of loving and healing that characterized the life of Jesus.”¹²³ Jesus mandates a life of total abandonment to the will of the Father through the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Christ followers have been ushered into Jesus’ relationship with the Father, listening to the inner voice of love and mediating his love to others. They now embody the flow of God.

Reviewing the texts provided above from John’s gospel related to Jesus flowing, if the Christ follower enjoys the union Jesus had with the Father then she too may depend upon God for actions, judgment/decisions, speech, and even tone of speech.¹²⁴ The sacred flowing Christ follower lives humbly and moves restfully trusting his words and deeds to be given by God himself. To live is in fact, Christ. This lifestyle hinges upon experienced union of the Christ follower with Christ and the Father. Therefore, it depends upon an engaged incarnation.

In Christ

Incarnation serves as a crucial component of theology that is essential to Christianity and vital to uniting followers with God and flow. Incarnation is, “The making real or concrete of something abstract and/or the bodily manifestation of a supernatural being.”¹²⁵ Two incarnations are significant. First, Jesus being birthed into

¹²²1 John 4:17.

¹²³Dumm, *Mystical Portrait of Jesus*, 49.

¹²⁴This dependent lifestyle is exemplified in John 4:34, 5:19, 21, 30, 36, 6:38, 57, 7:16, 8:26, 28, 29, 38, 42, 9:4, 10:18, 12:49, 50, 14:10, 14:31, 17:8, 20:21.

humanity embodying the life of God the Father. The second intimately connects humanity with the first. Jesus took up residence in believers and they were put into him and the Father.¹²⁶ The Christian uniquely makes Jesus real or concrete, tangible. These dynamic incarnations establish union supplying a theological foundation for sacred flow.

Christians are mysteriously enveloped by Jesus and the Father. “Jesus said, ‘In that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in me, and I in you.’”¹²⁷ The Christian dwells in Christ and in the Father. Jesus explains to his disciples that beyond his resurrection his followers will live in him and he in the Father.¹²⁸ Christ followers are mysteriously wrapped in God the Father and Jesus. John reports that “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”¹²⁹ Christians are saturated with God.

Jesus’ death and resurrection provided a way for humanity to live in spiritual union with the Father. Jesus became sin so that his followers could become the righteousness of God.¹³⁰ Religious dualism ended with the spiritual work done on the cross. In Christ, followers are made righteous and ushered into complete union via the grace gift of Jesus.¹³¹

¹²⁵Incarnation, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/incarnation> (accessed July 1, 2008).

¹²⁶John 14:20, Colossians 1:27, Colossians 3:3, 4.

¹²⁷John 14:20.

¹²⁸John 14:20.

¹²⁹1 John 14:15.

¹³⁰2 Corinthians 5:21.

¹³¹Romans 3:21-26.

In his letter to the Romans and to the Galatians, Paul writes of the believer being crucified with Christ.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.¹³²

Paul writes of being baptized into Christ's death. The primary definition of the Greek term *baptizo* is "to make whelmed" or immerse completely, dunk.¹³³ Believers are dunked into Christ. Taking this figuratively, the sacrament of baptism provides a meaningful incarnational metaphor. Considering it literally, believers have mysteriously been immersed into Christ and his death. The word picture in Romans 6:5 related to being united with Jesus in the likeness of his death is that of being planted together.¹³⁴ The idea is that of being grown along with, closely united, fused, related in nature, firmly united, associated in birth or origin, being in close accord, congenial, or being of the same birth.¹³⁵ Followers of Christ were placed on the cross and in the ground with and in Christ.

To the Galatians Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,

¹³²Romans 6:5-8.

¹³³Meyers, *e-Sword*, Romans 6:3.

¹³⁴Meyers, *e-Sword*, Romans 6:5.

¹³⁵Connate, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/connate> (accessed July 22, 2008).

who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹³⁶ The old spiritual Paul was slain at the cross in Jesus and no longer lives. The term *with* in the Greek, *sustauroo*, means “to impale in company with.”¹³⁷ Also, this co-crucifixion with Christ is written in the aorist tense in Greek, a past occurrence with lasting effect.¹³⁸ Paul’s impaling with Christ had already happened through Christ. Therefore, he may consider his old spiritual nature dead, and not go about attempting to crucify it again and again. Just as he mysteriously died in Christ, he mysteriously rose to a new life in Christ. He, as do all Christ-followers, resides in Christ who is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This communicates a complete truly intimate union.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.¹³⁹

Christ in You

Paul proclaims to the Colossians that Christ has come to take up residence in them,

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶Galatians 2:20.

¹³⁷Meyers, *e-Sword*, Galatians 2:20.

¹³⁸F.F. Bruce, *Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. C.L. Morris. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 131.

¹³⁹Ephesians 2:4-6.

¹⁴⁰Colossians 1:25-27.

The mystery, or at least a portion of it, is as Paul clearly states, “Christ in you.” Messiah has come to dwell in and among humankind simultaneously. The term *in* found here is a primary preposition indicating a fixed location.¹⁴¹ Christ is fixed inside his followers. Likewise, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul exhorts the Corinthians by emphasizing the presence of Christ in them, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.”¹⁴² Jesus being born in and forming his follower from the inside out represents the core of Christian conversion and spiritual formation.

God foretold of his New Covenant incarnation approximately six hundred years prior to Jesus’ birth. The prophet Ezekiel announced that God would make a new covenant with the people. In this new covenant the people would be made new spiritually, given a new heart, be injected with God’s Spirit, and led from within. God granted a new self to his people.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.¹⁴³

According to this text, God provided a cleansing (of sins), a new spiritual identity, a new heart, and His Spirit. The heart in this case is literally associated with emotions,

¹⁴¹Meyers, *e-Sword*, Colossians 1:27.

¹⁴²1 Corinthians 6:19.

¹⁴³Ezekiel 36:25-27.

will, intellect, or the center of everything that is considered one's soul.¹⁴⁴ Stony hearts are removed and replaced with new God-responsive hearts. Paul's incarnation statement in Colossians resonates with Ezekiel's. In this prophecy alone God addresses how he will deal with the unregenerate spirit of humans, their sin-saturated soul, and their wandering body. God recreates, renovates, and redirects. This prophecy presents the holistic redemption offered through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Christ as Life

The last verse in Ezekiel's prophecy claims God will send his Spirit to dwell within and "cause" godly activity. The verb cause here literally means "to do or make in the broadest sense or application, bring forth".¹⁴⁵ As those in Christ and bearing Christ within, Christians live in and through Christ.¹⁴⁶ In this new life, the Spirit of the living God serves as their advocate, counselor, teacher, and source of strength.¹⁴⁷ A boundless internal source has been made available. George Maloney asserts, "We Christians are raised to a new life by possessing a new principle of activity, Christ himself."¹⁴⁸ The *Logos* himself, the flow, has become the believer's way of life. Sacred flow sets followers free from legalism.

¹⁴⁴Meyers, *e-Sword*, Ezekiel 36:27.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Philippians 4:13.

¹⁴⁷John 14:26, John 15:26.

¹⁴⁸George Maloney, *The Mystery of Christ in You: The Mystical Vision of Saint Paul* (New York: Alba House, 1998), 31.

The Christ follower is to be led by the Spirit of the living Jesus not burdened under the Law.¹⁴⁹ The law cannot provide life, but the Spirit by nature is a life-giver.¹⁵⁰ When believers choose to live under the Law rather than being guided by the Spirit sacred flow fades. Focus upon keeping religious rules (legalism) serves as a significant hindrance preventing many Christians from experiencing their grace-given union and sacred flow.¹⁵¹ These rules may come from God, others, or themselves. In reality, believers have been made to die to union with the law so that they might experience union with Jesus and the grace therein.¹⁵² They are free to flow wholly with the indwelling Spirit of God. This freedom is freedom from all things with one exception – Christ himself.¹⁵³ He is the inner principle of life. He is the life.

The New Covenant established in the blood of Christ purchased a new way of life for those who would follow Jesus.¹⁵⁴ As stated above, God leads these followers intimately and internally. Jeremiah prophesies of this long before it comes into effect.

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹Galatians 2:19-3:28, 5:1-26, John 1:17.

¹⁵⁰2 Corinthians 3:6.

¹⁵¹1 Corinthians 15:56.

¹⁵²Romans 7:4, 6.

¹⁵³Jouette M. Bassler, J., ed. *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, Pauline Theology. Vol. 1. (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 2002), 157. See also 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23.

¹⁵⁴Ezekiel 36:25-27. Jeremiah 31:31-34. Also, Hebrews 7-10. Jesus established a new better covenant and a new law. He did so as an eternal, perfect High Priest and eternal perfect sacrifice.

The position or location of the law of God has changed for those who belong to God through Christ. The law now resides on/in their heart.¹⁵⁶ The indwelling Spirit granted to believers beginning at Pentecost guides them into the truth.¹⁵⁷ The Spirit assumes the teaching tenure Jesus held with his disciples.¹⁵⁸ The need for an external standard has expired for those who recognize Jesus as their source.¹⁵⁹ The law of love remains encapsulating the whole law. Paul writes, “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹⁶⁰ Paul’s frustration with the Galatians concerned their turning from a life under grace in the Spirit back to law. They forsook their freedom and grace-guidance for a law-keeping lifestyle.¹⁶¹ He reminds them that the only way to grow in the life of faith is to live freely according to the Spirit, flow. Paul asserts that the only way to fend off the sinful desire of the flesh is to walk by the Spirit, not strain under the law.¹⁶² Spirit-walking leads to faith working itself out through love.¹⁶³

But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these

¹⁵⁵Jeremiah 31:33-34.

¹⁵⁶Jeremiah 31:31-34.

¹⁵⁷John 14:26, John 15:26.

¹⁵⁸J.C. Thomas, *The Spirit of the New Testament* (Scholeksterstraat, Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005), 168.

¹⁵⁹1 John 2:27.

¹⁶⁰Galatians 5:14.

¹⁶¹Galatians 3:3.

¹⁶²Galatians 5:16.

¹⁶³Galatians 5:6.

are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.¹⁶⁴

Most poignantly, Paul writes that Christ followers have been given life by the Spirit and they are to follow the rhythm of that Spirit in every area of their lives.¹⁶⁵ The word picture in the Greek relates to soldiers rhythmically marching.¹⁶⁶ Believers are meant to get into the rhythm and flow of the Spirit in every facet of their daily lives. God crucified his followers in Christ and raised them into rhythm with Him.¹⁶⁷ The sure way to failure in the spiritual life is self-effort beyond cooperation with the Spirit. Watchman Nee points to this when he asserts that, “Man’s failure does not have to do with weakness, but his inability to allow God to empower him.”¹⁶⁸

Miroslav Volf affirms the believer’s role of celebrating God’s indwelling and doing,

Because God has made us to reflect God’s own triune being, our human tasks are not first of all to do as God does – and certainly not to make ourselves as God is – but to let ourselves be indwelt by God and to celebrate and proclaim what God has done, is doing, and will do.¹⁶⁹

The completed work of Jesus and humanity’s immersion into it provides the proper foundation for Christian spirituality to be understood through the framework of flow. The Christian is set up to draw from the indwelling presence of Christ, being led into and then from the sacred flow of the Father.

¹⁶⁴Galatians 5:16-18.

¹⁶⁵Galatians 5:25.

¹⁶⁶Meyers, *e-Sword*, Galatians 5:25.

¹⁶⁷Romans 6:3-11.

¹⁶⁸Watchman Nee, *Secrets to Spiritual Power*, S. Kulp ed. (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1988), 100.

¹⁶⁹Volf, and Welker, *God's Life in the Trinity*, 6.

Elements and Characteristic Effects

As with Jesus, the elements of flow integrate smoothly with his followers. With union realized and Jesus understood as the principle of life, the believer is prepared to live and move and flow freely with God. The believer may deeply concentrate upon the person of Christ in her as her source. Deep concentration also means one recollects the God-consciousness that easily gets lost in distraction or dismay. Turning from distraction or dismay to God sparks renewal and rhythm. Underhill asserts that by simplification, removal of distraction, and turning one's consciousness inward she can unite her rhythm with the rhythm of God.¹⁷⁰

The clear goal of the Christian is the will of the Father. The will of God for his followers is love – to receive his love as well as love him, one's self and others.¹⁷¹ Teresa of Avila remarks that the soul is to be consumed and occupied with love.¹⁷² This is the unifying purpose or goal that makes sacred flow possible as a way of life. Attaining the goal manifests itself in innumerable ways. The Spirit directs how, when, where, and whom to love in each moment. God, in his creativity, guides and empowers the Christian through his uniqueness to love authentically in every situation.

Immediate and unambiguous feedback comes from the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit provides feedback by way of interpretation, inspiration, counsel, comfort etc.¹⁷³ Stated earlier in the thesis, Csikszentmihalyi found in his flow studies that

¹⁷⁰Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 27, 28.

¹⁷¹Luke 10:27.

¹⁷²Judy, *Teresa of Avila*, 72.

¹⁷³John 14:26, John 15:26.

artists must be intrinsically regulated when it comes to goals and feedback. To flow, their intuition must guide them. Underhill writes, “The mystics are artists and the stuff in which they work is most often human life.”¹⁷⁴ Ruusbroec wrote about God’s inner feedback and flow and humanity’s relationship with it. He remarks, “God is more inwards to us than we are to ourselves, and His inward impulse, or working, is nearer and more inner to us than our own work. And therefore God works in us from within outwards.”¹⁷⁵ The Holy Spirit supplies feedback as the Christ follower traverses life absorbed in harmony with God.

The challenge-skills balance element of flow is set by the God and the follower himself. God, the Flowmaker, creates regular opportunity for sacred flow in the life of his followers. God creates or allows circumstances to occur that tax the faith-skills or depend-ability of the believer. Periods of pain, suffering, or persecution take people to their limits necessitating miraculous flow-faith in order to deal with each moment. During these intense faith challenges one learns to allow God to fully flow in and through them. In doing so, some of their most profound experiences with God occur in the midst of their most desperate situations.

In addition to God-arranged circumstances, Christians, being led by the Spirit, engage in many self-induced challenges. Self-induced challenges provide autonomy and opportunity for one to appropriate Christ’s life. This may involve complex risk and challenge like moving one’s family to foreign country to serve others or a smaller challenge like losing fifteen pounds. Whether situational or self-induced, complex or

¹⁷⁴Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 84.

¹⁷⁵Paul Verdeyen, *Ruusbroec and His Mysticism* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 162.

simple, challenges test one's faith in God's strength. Challenges allow Christ followers to grow as they flow and flow as they grow. The Father is committed to love and conform everyone to the image of his Son.

The autotelic approach simply means the Christian is to be present to the present just as Jesus lived. Henri Nouwen translates the autotelic approach as living in the "here and now."¹⁷⁶ One pays attention to each moment attentively looking to experience God and what he would have her say, do, etc. Christian mystics speak to the importance of slowing, stopping, and experiencing the presence of God in each moment.¹⁷⁷ Saturate one's self with the moment. God's grace is for here and now. Speaking of this Underhill declares, "To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible to man."¹⁷⁸ God leads his followers to an autotelic personality by which they treasure every moment and live it mindfully.¹⁷⁹

Flow's characteristic fruits also have parallels in the context of sacred flow. When Christians deeply concentrate upon God and give themselves fully to his love, they make way for sacred flow and its resultant fruit. These cannot be manufactured. They simply happen with varying frequency and intensity as one experiences the sacred flow of God. When intense sacred flow occurs Christians are conscious of their unity and

¹⁷⁶Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 19.

¹⁷⁷For an example see Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 86.

¹⁷⁸Underhill, *Mysticism*, 447.

¹⁷⁹Paul exhorts believers to rejoice always (Philippians 4:4), pray without ceasing (1Thessalonians 5:17) and give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). To carry out any of these ideals with any consistency one must be mindful in each moment. Additionally, Jesus models a life in which he is dependent upon the Father even what words to say and how to say them (John 12:49, 50). This is made possible by being mindful of God in each moment.

interrelatedness with God and everything else. Their time in flow is valid and accepted for what it is and they are naturally grateful to God for it. While flowing, they catch a glimpse of their authentic self in Christ. Their awareness of God and activity merge and they work in unison with him. They move intuitively and in harmony with God. Any selfish sense of self-consciousness or fear dissolves. An overarching sense that God is in control becomes reality. Life seems to slow and an inner stillness exudes. In this stillness believers become cognizant of receiving love from God and offering it to others. Rivers of living water flow through allowing love to happen spontaneously and effortlessly. The project will expound each of these characteristics integrating them with Scripture.

Postures and Practices

The project will present postures and practices meant to facilitate the awareness and growth of one's inner life.¹⁸⁰ Holistic awareness, mind-setting and rhythmic engagement are soul postures that fuse theology and practice, Christianity and flow. They are biblical and relatable to sacred flow. The postures mean to create and maintain a fertile soul conducive to sacred flow. Posture in this sense means the soul's disposition, attitude, or approach to life. Spiritual practices or disciplines are those activities intentionally engaged throughout Christian history to enliven or enhance one's life with God. These spiritual practices are not meant to be employed legalistically but according to the direction and enablement of the Spirit. The postures and practices intend to bring sacred flow into everyday life. The Christian's environment becomes primed for flow as

¹⁸⁰Csikszentmihalyi determined from his research that the management and development of the inner life, particularly the consciousness leads to genuine happiness, enjoyment. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 6.

the postures lead to the practices and the practices lead back to the postures. Both the postures and the practices keep the believer focused on the elements of sacred flow.

Holistic awareness entails waking up and paying attention. Holistic awareness is “hyperawareness.”¹⁸¹ In the words of Brother Lawrence, it is a turning and keeping of the “soul’s eyes” upon God.¹⁸² Being aware means proactively being open, vulnerable and teachable. Frank Laubach expresses this in his desire to live all of his waking moments “in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, ‘What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done in this minute?’”¹⁸³ Holistic awareness both prepares and maintains one’s ability to receive and respond to the Holy Spirit moment by moment.

Mind-setting allows one to more easily sift all of the information collected as one is holistically aware. Focus is fundamental for sacred flow. To effectively speak of setting the mind requires definition. The verb *set* in this context means to, “direct or settle resolutely.”¹⁸⁴ One directs the mind to settle on a particular thought or thoughts. The term *mind* has numerous definitions and contexts. In the context of this project and specifically for the spiritual postures the term *mind* will mean, “The totality of conscious (and unconscious) mental processes and activities.”¹⁸⁵ The posture means to settle the conscious mind while the unconscious mind is subject primarily to the Holy Spirit’s

¹⁸¹Anthony Campolo and Mary Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action; Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 6.

¹⁸²Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 69.

¹⁸³Frank Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007), 4.

¹⁸⁴Set, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/set> (accessed April 16, 2008).

¹⁸⁵Mind, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mind> (accessed April 16, 2008).

setting. Becoming holistically aware is sure to bring a flood of new thoughts. Mind-setting moves one toward a sense of order in the consciousness. Speaking to the significance of mind-setting, Csikszentmihalyi writes, “Because optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in the consciousness moment by moment, each person has to achieve it on the basis of his own individual efforts and creativity.”¹⁸⁶ Subject to and empowered by the Holy Spirit, one sifts and directs his consciousness, reigning thoughts and thought patterns, turning them over to God.¹⁸⁷

The clear proactive goal of Christian spirituality, love, serves as the focal point for mind-setting. To set one’s mind on love is to set it on God and vice versa.¹⁸⁸ Within the context of love, the mind can be set on a variety of thoughts. Paul writes, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”¹⁸⁹ The Spirit-wind directs the mind in many directions within the context of God’s love.¹⁹⁰

Culture’s rhythms have influenced each person’s mental groove or thought patterns. Christian spirituality calls Christ followers to the renewing of the minds, or in the context of rhythm and flow, the transformation of one’s mental rhythms.¹⁹¹ This transformation of the mind serves as part of setting the stage for sacred flow. Paul

¹⁸⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 5.

¹⁸⁷2 Corinthians 10:5.

¹⁸⁸1 John 4:16.

¹⁸⁹Philippians 4:8.

¹⁹⁰1 Corinthians 2:16.

¹⁹¹Romans 12:2.

stresses, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”¹⁹² God does the transforming as one opens, focuses, and cooperates. Most certainly, setting the mind on God takes practice, and the Holy Spirit is ever-present to guide and empower this training. The resultant activism born of holistic awareness and mind-setting is to love God and others as one’s self moment by moment with everything one has to offer. Hyperaware and focused love finds healthy expression in the oscillating flow of the Holy Spirit.

Rhythmic engagement consists of the Christian remaining in God’s rhythm as he moves her toward and away from activities, people, and places. Undoubtedly, this is the only way to “make something happen” in one’s life.¹⁹³ Remaining or abiding in him leads to a flow-through of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.¹⁹⁴

Jesus exemplified this rhythm illustrating to humanity true humanness. Luke writes, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”¹⁹⁵ Though it is rarely perceived, Jesus’ life and ministry was rhythmic. His relationships had rhythm. He was guided by the rhythm of the Father. With regularity he ministered among the crowds, he walked with his friends, he attended parties, he visited with individuals, and he pulled away into solitude. In all of his activity Jesus never hurried. He rhythmically engaged in

¹⁹²Ibid.

¹⁹³John 15:5.

¹⁹⁴Galatians 5:24.

¹⁹⁵Luke 5:16.

activity and rest, labor and leisure – all of which were a significant part of his ministry.

He attended these occasions rhythmically rather than religiously.

Rhythmic engagement nurtures flow. Some level of sacred flow is continuously experienced within rhythmic engagement as long as one is fully absorbed in whatever he is doing. As stated earlier, the ebb and flow of sacred flow is rhythm and flow. Though one may not be absorbed in intense activity he may remain in the flow of the Holy Spirit. These plateau-experiences as Maslow calls them may be low or high plateaus, creating a range of rhythm.¹⁹⁶ Rhythmic engagement grants one the freedom to experience sacred flow anywhere doing anything.

The spiritual postures can be summarized in three words: awaken, focus, and engage. Holistic awareness, mind-setting, and rhythmic engagement uniquely and tangibly express Christian spirituality as sacred flow. Holistic awareness promotes deep concentration and the autotelic approach while opening one to goals and feedback. Setting the mind leads and maintains one's concentration, deep focus on the goal, feedback, and autotelic approach. Rhythmic engagement allows one to freely and restfully approach the love goal in various contexts while remaining deeply concentrated. Christian spirituality, via these postures, proves to be fully compatible with flow confirming sacred flow as a holistic, flowing Christian spirituality.

This project will consider several spiritual practices that can be integrated rhythmically into sacred flow spirituality. Spiritual practices embody and enhance sacred flow. Spiritual practices are more often called disciplines. The term *discipline* refers to

¹⁹⁶Hakan Thorsen, *Peak-Experience, Religion, and Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into some Main Themes in the Writings of Abraham H. Maslow* (Stockholm, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1983), 88, 89.

training. In the context of sacred flow, the practices are training in the form of specific flow facilitating rhythms. They might be referred to as cross-rhythms – training in the way of the cross. *Cross* here refers to the whole gospel, the good news of Jesus and his work on humanity's behalf. Cross-rhythms then assist Christians in experiencing the gospel.

These practices are meant to be engaged rhythmically being gracefully led by the Holy Spirit. Graceful rhythm does not however limit difficulty. Constant potential for distraction as one's life occurs in the midst of a frenetic culture makes engaging cross-rhythms inconvenient. The practices considered in the project are prayer, study, worship, simplicity, journaling, fasting, community, celebration, Sabbath, and giving. The Spiritual postures and practices provide scaffolding or a trellis for followers to work their salvation into their daily lives.¹⁹⁷ The postures hoist and set one's sails while the practices trim the sails, fine-tuning them to harness as much of the Spirit's wind as possible. The project will expound each practice and its relation to sacred flow as well as provide insight regarding their integration into daily life.

In this section the thesis was supported by laying out the foundation of sacred flow. It began by defining flow along with its elements and characteristics. Next, the section established that Jesus himself is flow and lived a lifestyle modeling sacred flow. He flowed with the Father and his flow lifestyle served as a model for his followers. The believer's mutual indwelling and union with Christ was illuminated as was the necessity of re-orienting mysticism and functioning under grace rather than law. The section integrated the mutual indwelling with the flow elements and characteristics displaying

¹⁹⁷Philippians 2:12, 13. The spiritual practices serve as instruments aiding believers in working out their salvation.

sacred flow as a reality for Christ's followers. Lastly, the section introduced postures and practices that fuse flow and Christian spirituality. Sacred flow awakens, focuses, and leads the Christian to rhythmically engage.

Sacred flow resolves the ministry problem by re-collecting and re-centering the mutual indwelling. It returns the focus of Christian spirituality to the believer living from the mutual indwelling. Christ flows within and through his followers as they trust him. The Christian acknowledges her dwelling place in God and God's dwelling place in her. The flow metaphor provides a meaningful, fluid, fresh perspective for Christian spirituality. The flow framework, its elements and characteristic fruit, effectively communicate Christian spirituality as sacred flow – Spirit-walking.

SECTION FOUR

THE PROJECT

The project substantiating the claim is a book engaging Christians with the purpose of inspiring and transforming their experience with God, themselves, and others by refocusing their faith upon their mutual indwelling with Christ. The project directs readers to flow with God's Spirit in his love, guidance and strength.

The introduction of the book will express the ministry problem and briefly introduce the solution. Much of Christian spirituality is neglecting or misappropriating its mystical core – the mutual indwelling with Christ, and therefore finds itself hindered by legalism. All of Christian living is meant to flow out of one's dynamic union with God – sacred flow. Chapter one shares the spiritual journey of the author, communicating a life that has moved from religion to rhythm. The concept of flow will be introduced in chapter two where its nature, elements and characteristic fruits will be shared. Chapter three reveals Jesus as flow and as a model of a flowing lifestyle. Chapter four integrates Christians into the sacred flow of Jesus. Chapter five considers the elements of flow in conjunction with Christian spirituality in order to build bridges that deepen the integration of the two. Chapter six reflects upon the characteristics or fruit of flow as they relate to Christian living. Chapters seven and eight bring sacred flow into everyday life by introducing spiritual postures and practices that create fertile ground for flow to germinate and bloom.

Essentially, the project provides a metaphor and a framework to teach what it means to walk by the Spirit. A book is a versatile and far-reaching instrument to

accomplish this goal. Typically, books are more widely distributed than curriculum, sermons, and retreat or seminar materials. Moreover, book content can easily be modified to suit other contexts like those just mentioned. Additionally, the book could be uploaded to the Internet. It can anchor a conference for Christians and/or Christian leaders or the chapters could be used as springboards for discussion in small groups. It could be used as a reference for spiritual formation. Lastly, the book could be useful in introducing people to Christian spirituality.

SECTION FIVE

PROJECT SPECIFICATION

Goals

- Communicate Christian spirituality through the metaphor and framework of flow; its nature, elements, and characteristics.
- Catalyze Christians to reorient their spiritual life around their mutual indwelling with Christ, toward a lifestyle of rhythm and flow – sacred flow.
- Produce a quality appealing product that inspires people to consider its content.
- Produce a book that can be converted for use in other contexts like retreats, seminars, counseling, spiritual direction, small groups, etc.

Audience

The audience for the book project will range from those who have somewhat limited knowledge about Christian spirituality to Christian leaders. Many Christians will learn Christian spirituality from a new perspective. Leaders will recommend the book to their communities as a way to rouse and deepen their faith. Since an intriguing far-reaching alternate metaphor for Christian living is presented in the book, the book will encourage burnt out, downtrodden, and disenfranchised Christians as well as others who are inquisitive about Christian spirituality. The primary audience will be those interested in mystical or contemplative Christian spirituality.

Projected Scope

The projected scope of the project will be producing a book that supports the thesis. Since the project is meant for popular consumption it will be 175 – 225 pages in length.

Content

The First Current: Foundation for Sacred Flow.

- Chapter 1: Trepidation: Future Woes or a Faith that Flows?
- Chapter 2: Conversion: From Religion to Rhythm.
- Chapter 3: Absorption: Discovering the Zone.
- Chapter 4: Revelation: Jesus Flows.
- Chapter 5: Incarnation: ...and We Can Too.

The Second Current: Framing Faith in the Flow.

- Chapter 6: Integration: Living in the Elements.

Concentration - Tapping Into the Source.

Goals - Love God. Love Neighbor. Love Self.

Feedback - Embrace the Rhythm Within.

Balance - Living on the Edge.

Presence - Living Here and Now.

- Chapter 7: Produce - Reaping Sacred Flow's Harvest.

The Third Current: Living Faith in the Flow.

- Chapter 8: Postures: Soul Poses That Catalyze Sacred Flow.
- Chapter 9: Practices: Rhythms That Deepen Our Groove.

Budget

Five hundred dollars is the budget for editing and cover design. The project will be readied and sent to various literary agents and publishers.

Standards of Publication

The project will be submitted in MS word loosely according to Turabian standards. The text of the project will further edited and reformatted for publication through whichever publishing house purchases it.

Action Plan

- **6/1-30/2008:** Write written statement
- **7/1-30/2008:** Write written statement
- **8/1-31/2008:** 35 project pages and edit written statement.
- **9/1-30/2008:** 35 project pages. Edit past project writing and written statement.
- **10/1-31/2008:** 35 project pages. Edit past project writing and written statement.
- **11/1-30/2008:** 35 project pages. Edit past project writing and written statement.
- **12/1-20/2008:** 35 project pages. Edit past project writing and written statement.
- **12/21-26/2008:** Christmas vacation
- **12/27-1/10/09:** Final editing.
- **1/11/2008:** Submit penultimate draft of the project and written statement to advisor.

Work Space

I will do most of the work in my study at home. I will use a bedroom for an office. I will occasionally do work externally for a change of setting and to escape family noise. I have access to other work spaces if my home space becomes *too close to home*.

Key Support

Rob Eagar will serve as my outside expert related to style and publishing. Rob is the president of Wildfire Marketing, a marketing company serving Christian publishers, writers, and speakers. He is also a published author who has traversed the country speaking. Rob will also consult on the content of my project. I will send each chapter draft to Rob. He will read it and we will dialogue regularly about his suggestions.

Barry Grecu will serve as my outside expert related to content and style. Barry is the director of Ministry Emmaus. He is a counselor and spiritual director whose passion is contemplative spirituality. As with Rob, I will send each chapter draft to Barry. He will read it and we will dialogue regularly about his suggestions.

Gary Franklin will serve as my encourager. Gary is the lead elder/teaching pastor at the church I attend. He is also staff with a cross cultural mentoring organization called MentorLink. He will read everything but primarily serve as an encourager. I currently meet with Gary every two weeks. I will continue this practice.

John Rivenbark will serve as my final editor for grammar and punctuation.

John holds a Master's degree in Religious Studies from Georgia State University.

Back Up Plan

In the completion plan above I started from the evaluation draft deadline and moved backward affording as much time as possible. Also, I left a cushion at the end. This seemed more strategic than creating two plans. If I finish writing a chapter early I will move forward expediently rather than stopping. If I am more than three chapters behind on November 30, 2008 I will take the next train to graduation.

SECTION SIX

POSTSCRIPT

Summary

Sacred flow, the topic chosen for my Track 02 dissertation, has been percolating within me since late 1999. Over the years I latently read while collecting related ideas and experiences. I hoped that I would someday be able to adequately develop and express the sacred flow concept in a tangible form. George Fox provided me that opportunity. Being involved with so many sound creative thinkers pushed me and shaped the topic in significant ways. The program enabled me to parse the topic into semesters that in turn allowed me to sufficiently study components that would eventually give the dissertation considerable depth and texture. As the program began I felt excited but overwhelmed with the breadth and depth I needed to cover. As I continued, the topic was honed, and I was able to prioritize my study. I enjoyed the study so much that I had to bridle my passion in order to stay on task. Oftentimes I felt the compulsion to study too deeply into non-essential areas and thus waste invaluable time. Eventually, this scatteredness settled as I continued, and by the time I needed to craft the final dissertation I had a solid sense of what needed to be included and excluded.

Overall, I am genuinely satisfied with the execution of the dissertation. I believe the essential strengths of sacred flow were communicated adequately. The sacred flow concept is holistic; engaging spirit, soul, and body in intimate connection with God. Sacred flow is incarnational and missional. It honors God's incarnation in us and ours in this world. God's incarnation flows within us organically moving us to participate in his

mission. The sacred flow concept balances mysticism and pragmatism, theology and practice, and orthodoxy and paradox. It connects the ancient mystery of Christianity, Christ in you, with flow, a future-oriented psychological concept.

Efficacy of the Chosen Approach

As I mentioned, the sheer amount of information available for study surrounding my topic was overwhelming. Christian spirituality and positive psychology are essentially bottomless pits for exploration. Integrating Christian spirituality with positive psychology affords a horizon-less landscape of research opportunity. Therefore, I attempted to shape my study of these two fields tightly around the ministry problem and the thesis: respectively, legalism related to neglect or misappropriation of the believer's mutual indwelling as opposed to an awakened, focused, engaged Christian spirituality that flows from the believer's mutual indwelling. I believe the ministry problem reflects the state of Christian spirituality globally. Additionally, I believe my thesis offers a unique approach to transform Christian spirituality cross-culturally. Identifying the problem and the thesis allowed me to establish a reasoned, credible approach.

I broke the semester study into the following topics; flow, New Testament Christian theology, Christian mysticism, and spiritual practice. Were I to do the research again, I would spend more time in the study of positive psychology beyond the flow concept as well as investing more time in Christian theology. It's not that either of these areas necessarily lacks crucial or invaluable information in the dissertation, but I am convinced that prolonged study into the depths of these fields would greater refine my integration of Christian spirituality and flow. The areas of Christian mysticism and

spiritual practice were vital but in the context of the completed dissertation, could have been combined and considered in a single semester.

Gains

The considerable gain of the dissertation is the successful integration of Christian spirituality and flow. Thus far, the argumentation proved rational and reasonable to me, my unofficial readers, my faculty advisor, and my second reader. Ultimately, “success” lies in the ability of sacred flow to influence people toward deeper experienced intimacy with God.

I have gained valuable friendships. When I was debating applying for the degree, my father-in-law, a PhD in Linguistics, said that it would be worth it simply for the friendships that will be forged. He was correct. I now have many new friends, creative colleague-companions alongside me as I continue my journey.

Lessons Learned

Completing the dissertation taught me that refining one’s research topic is crucial. I am convinced this idea proves equally valid outside of academia. Good research requires continually peeling away outside layers to get to the solid center of the problem and the solution/thesis. Related, good researchers must retain an open-focus in order to complete a successful project. We must be open for information from inside and outside of our field to blindside us. Unexpected material may seamlessly integrate with and support our topic, therefore being open is essential. Conversely, focus leads our research to the required depth and onward to completion.

This process has taught me to better trust my intuition. In the midst of researching, I overcame the anxiety of drowning in an ocean of information by coming to enjoy deep-water swimming. As I freely swam around, I found what I needed to build my case. This didn't release me from the rational currents of research; it actually freed me to truly discover them and their essential tributaries.

Suggestions for Further Research

As I noted earlier, more research can be done to integrate into sacred flow broader concepts outside of flow but inside of positive or applied psychology. Specifically, the elements of flow could be used to guide more expansive study. What does the rest of positive psychology offer with regard to concentration, goal-setting, feedback, challenge, and intrinsic motivation? This would lead to a broader evaluation of the fruits of flow and their connection with Christianity. With regard to further theological research, I am convinced that a closer consideration of God's story throughout human history would reveal more integrative possibilities for sacred flow.

Potential Avenues of Pursuit

Early on I sensed that beyond general spiritual formation, the sacred flow concept could be used within counseling, performance coaching, leadership training, and parenting. I have already begun using the language of sacred flow in informal and formal counseling sessions. More work could be done to integrate sacred flow concepts within a Christian counseling framework. Flow is already used in performance coaching. This practice could be broadened to encompass a Christian spiritual element. Sacred flow could have powerful implications within leadership training. Put simply, we could train

leaders to live and lead via sacred flow. Lastly, sacred flow may inspire and transform our parenting. How do we flow as we parent? How do we facilitate our kids into sacred flow? These questions and others like them offer intriguing opportunities.

Given these avenues I am certain the dissertation will continue to be a launching pad into other nooks and crannies of study and implementation. I have a sense that this is only the beginning for this integration. I hope the project portion of the dissertation will give sacred flow voice and thus create more opportunities.

Bibliography

- Badcock, Gary D. *Light of Truth & Fire of Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Christian Meditation*. Translated by Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- _____. *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*. Translated by Brian I. Daley S. J. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Bangley, Bernard, ed. *Radiance: A Spiritual Memoir of Evelyn Underhill*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004.
- Barna, George. *Revolution; Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005.
- Bartlett, Alan. *Humane Christianity; Arguing with the Classic Christian Spiritual Disciplines in the Light of Jesus of Nazareth*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2005.
- Bassler, Jouette, ed. *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*. Vol. 1, Pauline Theology. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.
- Belitz, Charlene, and Meg Lundstrom. *The Power of Flow; Practical Ways to Transform Your Life with Meaningful Coincidence*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998.
- Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Benner, David G. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Bloesch, Donald. *Spirituality Old & New; Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007.
- Blum, Richard. *The Sacred Athlete: On the Mystical Experience and Dionysius, It's Westernworld Fountainhead*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.
- Blythe, Teresa, and Daniel Wolpert. *Meeting God in Virtual Reality; Using Spiritual Practices with Media*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004.
- Bouyer, Louis. *The Christian Mystery; from Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*. Translated by Iltyd Trethowan. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990.

- Brafman, Ori, and Rod A. Beckstrom. *The Starfish and the Spider*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2006.
- Bro, Bernard. *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*. Translated by Anne England Nash. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983.
- _____. *Romans* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Canon Leon Morris. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.
- Burke, Spencer. *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations about God, Community, and Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Busch, Roger J. Vanden. "The Value of Silence in Quaker Spirituality." *Spirituality Today: A Dominican Internet Journal of Spirituality* 37 (1985): 326-335.
- Campbell, James M. *Paul the Mystic*. New York: Andrew Melrose, 1907.
- Campolo, Anthony. *The God of Intimacy and Action; Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Chamberlin, Jamie. "Reaching Flow to Optimize Work and Play." *American Psychological Association Monitor* 29, no. 7 (1998).
- Clark, James Midgley. *The Great German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1949.
- Clarkson, George E. *The Mysticism of William Law*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Clasper, Paul. *Eastern Paths and the Christian Way*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980.
- Clement, Olivier. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*. London, UK: New City, 1995.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *How People Grow; What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Coakley, Sarah, ed. *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Collins, Gary, David G. Myers, David Powlison, and Robert C. Roberts. *Psychology & Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Conti-Entin, Carol. *Improvisation & Spiritual Disciplines; Continuing the Divine-Human Duet*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1989.

- Cooper, Andrew. *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publication, Inc, 1998.
- Coslet, Dorothy Gawne. *Madame Guyon, Child of Another World*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1984.
- Cox, Harvey G. Jr. "Make Way for the Spirit." In *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, 93-100. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Craine, Renate. *Hildegard*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997.
- Creps, Earl. *Off-Road Disciplines; Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990.
- _____. *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993.
- _____. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.
- _____. *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1997.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, Sami Abuhamdeh, and Jeanne Nakamura. "Flow." <http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/Readings%20251/CsikFlow%20copy.pdf>. (accessed May 4, 2008).
- Cullen, Christopher M. *Bonaventure*. Oxford, UK: University Press, 2006.
- Cunningham, Lawrence. *Francis of Assisi*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Das, Andrew. *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001.
- Debold, Elizabeth. "Flow with Soul." <http://www.wie.org/DE/j9/csiksz.asp>. (accessed July 20, 2008).1-9.
- De Caussade, Jean-Pierre. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. New York: Image Books, 1975.
- De Sales, Francis. *On the Love of God*. New York, NY: Image Books, 1963.

- Deen, Edith. *Great Women of the Christian Faith*. 1st ed. New York: Harper, 1959.
- Delio, Ilia. *Simply Bonaventure*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001.
- Dennis, Jay. *The Jesus Habits*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005.
- Dieker, Bernadette, and Jonathan Montaldo, eds. *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart*. In The Fons Vitae Thomas Merton Series. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003.
- Drilling, Peter. *Premodern Faith in a Postmodern Culture*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.
- Dumm, Demetrius. *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001.
- Dunn, James D. G. "Judaism in the Land of Israel in the First Century." In *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner. New York: Koln, 1995.
- _____, ed. *Paul and the Mosaic Law*. Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- _____. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.
- Dupre, Louis. *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981.
- Dupre, Louis, and O.S.B. James A. Wiseman. *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Dupré, Louis K., and James A. Wiseman. *Light from Light : An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.
- Eastman, Brad. *The Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Eckhart, Meister. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence*. London: SPCK, 1981.
- Edman, Raymond V. *They Found the Secret; 20 Transformed Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.
- Edwards, Tilden. *Living in the Presence; Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987.

- Egan, Harvey S.J. *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.
- Elwell, Walter, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984.
- Enomiya-Lasalle, Hugo M. *Zen Meditation for Christians*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974.
- Fanning, Steven. *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*. London, UK: Routledge, 2001.
- Farina, John, ed. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Fee, Gordon. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- _____. *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.
- Feldman, Christina. *The Buddhist Path to Simplicity; Spiritual Practice for Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Metro Books, 2001.
- Fenelon, Francois. *Christian Counsel*. Translated by J.W. Metcalf. New York, NY: Edward Jones, 1810.
- _____. *The Seeking Heart*. Sargent, GA: The Seedsowers, 1962.
- _____. *Let Go*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1973.
- Ferguson, John. *Pelagius; a Historical and Theological Study*. Cambridge, UK: W. Heffer & Sons 1956.
- Finley, James. *Christian Meditation; Experiencing the Presence of God*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.
- Fontana, David. *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*. Oxford, UK: BPS Blackwell, 2003.
- Forman, Robert K. C. *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Foster, Richard. *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life; Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.

- _____. *Celebration of Discipline; the Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- _____. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Fox, George. *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John Nickalls, Cambridge: University Press, 1952.
- _____. *The Power of the Lord Is over All; the Pastoral Letters of George Fox*, ed. Canby Jones. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.
- Francis, Thomas. "Contemplative Prayer." Lecture, weekend retreat at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.
- Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shape of Things to Come*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.
- Frouhlich, Mary, ed. *St. Therese of Lisieux: Essential Writings*. Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Galbreath, Paul Harold. *The Christology of the Gospels and Abraham Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualization*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984.
- Gallwey, Timothy W. *The Inner Game of Tennis*. New York, NY: Random House, 1974.
- _____. *The Inner Game of Work*. New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001.
- Gatta, Julia. *A Pastoral Art: Spiritual Guidance in the English Mystics*. London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987.
- Gemelli, Agostino. *The Message of St. Francis*. Translated by Paul J. Olin. Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963.
- Geoffrion, Timothy. *The Spirit-Led Leader; Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005.
- Gerard. "Contemplative Prayer." Lecture, weekend retreat at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.
- Gilson, Etienne. *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*. Translated by A.H.C. Downs. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990.

- Gonzalez, Justo. *A History of Christian Thought; from Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*. Vol. 2. Rev. ed. A History of Christian Thought Series. Nashville, TN: Abigdon Press, 1987.
- _____. *A History of Christian Thought; from the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*. Vol. 1. Revised Edition. A History of Christian Thought Series. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.
- Gorman, Michael J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Gorsuch, Richard. *Integrating Psychology and Spirituality?* Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.
- Greene, Dana. *Fragments from and Inner Life*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing Company, 1993.
- Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Translated by Catharine P. Roth. Crestwood. New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993.
- Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Griffin, Emilie, ed. *Evelyn Underhill: Essential Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series. Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 2003.
- Griffith-Dickson, Gwen. *Human and Divine: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religious Experience*. London, UK: Duckworth, 2000.
- Gross, Rita, and Terry Muck, eds. *Christians Talk About Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk About Christian Prayer*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2003.
- Gunton, Colin E. *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Guyon, Jeanne. *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. Sargent, GA: SeedSowers, 1975.
- Harpur, James. *Love Burning in the Soul: The Story of the Christian Mystics, from Saint Paul to Thomas Merton*. Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2005.
- Hay, David and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds. "Romans." Vol. 3, *Pauline Theology*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.
- Hengeveld, Nick. "The Bible Gateway." (accessed March 2007).

- Hildegard and Matthew Fox. *Illumination of Hildegard of Bingen*. Sante Fe, NM: Bear And Company, 1985.
- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways; Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Holmen, Tom. *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2001.
- Horsfall, Tony. *Rhythms of Grace: Finding Intimacy with God in a Busy Life*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2004.
- Huston, Paula. *The Holy Way: Practices for a Simple Life*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2003.
- Ignatius. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: St. Ignatius' Profound Precepts of Mystical Theology*. Translated by Anthony Mottola. New York, NY: Image Books, 1989.
- Israel, Martin, and Neil Broadbent. *The Devout Life: William Law's Understanding of Divine Love*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2001.
- Jackson, Susan, A. and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow in Sports: The Keys to Optimal Experiences and Performances*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999.
- Jantzen, Grace. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000.
- Jardine, William, ed. *Shepherd of Hermas; the Gentle Apocalypse*. Redwood City, CA: Proteus Publishing, 1992.
- Jeeves, Malcolm. *Human Nature: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006.
- Johnston, William. *Christian Mysticism Today*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.
- _____. *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.
- _____. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000.
- Jonas, Robert. *Becoming the True Self: Spiritual and Psychological Perspectives for the 21st Century*. <http://www.emptybell.org/articles/Becoming%20the%20True%20Self.pdf> (accessed October 24, 2006).

- Jones, Canby, ed. *The Power of the Lord Is over All*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way; Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Judy, Dwight H. *Embracing God: Praying with Teresa of Avila*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Kang, Kun Ki. "Thomas Merton and Buddhism: A Comparative Study of the Spiritual Thought of Thomas Merton and That of National Teacher Bojo." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1979.
- Kanh, David. "Finding the Flow in Montessori." *M: The Magazine for Montessori Families* (Fall 2006): 20-22.
- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1997.
- Keel, Tim. *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor, and Chaos*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
- Kelley, Anthony J. C.S.S.R , and S.D.B. Francis J. Maloney. *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2003.
- Kennedy, Robert E. *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit; the Place of Zen in Christian Life*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1995.
- Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- _____. *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations..* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondevan, 2007.
- King, Thomas M. *Merton Mystic at the Center of America*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- King, Ursula. *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Editions, 1998.
- _____. *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2001.
- Kurtz, Ernest, and Katherine Ketcham. *The Spirituality of Imperfection; Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992.

- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Laforest, Ann. *Therese of Lisieux: The Way of Love*. Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2000.
- Laubach, Frank. *Letters by a Modern Mystic*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007.
- Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- Lawson, James G. *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *The Gospel According to Saint John*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. ed. Morna D. Hooker. New York, NY: Continuum, 2005.
- Loehr, Jim, and Tony Schwartz. *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks, 2003.
- Lord, Peter. *Hearing God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.
- Macquarrie, John. *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Magill, Kevin J. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?* New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.
- Mair, George. *A Life with Purpose: Reverend Rick Warren, the Most Inspiring Pastor of Our Time*. New York, NY: Berkley Books, 2005.
- Maloney, George. *The Mystery of Christ in You: The Mystical Vision of Saint Paul*. New York: Alba House, 1998.
- _____. *Abiding in the Indwelling Presence*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Marceau, William C. *Optimism in the Works of St. Frances De Sales*. Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.
- Maslow, Abraham H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50, no. 1 (1943): 370-396.

- _____. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968.
- _____. *The Further Reaches of Human Nature*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976.
- _____. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994.
- May, Gerald, M.D. *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982.
- _____. *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001.
- _____. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006.
- McGinn, Bernard, and Patricia Ferris McGinn. *Early Christian Mystics: The Divine Vision of the Spiritual Masters*. New York, New York: Crossroad, 2003.
- McGrath, Alister. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- _____. *Historical Theology; an Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- McIntosh, Mark. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- McKim, Donald. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- McLaren, Brian. "Emerging Hope and the Mainline; Paths and Obstacles." Lecture, in *Mainline Emergent/s: Conversations in Theology, Hope, and Practice* Decatur, GA, 2007.
- _____. *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- McNeal, Reggie. *Practicing Greatness; 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass, 2006.

- McVey, Steve. *Grace Land*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001.
- _____. *The Godward Gaze*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.
- Merton, Thomas. *The New Man*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, 1961.
- _____. *Mystics and Zen Masters*. New York: Noonday Press, 1967.
- _____. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, 1972.
- _____. *The Ascent to Truth*. New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1981.
- _____. *Thoughts in Solitude*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993.
- _____. *The Inner Experience*, ed. William H. Shannon. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003.
- Mezmer Dr. *The Flow Experience: The Summa Cum Lousy of Bad Psychology*.
<http://flowstate.homestead.com/files/zflowlousy.htm> (accessed 3/20/2008 2008).
- Michael, Fr. "Lectio Divina." Lecture, weekend retreat at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.
- Milavec, Aaron. *The Didache; Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*.
 Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- Miller, Paul Allen. *Postmodern Spiritual Practices; the Construction of the Subject and the Reception of Plato in Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2007.
- Mommaers, Paul, and Jan Bragt Bragt. *Mysticism Buddhist and Christian*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1995.
- Moon, Gary W. and David G. Benner, eds. *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls; a Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Morris, Leon. *Jesus Is the Christ; Studies in the Theology of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.
- Mulry, Ray. *In the Zone: Making Winning Moments Your Way of Life*. Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers, 1995.
- Murphy, Michael. *Golf in the Kingdom*. New York, NY: Arkana Books, 1992.

- _____. *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sports*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995.
- Murphy, Shane. *The Achievement Zone: An 8 Step Guide to Peak Performance in All Arenas of Life*. New York: Berkley Books, 1996.
- Murray, Andrew. *Absolute Surrender*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981.
- _____. *Humility*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- _____. *Experiencing the Holy Spirit*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985.
- Murray, Andrew. *Abiding in Christ*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1997.
- Myers, David G. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Nee, Watchman. *The Release of the Spirit*. Indianapolis, IN: Sure Foundation Publishers, 1965.
- _____. *Christ the Sum of All Spiritual Things*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1973.
- _____. *The Spiritual Man*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1977.
- _____. *Grace for Grace*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1983.
- _____. *The Life That Wins*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1986.
- _____. *Secrets to Spiritual Power*, ed. Sentinel Kulp. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1988.
- Newman, Barclay, and Eugene A. Nida. *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981.
- _____. *The Way of the Heart*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981.
- _____. *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.

- _____. *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1999.
- _____. *Life of the Beloved*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000.
- _____. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. ed. Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Oord, Thomas Jay, and Michael E. Lodahl. *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005.
- Palmer, Jim. *Wide Open Spaces; Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Palmer, G.E.H., Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds. *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Vol. 2. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1984.
- Paroschi, Wilson. *Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:18)*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Peterson, Michael, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger. *Philosophy of Religion*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Pond, Kathleen. *The Spirit of the Spanish Mystics; an Anthology of Spanish Religious Prose from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century*. London, UK: Burns & Oates, 1958.
- Price, Charles. *Christ in You: How to Find Renewed Spiritual Power*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 1995.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Rabb, Theodore K. *The Last Days of the Renaissance and the March to Modernity*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.
- Ravizza, Ken. "Qualities of the Peak Experience in Sport." In *Psychological Foundations of Sport*, ed. J.M Silva and R.S. Weinberg, 452-462. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1984.
- Ravizza, Ken, and Tom Hanson. *Heads-up Baseball*. Chicago, IL: Masters Press, 1995.
- Rees, B. R. *Pelagius; a Reluctant Heretic*. Wolfeboro, NH: The Boydell Press, 1988.

- Reisinger, Ernest C. *The Law and the Gospel*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishers, 1997.
- Richmond, Lewis. *A Whole Life's Work; Living Passionately, Growing Spiritually*. New York, NY: Atria Books, 2004.
- Rieff, Philip. *Charisma; the Gift of Grace, and How It Has Been Taken Away from Us*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2007.
- Rhodes, Tricia McCary. *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Rogers, Joyce. "Mysticism as a Way of Spirituality." *Spirituality Today* Vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 1988). 100-108.
- Rollins, Peter. *How (Not) to Speak of God*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006.
- Rowe, William. *Philosophy of Religion*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001.
- de Sales, Frances. *On the Love of God*. Translated by John K. Ryan. Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963.
- Sandford, John. *Mystical Christianity: A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Restless Souls; the Making of American Spirituality from Emerson to Oprah*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1931.
- Sebba, Anne. *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997.
- Shults, LeRon F. and Steven J. Sandage. *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Simpkins, C. Alexander, and Annellen Simpkins. *Simple Zen; a Guide to Living Moment by Moment*. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing, 1999.
- Smith, Huston. *The Soul of Christianity; Restoring the Great Tradition*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.
- Smith, Hannah Whitall. *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1952.

- Smith, Jr., Chuck. *The End of the World...As We Know It*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001.
- Smith, John Holland. *Francis of Assisi*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972.
- Smith, Karen E. *Christian Spirituality*. London, UK: SMC Press, 2006.
- Smith, Malcolm. *The Power of the Blood Covenant: Uncover the Secret Strength in God's Eternal Oath*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2002.
- Smyth, Bernard T. *Paul: Mystic and Missionary*. New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1980.
- St. Cyres, Stafford Harry Northecote. *Francios De Fenelon*. Port Washington, NY Kennikat Press, 1970.
- Stone, Dan, and Greg Smith. *The Rest of the Gospel: When the Partial Gospel Has Worn You Out*. Dallas, TX: One Press, 2000.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. 1st ed. World Perspectives. New York: Harper, 1957.
- Sweet, Leonard. *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic*. Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1994.
- _____. *Postmodern Pilgrims; First Century Passion for the 21st Century World*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holdman Publishers, 2000.
- _____. "Dreams Gone Wild; a New Kind of Human, Pure Human." Unpublished article. Orkas Island, OR, 2007.
- _____. *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Do Without*. Colorado Springs, CO David C. Cook, 2008.
- Tamburello, Dennis. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.
- Teahan, John Frances. "The Mysticism of Thomas Merton: Contemplation as a Way of Life." Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1976.
- The Rutba House, ed. *School(S) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishers, 2005.
- Thomas, John Christopher. *The Spirit of the New Testament*. Scholeksterstraat, Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005.

- Thomas, Major Ian. *The Saving Life of Christ and The Mystery of Godliness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.
- Thorsen, Hakan. *Peak-Experience, Religion, and Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into Some Main Themes in the Writings of Abraham H. Maslow*. Stockholm, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1983.
- Thrangu, Rinpoche. *Everyday Consciousness and Buddha-Awakening*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2002.
- Thurston, Bonnie B., ed. *Merton & Buddhism; Wisdom, Emptiness, & Everyday Mind*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007.
- Tillich, Paul. *A History of Christian Thought*, ed. Carl Braaten. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968.
- Tobin, Frank. *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.
- Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God; One Being Three Persons*. Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Pursuit of God*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993.
- Trigg, John Wilson. *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1912.
- _____. *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins*. New York, NY: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD., 1913.
- _____. *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*. Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986.
- Verdeyen, Paul. *Ruusbroec and His Mysticism*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994.
- Volf, Miroslav and Michael Welker, eds. *God's Life in the Trinity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Ward, Karen. "New Monasticism." Lecture, Mainline Emergent/s: Conversations in Theology, Hope, and Practice Decatur, GA, 2007.

- Warren, Rick. *God's Power to Change Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- _____. *The Purpose Driven Life; What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Way, Robert E. *The Wisdom of the English Mystics*. London, UK: Sheldon Press, 1978.
- Wheatley, Margaret J. *Finding Our Way; Leadership for an Uncertain Time*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.
- Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1991.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines; Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.
- Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan. *New Monasticism; What It Has to Say to Today's Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Wiseman, James A. *Spirituality and Mysticism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.
- Wong, Eva *Teachings of the Tao*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1997.
- Wright, Wendy M. *Frances De Sales: Introduction to the Devout Life and Treatise on the Love of God*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993.

GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

SACRED FLOW:
DISCOVERING LIFE IN GOD'S RHYTHM

A TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
ARTHUR T. SPOSARO

ATLANTA, GA
MARCH, 2009

Sacred Flow

Discovering Life in God's Rhythm

Artie Sposaro

For Elizabeth, Lydia, Lincoln, and Elgin

Copyright, Arthur T. Sposaro, 2009

Preface

Before you begin, I feel it imperative that I share with you that I am not writing as a weathered spiritual guru. I don't live in a monastery, cave, desert, castle or anywhere else considered spiritually hip...unless a random small suburb of Atlanta is cool. I am a middle 30s believer, seeker, pilgrim, husband, dad, brother, son, leader, learner, reader, writer, friend, pastor, counselor, coach, etc. I believe I am an everyman of sorts, and normal for the most part (whatever that means). I have lived in the US and abroad. I have followed Jesus inside and outside of the institutional church. I have roamed both academic halls and athletic fields. I have worked with for-profits and non-profits. I have enjoyed time on organization boards and snowboards. I have experienced plenty of highs and lows and walked through them with others. Most significantly, I have spent the past ten years earnestly wrestling with what it means to live in the rhythm and flow of God. I have been intentional about opening my soul's eyes as much as humanly possible to a broader view of Christian spirituality and specifically to what it might mean to wholly trust God and be divinely empowered in each moment. In this book it is not my intention to produce a new spiritual method or system, but to offer a perspective of Christian spirituality that resurrects or simply inspires your faith. I hope this book clearly articulates a message of sacred flow with the Almighty that resonates with you. I hope the content herein reorients, revolutionizes, and catalyzes your way of being – your spirituality, in ways you never dreamed possible....it did mine. Artie

Acknowledgements

This book has been marinating within me for years. Many people have been a part of my life through those years. I would like thank those *many* people who invested in me or simply entered my life as a true friend. I would like to warmly thank those friends I made through Midtown Church and Grace Ministries International in Atlanta. They surrounded me during major spiritual transition and formation. I have a deep appreciation for all you who befriended my family during our five year sojourn to Czech Republic.

Many thanks to Carole Spencer, Chuck Church, John Rivenbark, Ash Zook, Rob Eagar, and Gary Franklin. These friends regularly offered calm counsel, wise direction, and genuine encouragement that proved invaluable. I would not have started, stayed the course, or finished without them. A special thanks to Carole at George Fox Seminary who has guided, edited, and encouraged my writing over the past three years. Thanks also to Len Sweet, Loren Kerns, Chuck Conniry and my classmates at George Fox who impacted me in a meaningful way. Thanks to Roger Balko for his artwork used to produce a book cover, and Nancy Edge for her innovative design work. Thanks to Emory University's Pitts Theology Library and its gracious staff, particularly Myron McGhee. I camped there often and held scores of volumes hostage over the past three years.

Thanks to my mom who, while I was growing up (and even now) would not allow me to use the phrase "I can't" and to my dad whose work ethic rubbed off on me...at least a little bit. Finally, thanks to my wife, Elizabeth, who had to bear my incessant insecurity, rough drafts (and related defensiveness), constant note taking, verbal rambling, absence, etc. Her endless grace and patience allowed this project to happen and significantly shaped it.

I truly appreciate you all

Table of Contents

The First Current: Foundation for Sacred Flow

1: Trepidation – Future Woes or a Faith That Flows?	1
<i>religious stagnancy, why sacred flow?</i>	
2: Conversion – From Religion to Rhythm	15
<i>religion vs. spirituality, losing my religion...and santa christianity flows, christianity converted</i>	
3: Absorption – Discovering the Flow	36
<i>reorienting rhythm and flow, defining flow</i>	
<i>the elements of flow, the fruits of flow</i>	
4: Revelation – Jesus Flows...	59
<i>Jesus is the flow, Jesus flows, prodigal flow</i>	

The Second Current: Framing Faith in the Flow

5: Incarnation – ...and We Can Too	79
<i>becoming pragmystic, embodying the Jesus life,</i>	
<i>the Jesus law; our freedom to flow</i>	
6: Integration – Living in the Elements	103
<i>concentration: tapping into the Source,</i>	
<i>goals: love God, love neighbor, love self,</i>	
<i>feedback: embracing the rhythm within,</i>	
<i>balance: living on the edge,</i>	
<i>presence: living in the here and now,</i>	
<i>holy resonance</i>	
7: Produce – Reaping Sacred Flow's Harvest.	134
<i>unitive consciousness, self-validation,</i>	
<i>uniqueness of identity, total absorption,</i>	
<i>action-awareness merge, inner stillness,</i>	
<i>effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive,</i>	
<i>action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy,</i>	
<i>self-transcendence, time disorientation,</i>	
<i>peak performance</i>	

The Third Current: Living Faith in the Flow

8: Postures – Soul Poses That Catalyze Sacred Flow.	.	.	162
<i>posturing and re-posing,</i> <i>soul poses, holistic awareness, mind-setting,</i> <i>rhythmic engagement</i>			
9: Practices – Rhythms That Deepen Our Groove.	.	.	194
<i>prayer, sacred word, simple prayer, silence, solitude,</i> <i>meditation, contemplation, daily examen, lectio divina,</i> <i>unceasing prayer, study, worship, simplicity, journaling,</i> <i>fasting, community, celebration, sabbath, giving,</i> <i>it's time for us to flow</i>			
Appendix A: Spiritual Practices Bibliography	.	.	222
Bibliography	.	.	226

The First Current

Foundation for Sacred Flow

1

Trepidation

Future Woes or a Faith That Flows?

Open yourself to God without measure. Let His life flow through you like a torrent. Fear nothing on the road you are walking. God will lead you by the hand. Let your love for Him cast out the fear you feel for yourself.
- Francois Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart*

As a kid I loved watching cartoons on Saturday mornings. The *Super Friends* were my favorite by far. You may remember...Superman, Batman, Robin, Aquaman, Wonder Woman, and others taking on evil together using the Hall of Justice as their base. They foiled incessant plots hatched by seedy characters like Bizarro, the Black Manta, Brainiac, Lex Luthor, and the Riddler who formed the Legion of Doom.

I always wanted a superpower or two...and to have Super Friends. I kind of hoped I would grow into it...and find others who had as well. I found it mysterious and cool that every Super Friend was super and unique, offering their superpower for the team's best interest. Every now and then I would attempt to spin a web, telekinetically move a cow in the pasture out back, or jump off of something dangerously high hoping for flight. With my powers concealed I would retain my superficial identity - Artie, chubby, sporty, pimple-faced trumpet player, but beneath the awkward exterior I would be something supernatural and powerful. Not only this, other Super Friends would watch my back. Together we would live out of our deepest identity foiling evil plots and helping

people everywhere. I prayed for this more times than was normal or rational for a kid my age.

Doesn't this describe the nature of authentic Christianity?

These days as I reflect on my *super* obsession, I realize my longing might have been from God. We are in fact indwelt by God himself, the *Super Spirit*, who created us all uniquely *super*...and natural. *He* is our superpower having in Himself every superpower. As partakers of his divine nature we possess God-given abilities to be wielded at the discretion and by the enabling power of his omnipotent Spirit. This same profusely imaginative indelible Spirit creates and sustains everything seen and unseen, eternal and temporal. So, though superficially we may feel ordinary, chubby, awkward, terribly human, or even worthless, we are nothing short of *supernatural*. We are simultaneously super and human expressions of God. In reality, our *Super Friends* are more than friends, they are family - together we create one body. Along with our do-gooder community of Super Friends we live from our innermost super selves as members of a Kingdom of God whose mission is to go about foiling evil and helping people everywhere. It does so by us uniquely brandishing a sacred superpower that no legion, gloom, or doom can overcome – *love*.

Today's Christian spirituality concerns me. My distress surrounds Christian spirituality's bent toward the *natural*...as opposed to the *super*...or better yet, a healthy balance between the two. Our sense of the mysterious *super* is faint. I am disturbed by Christian spirituality's earthliness. Notice, I didn't say *earthiness*. Christian spirituality could use plenty more *earthiness*, grounded authenticity. But earthliness refers to what

Julian of Norwich called *oblivio Dei*, obliviousness of God and his immanent presence and power. Even in our spirituality we ignore God.

For God's sake (and our own)....and with God's help of course, we plot, strategize, try, try again, strain, manage, arrange, succeed, fail, burn out and repeat. We do so individually and corporately and thus our spirituality is stuck in a fruitless paradigm. Like the condemned mythological king **Sisyphus**, we eternally strain pushing a boulder up a steep hill only to watch it roll down so we can perpetually repeat the process. This *Sisyphus syndrome* defines our spiritual lives. Where is your rock today? You should be pushing it...faster. Are you at the top or being run over by the beastly boulder as it rolls back down? Or have you given up pushing for now?

**How sad that millions of human beings
are dead to God's harmonious rhythm,
that they live lives so deprived of this
joyful, childlike abandonment to the
divine source of all life**

**- George A. Maloney
*Abiding in the Indwelling Trinity***

The Sisyphus system has us perpetually running on a spiritual treadmill...getting nowhere. Our soul pours with sweat, hoping the strenuous workout will end before serious injury occurs. Inevitably, we collapse cracking our knee, head, or both. We lie on the floor in pain until we muster the strength to walk, and then run again.

We remain ever limited by our pain tolerance as we continue pushing and running. Conversely, we have the option of living as super-natural children in rhythm with a God who has never sweat. We are meant to enter the graceful paradigm of Jesus, the original Super Friend. His paradigm thrives in the sacred flow of the Father.

religious stagnancy

Renowned Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Chick-sent-me-high-ee) has spent decades attempting to discover what brings people the most enjoyment in life. What leads to optimal experience in our daily lives? Ultimately, his research concluded that the *flow* state or experience is fundamental to happiness, enjoyment, development, and wholeness.¹ Flow is a harmonious experience or state of consciousness in which we become totally absorbed in what we are doing to the point which our mind and body are working together effortlessly.² Typically, to describe flow we use the colloquial expression *the zone*. Most of us have some experience with the zone.

Unfortunately, related to this discovery, Csikszentmihalyi does not hold out much hope for the future of Christianity. The basis of his assessment, found in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, is that the Christian religion does not cultivate flow. He contends that institutional Christian religion embedded with worldly structure leads to disorder and spiritual stagnancy rather than order and flow.³ Archaic legalistic doctrines of the past corrupt a potentially flowing belief system. Given an alternate perception and framing, Christianity could be characterized by dedicated attention, constant discovery, and meaningful goals. Nevertheless, people have and will continue to cling to various forms and levels of fundamentalism as a way to cope with a world or a life that feels meaningless and/or out of control. Specifically Csikszentmihalyi writes,

But it seems clear that an increasing majority are not being helped by traditional religions and belief systems. Many are unable to separate the truth in the old doctrines from the distortions and degradations that time has added, and since

¹Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), 2-8.

²Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports: The Keys to Optimal Experiences and Performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), 5.

³Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 238.

they cannot accept error, they reject the truth as well. Others are so desperate for some order that they cling rigidly to whatever belief happens to be at hand – warts and all – and become fundamentalist Christians, or Muslims, or communists.⁴

Flow, on the other hand, puts us on the path of awareness, focus, engagement, meaning, and ultimately joy. Integrated with Christianity, flow's nature, elements, and effects inform and inspire

a faith of full engagement and graceful rhythm. This book engages decades of cross-cultural

Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.

- Romans 8:5-7, *The Message*

psychological research

findings related to peak-experience in order to establish and expound a Christian spirituality absorbed in and empowered by God's presence that manifests a life in harmonious rhythm with God.

Hope could be found in a faith that flows. Csikszentmihalyi argues that a flowing faith would be a more holistic faith that welcomes and integrates what we know, feel, hope for, and even dread. It would contain a matrix of beliefs that call for, hone, and sustain our attention-energy (devotion) toward meaningful goals thereby providing opportunity for flow.⁵

Another profoundly influential psychologist, Abraham H. Maslow, asked similar fundamental questions and discovered very similar results. Most of us remember Maslow from his work regarding our hierarchy of needs. For example, our need for secure housing trumps our “need” for designer sunglasses. We don't care much about aesthetic

⁴Ibid, 238, 239.

⁵Ibid.

needs when basic needs are not being met.⁶ In Maslow's influential book *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Maslow opens with a question integrative and fundamental to humanity and in our case Christian spirituality. He writes, "How can we encourage free development?"⁷ He sought to understand wholeness, how we become completely healthy – How do I become my authentic self?⁸

Maslow regarded peak-experiences or flow as the pinnacle of human development and experience.⁹ He also believed that religious legalism prohibited people from free development and wellbeing as it limited peak-experiences. About this Maslow writes,

Most people lose or forget the subjectively religious experience, and redefine Religion as a set of habits, behaviors, dogmas, forms, which at the extreme becomes entirely legalistic and bureaucratic, conventional, empty, and in the truest meaning of the word, anti-religious. The mystic experience, the illumination, the great awakening, along with the charismatic seer who started the whole thing, are forgotten, lost, or transformed into the opposites. Organized Religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experienter.¹⁰

Typically, today's Religion superficially embraces the Spirit's role as an empowering presence. This casual embrace by Religion does not constitute or facilitate a faith that flows. Maslow affirms that mystic or subjective religious experience – a more flowing spirituality, is easily attuned with higher levels of human development, rationality, science, and social passion.¹¹

⁶Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50, no. L (1943), 370-396.

⁷Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994), 5.

⁸Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968), 16.

⁹Paul Howard Galbreath, *The Christology of the Gospels and Abraham Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), 65.

¹⁰Maslow refers to big "R" Religion as institutionalized, conventional and organized. Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions*, viii.

¹¹Maslow refers to small "r" religion as subjective, naturalistic, and experiential. Maslow, *Religions*, viii, xiii.

Most of us have some acquaintance with the flow experience. Flow produces pure enjoyment and more often than not peak performance as its by-product. As I said, flow is a pleasant state of consciousness in which we are so absorbed in what we are doing that we feel at one with our activity. You have likely experienced flow at some level through a competition, intense conversation, absorbed at work, or while engaging in a hobby. While flowing, both our sense of self-consciousness and self-effort fade. We float, totally engrossed in our activity.

My friend Chuck told me about flowing while at work painting houses last summer. Chuck is not your typical housepainter. He holds a Ph.D. in English. He told me that when he painted a house while engrossed listening to a good digital book, he hummed through the day in the zone. He explained that he went deeper into this flow, even painting with more skill and velocity when the book had an engaging or challenging plot.

Dogmas and creeds and the closed revelation of a completed canon have replaced the emphasis upon keeping close to the fresh uprisings of the Inner Life.
– Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*

Susan Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi provide a collection of expressions people have used to describe flow; *in the bubble, complete satisfaction, focused, in the zone, total involvement, peaceful, on auto, everything clicks, switched on, ideal, nothing else matters, in the groove, unbeatable, super alive, floating, weightlessness, total control, optimal pace, and tuned in.*¹² Hearing these terms I think of sports network ESPN's commentators, who have been manufacturing descriptions of flow for years. Others have articulated flow as being touched by immortality, mystery and awe...a sensation of detachment and unity with all things at the same time.

¹²Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 12.

Csikszentmihalyi has researched flow for over forty years, having discovered the phenomenon in 1965 while studying creativity in conjunction with his doctoral dissertation in psychology. He studied artists as a way to consider questions regarding creativity and enjoyment. He found that his respondent artists were intrinsically motivated and more often than not they totally lost themselves in their work.¹³ The process of creating was far more important to them than the finished product or what the finished product might glean financially. He termed this state *flow* as this best represented the idea respondents most often associated with the experience.¹⁴

Amazingly, Csikszentmihalyi and Maslow found that men and women alike, vastly diverse in age and culture, reported optimal experiences in the same way despite their activity.¹⁵ Reading and chess nurture flow as well as playing tennis whether you are a Chinese teenage girl or a fifty-five year old Canadian grandfather. They found flow to be a cross-gender, cross-cultural, and cross-activity occurrence....that did not *cross* into mainstream institutional Christianity.

I agree with their assessment regarding Christianity and flow. Christianity seemingly stands stationary and takes pride in its steadfast immovability. It tends, even if unintentionally, to bind people to shame, guilt, self-focus, and results orientation. This form of Christianity hampers creativity and freedom. Its focus is not fine tuning attention and engagement with God and others, but fine tooth combing for wayward doctrine and behaviors. It pushes legislation instead of facilitating cultivation, imagination, and germination.

¹³Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

¹⁴Csikszentmihalyi did sampling studies and scores of interviews that included cross-cultural subjects. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 358.

¹⁵Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 4.

Flow or no flow, Christianity has not exactly lurched forward in the almost twenty years since the *Flow* book's first publishing in 1990. Actually, at least in the United States, organized Christianity faces increasing atrophy. The fundamentalism of which Csikszentmihalyi speaks has been subtly absorbed in much of mainstream Christian spirituality.

Christianity is stuck, stagnant, needing flow – *the Spirit's flow*.

I believe there is hope for a vibrant Christianity in our future. In order to enable such a future, Christian spirituality must regain its flow. It must reorient itself in such a way that it cultivates regular opportunity for its family to experience God's sacred flow. Csikszentmihalyi and Maslow did find small pockets of flow in Christianity. They discovered flow on the margins with mystics and those historically declared saints. These people made experiencing God and serving others a way of life. They meditated, contemplated, and served God with extreme awareness, focus, and engagement. They gave themselves fully to their relationship with God and the service that resulted from this relationship. They would admit that their Source was the indwelling presence of God and that they lived rhythmically with Him.

They lived in God's sacred flow.

Mystics and saints understood the notion of flow not as a human phenomenological psychological state of consciousness, but as a joyful aspect of their focused faith. They would likely theorize (as do I) that God planted this mysterious phenomenon in the human psyche to enhance our relationship with him and everything else. Our hope lies with these mystics on the margins in a spirituality that flows. Hope rests in re-centering the mystery and mysticism found at the heart of Christianity.

You might ask, “What mystery?” or “What mysticism?”

- The mutual indwelling; Christ lives in us and we live in him.

This is ground zero for Christianity, where rooted, authentic spirituality flows from and to. It is both fully mysterious and mystical that you and I have been placed into the Father, God himself, and he has been placed into us via the Son and the Spirit. This is mysticism at its best. We indwell the Flowmaker and he us. We are meant to live in rhythm with God, flowing forth from him and him from us! This *sacred flow* means to consume our lifestyle, becoming our way of being...and doing. It’s certainly not meant for the margins.

Do you feel spiritually stuck? Are you worn out by religion, institution, or dogma but long to authentically experience God? Are you enjoying your life?...with God? Have you lost (or ever found) any sense of rhythm with God, or him flowing in and through you?

This book offers hope through presenting a Christian spirituality characterized by rhythm and flow with God – *sacred flow*. It offers an alternative paradigm characterized by the Spirit – the way of Jesus rather than institution, dogma, values, morals, principles, and standards. All of these latter things are fine, if kept peripheral and in check by the former. The latter are not meant to occupy the center. The empowering presence of God in his fullness; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, takes center stage in a faith that flows.

Sacred flow encompasses a life of restful rhythm and furious flow. Sacred flow reframes our roots. It integrates centuries old Christian spirituality with more recent peak-experience psychological findings. It balances the mystical and the practical, embracing and encouraging both. It’s a spirituality in which the beautiful mystery of God gracefully

working in and through his children regains its rightful place. Sacred flow reconnects Christianity with its ancient past and reframes it for the future.

why sacred flow?

I believe in grace. I acknowledge that the word *grace* is threadbare. It has been over used and thoroughly abused throughout Christianity and humanity's history. Despite any questionable reputation our history or poor theology (as well as regrettable behavior) has given it, grace is the single word that best describes the scandalous extent of God's love for us. It details what God has done and is doing in general and particularly through Jesus. Jesus embodies grace. He is the gift that keeps on giving...unconditionally. Much like neglecting to use most of our brain, we disregard a massive reserve of God at our disposal supplied by grace.

**The triumph of grace enables people
to live their ordinary lives divinely
- Thomas Keating
*Open Mind, Open Heart***

I believe we have not given grace its due in Christian spirituality. We are too busy trying to make things happen *for* ourselves, God, and others – living the Sisyphus life. Also, intolerantly we forfeit receiving and offering grace in order to protect reputations – ours and God's. When we back up and gain perspective, we recognize grace as our only hope, our paradoxical path to reigning in this life...and the way of Jesus.¹⁶ Grace is more than God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus that dealt with our innate wanderlust. Though fantastic and unfathomable in and of itself (and where most of our thinking on grace ends), grace is more. Grace is God's gift *in* us – mysterious Spirit-empowerment beyond our capacity to understand. Christ means to live his divine life uniquely in and through

¹⁶Romans 5:17.

us. Our most needed ability is depend-ability. As we live *responsively* with God, he transforms us toward our true selves from the inside out.

Sacred flow is grace fully embodied and engaged. It is moment by moment awareness and appropriation of God's mystical presence in us. Sacred flow spirituality depends upon God's leading and doing through us as we intimately embrace him. Sacred flow discovers and employs the connection between flow; a seemingly human mystical-practical psychological concept, and Christianity; a divine-human mystical-practical Christ-centered faith. This unique connection provides a fertile landscape for the full blossom of grace.

Sacred flow does more than renovate our spirituality, it revolutionizes it. Tapping into sacred flow is tapping into the mystical way of Jesus, aligning us with his presence and inviting his participation in every aspect of our lives. Our alignment with the Spirit of Christ de-categorizes our life, exposing all things as sacred. We trust God to freely engage and empower us holistically. We recognize his life, love, joy, peace, freedom, etc. as gifts to us. We discover more of God and ourselves as we establish our unique rhythm in him.

Sacred flow awakens a new vision within us. The awareness that comes from this vision shakes us from denial and leads us to respond with deep focus and full engagement. We learn to do whatever we do with a divine focus and a power beyond our own. Diving deep into sacred flow lands us in an intimacy with God we have not yet experienced.

Leonard Sweet, Christian writer and futurist, acknowledges the connection of flow with passion, enjoyment, fulfillment and Christianity. He writes, "The gospel is the

flow experience of a living person.”¹⁷ Flow relates closely with the energy of God in Christ. Sweet writes of Christians being in the rhythmical flow of God. He acknowledges both the power of flow and the consequences of the church without flow when he writes:

The absence of flow structures causes what is called “flow deprivation,” with its attendant consequences of tiredness, sheepishness, decline in creativity, diminished alertness. When the church no longer becomes a flow structure, or has all the “rush” and intensity of a flow of molasses, there are high social and psychological costs that must be paid.¹⁸

In essence, Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi, Sweet....and I call for a Christianity that cultivates flow. Sacred flow grounds Christianity in its ancient past and poises it for an influential future. This book frames Christian Spirituality as a flow-catalyzing spirituality.

Are you living in the flow?

In order to lead you deep into the flow, this book injects Christianity into flow’s framework. Flow provides a distinctive scaffolding to help us understand, experience, and extend God’s fluid grace in our daily lives. The book consists of three parts or currents. The first current, chapters one through four, lays a foundation for a Christian spirituality with rhythm and flow. The second current, chapters five through seven, builds on the foundation integrating the specific elements and the characteristic fruits of flow with incarnational Christian spirituality. The third current, chapters eight and nine, provides practical application by offering soul postures and spiritual practices that cultivate sacred flow. Beginning below, each chapter ends with a few questions or reflections to facilitate processing regarding us *being formed by God’s flow*.

¹⁷Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1994), 81.

¹⁸Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 71.

being formed by God's flow

1. Are you giving credence to the flow of God's Spirit in your life? Where the rubber meets the road, are you living deeply dependent on yourself? Ask God to expose this and begin teaching you what it means to live in way of the Spirit.
2. Does your faith make room for supernatural mystery and mysticism? Invite God to dissolve any discomfort you have with either.
3. Consider the ramifications of grace going beyond unwarranted favor to being the incarnate gospel itself – God's indwelling, empowering presence for everyday life.

2

Conversion

From Religion to Rhythm

If Christianity is to be renewed, this can be brought about only by a return to its root; that means to Revelation. We must place ourselves before this, must put aside all preconceived ideas, all portraits of art, all habitual attitudes, and must open our souls, perceive with our inner ear, behold with our inner eye, word upon word, in Matthew and Mark and Luke, in Paul and John.

- Romano Guardini, *And the Word Dwelt Among Us*

“Do you have a way to get to church tomorrow morning?” This was an expected question from my Dad anytime I wanted to attend a Saturday night sleepover as a kid. I attended church regularly throughout childhood very rarely missing a Sunday. It seemed Sundays came every third day. Rarely did I fight going, especially when pancakes would be offered afterward. I made up countless games to play in the church service to pass the time; count the ceiling planks, be the last to sit down or stand up, count how many people have on a red shirt, draw hotrods or motorcycles on the bulletin, etc. Despite the games and doodling, God still interested me. He was distant but intriguing.

Religion was my “rhythm” for most of my early life.

My childhood church-going took place at the local Catholic Church. Living in the suburbs of the Deep South outside of Atlanta in the late 1970s, early 80s and being Catholic made me atypical...and the evangelistic target of motivated Southern Baptists.

In high school I actually merged my Catholicism with the Baptists. Mainly, I was drawn to the Baptists' plain spoken approach, but it was also due to the influence of genuine friends...and a particular girl of course. I have not met another person whose Sunday schedule shaped up like mine during high school. Simultaneously, I was attending special masses, meetings, and events at the Catholic Church as well as youth events and services at the Baptist church. I

regularly attended Catholic mass at 8:30 am then raced over to the Baptist church to catch the last of the youth

Both Old and New Testaments frequently present faith as a response to a call to a journey – a journey of following and trusting God as he leads us on the adventure he has planned for us...The essence of Christian spirituality is following Christ on a journey of personal transformation.

- David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions*

group meeting and then the morning service. Before I knew it I was giving most of my attention to God, or at least the *stuff* that we crowd around him. I experienced a small burst of grace, life, peace, and freedom. I was on top of it spiritually...for what now seems like thirty seconds.

In college I continued the broadening of my religious horizons as I majored in Religion, sporadically attended a Presbyterian Church, hung out at the Baptist Center, and became fully engaged with the non-denominational campus Christian fellowship. I attended a dorm Bible study, led a separate dorm Bible study, and volunteered at a downtown ministry to the homeless. By my senior year my schedule was completely overrun with religious activity.

After college I accepted an assistant baseball coaching position in neighboring South Carolina and started a master's degree program at an Associate Reformed Presbyterian seminary. While coaching I led a Bible study for the baseball players and

attended the college's Fellowship of Christian Athletes. After a year of coaching I moved back to Atlanta and transferred to a Baptist seminary in order to finish my Master of Divinity degree locally.

You might think with this religious broadness and intensity I would be well rounded and spiritually satisfied. Well rounded maybe, but satisfied no. In the midst my full-on religious sprint, I tired. You are probably tired just reading about it! I began to feel that I couldn't measure up to the expectations, dogmas, standards, morals, etc. that I perceived God held over me or those I laid upon myself. Religion was *killing* me.

On many trips between Atlanta and South Carolina I berated myself and cried, bawling about being a failure in God's eyes and my own. Not only did I believe I was a failure but I began losing hope that Christianity itself would ever satisfy. A particular lyric from the band U2 resonated with me,

*"You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains, carried the cross of my shame, of my shame, you know I believed it, but I still haven't found what I'm looking for."*¹

Jesus was great, but religion had beaten me down. I had spent most of my short life searching and striving and I was *left wanting*. Of course most of the time this lack of fulfillment and the associated pain lurked below the surface with my emotional blubbery being repressed, happening on the highway or behind closed doors. I soldiered on.

Maybe you have felt the same way at sometime or another - knowing *more* has to be out there, earnestly seeking and often feeling inadequate and falling short. If you are reading this odds are that you are either currently trying religion, have tried religion to no avail, or are seeking God outside of organized religion. Maybe like me and many others

¹U2, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," *The Joshua Tree*, Island Records, 1987.

you have you given religion your all and still experience little freedom, empowerment, peace, joy, and intimacy with God.

Religion is not the answer.

religion vs. spirituality

My life experience with religion and the experiences of others I have known has proven religion inadequate as an ultimate solution for life here on earth and beyond. I

don't believe that most spiritual leaders recognize

their own crippling religiosity. Ironically, many

non-flowing religious leaders are attempting to

teach others how to live in the flow of God. Maslow puts it this way,

**The truth is that the treasure
lies within our very selves.**

**- Teresa of Avila
*The Interior Castle***

In a word, organized religion can be thought of as an effort to communicate peak-experiences to non-peakers, to teach them, to apply them, etc. Often, to make it more difficult, this job falls into the hands of non-peakers. On the whole we now would expect that this would be a vain effort, at least so far as much of mankind is concerned.²

Agreeing with Maslow, I perceive Religion as a place where all too often the blind are leading the blind. This notion may seem suspect even absurd coming from someone who has thus far earned a Bachelors degree in Religion, a Masters degree in Divinity, and a Doctorate degree in Ministry. I am serious though. Religion is insidious. It gets between us and God, clogging our flow. Religion often inspires fear, panic, frustration, insecurity, and hopelessness. I chased God (via religion) with passion, pleasure, and pain and I crashed, thank God I crashed...by the grace of God I crashed. Ultimately, my religious implosion opened me to a more spacious spirituality of grace.

²Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994), 24.

It is necessary for me to provide definition for the terms *religion* and *spirituality* since both have been used already and will be used in various places throughout the book. The actual term *religion* has several origins. It is noted to come from *religio* meaning, "respect for what is sacred," or "reverence for the gods." However, the primary and most popular etymology is the Latin *religare* "to bind fast" or "place an obligation on," or a "bond between humans and gods."³ Essentially, religion is meant to bind or bond us to God, to obligate us to God. I have to say that my experience with religion has been binding alright.

Reverence, respect or devotion to God does not trouble me in the least. Being intimately connected or bonded with God sounds great. These are all integral aspects of healthy spirituality. I take issue with religion's premise and practice, more often than not, being human-centered rather than God-centered. This means as a religious person I obligate myself to God. I do all I can to bond with God and bind myself to him. I take on the role of initiator and responder. I reverence God primarily to gain blessing and avoid cursing. In keeping with this, I have come to experience religion as *any system of beliefs and behaviors (personal or institutional) that when adhered to mean to gain the adherent favor and blessing with God*. In short, right beliefs coupled with right behaviors bring spiritual rightness and blessing.

Religion assumes separation between us and God. The existence of this gap continues beyond any conversion experience and the closure of the gap depends upon acquiring a particular system of beliefs and performing (or not) particular behaviors. The emphasis here lands on the words *system* and *behavior*. Religion worships order and

³Religion, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion> (accessed 10/03/08).

appropriate behavior. Ironically, most religious people are not renowned for order, unity or divine behavior.

I fully acknowledge that the term *religion* and its substance, does not carry the same negative definition and connotation for everyone. In general, it has not always carried a negative connotation or the baggage that it carries today. It hasn't always been over-weighted toward human responsibility and hypocrisy. From person to person, the word *religion* and its meaning carry distinct weight and orientation. Broadly, a generation or two ago, religion was more tightly equated with God's initiation and action, faith, positive influence, and respected by the majority of society. The meaning and weight of the term has waxed and waned over the centuries.

Spirituality serves as a safer more malleable term to use when considering our relationship with God and his with us. For many of us its broadness and flexibility makes us feel slightly uncomfortable. Spirituality differs from religion in that it is more fluid. Moreover, I believe it to be more God-centered. Spirituality begins, consists of, and ends with God. Spirituality is not married to human tradition, institution, or ritual, but it may have close relationship with one or all of them. It is more mystical by nature, not necessarily grounded in or dictated by systematic or ritualistic belief and practice, but may contain both.

In the language of Christian mystic Evelyn Underhill, spirituality is experienced and expressed "union with the Divine Reality."⁴ More pragmatically, spirituality is faith in the trenches. Spirituality is paradoxically, beyond the ordinary and pervasively ordinary. Spirituality is beyond possession, beyond the confines of self, beyond control,

⁴Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986), 12.

beyond immediate perceptions, beyond all expectations and at the same time it is ever present in ordinary everyday life.⁵ Spirituality touches both eternal and temporal, theory and praxis, theology and practices, the ethereal and the everyday real.

In today's global culture the term spirituality has both substantial broadness and traction. It can be generously defined as the way in which we live in touch with, and nurture our spiritual self in relationship with God. Our spirituality may engage content and have context in Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or some mixture of these and other spiritual traditions. Most often, we embrace the primary content and context of one tradition while several others are engaged more peripherally...even unknowingly (i.e. the practice of *mindfulness* or *being present* is found by different names in several faith traditions). Many faiths maintain their distinction but share similar values, postures, and practices with Christianity and vice versa. This book considers a Christian spirituality expressed with postures and practices that may embraced and termed differently in other traditions. I

At the heart of Christian spirituality there is one central story of Jesus Christ: his birth, death and resurrection. Christian spirituality is not about simply hearing the story and believing it to be true, of course. It is also about experiencing relationship with Christ.

- Karen E. Smith
Christian Spirituality

consider this healthy syncretism, a beneficial blend. I believe that varied postures and practices can greatly enrich our experience of God and others.

Essentially, Christian spirituality embraces the narrative of Jesus as the Son of God, who being sent into humanity by God the Father, lived, was executed for the sins of humanity, and was resurrected on their behalf. The cross-work of Christ eradicated the

⁵Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection; Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 31.

separation (sin) that existed between God and humanity. Embracing Jesus' story, digesting it, and manifesting it in daily life is the substance of Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality finds its center and outworking in our mutual indwelling of Jesus. Christians are meant to revel in this established intimate union and live from it.

Authentic Christian spirituality moves beyond religion. Jim Palmer, in *Wide Open Spaces: Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*, expresses that religion wants us to hone in on a certain set of propositions and doctrines about God while something deeper, Christ – the life-giving spirit, calls us beyond religion.⁶ Having Christ, the life-giving spirit, at its center and as its source makes Christian spirituality inherently and dynamically Christian. Jesus is the initiator, mediator, energy, and sustainer of Christian spirituality. God mysteriously serves as our spiritual core and the outer crust. He is present in our spirituality's broadness and minutiae.

Mark McIntosh crafts a succinct and powerful definition for Christian spirituality that most suits sacred flow. He defines Christian spirituality as the activity of being led by the Spirit into Christ's relationship with the Father.⁷ "Christian" living means that we live according to the promptings and power of the Spirit of God rather than being manipulated by our human inclinations. The embrace of, dependence upon, and manifestation of Christ in us is the heart of Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is union with God through Christ fully experienced and fully expressed - wholly living in God's sacred flow.

⁶Jim Palmer, *Wide Open Spaces; Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 7.

⁷Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 152.

Christian spirituality espouses reverence not religion. The fear or reverence of God is the beginning of wisdom...and faith.⁸ Reverence or respect for God and his preeminence leads us to proper perspective and guides us toward his flow. Wisdom from God leads us to the acknowledgement of his sovereignty in every situation, his constant activity on our behalf, and his intimate union with us. Wisdom inspires deep humility that sets us on the rhythmic path that diverges from religion.

From *pneumatikos* we derive the noun *pneuma*, which is translated as *spiritus* in Latin from which "spirit" is derived in English. The framework for the Christian life is, therefore, life in the Spirit of Jesus.

- David B. Perrin, *Studying Christian Spirituality*

It is safe to say that I have been Religious with a capital "R", and cross denominationally at that. I have engaged with Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and Non-denominationals. I have spent much of my short life buried in religion, trapped, spiritually self-entombed. Paradoxically, all true spirituality starts with a search for God and the freedom and love He alone is capable of granting. We all long for liberty, belovedness, spaciousness, security, and autonomy. We deeply desire to know and be known, to love and be loved. We crave relationship with a God who has the ability to love us, free us, and empower us. Unfortunately for many, if not most of us, this search drifts toward legalistic religion sooner rather than later. This was true for me...and maybe for you as well.

Christianity at large has lost its rhythm. Religion has robbed Christian spirituality of its rhythm. Rhythm has digressed to ritual, institution, and stifling dogma. Performance-based spirituality pervades. The many people I have counseled and taught

⁸Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, 15:33.

over the last ten plus years, in addition to scores of people who empathize with my story, give credence to this claim.

When I met Mica she couldn't even make it through a church service without leaving in shame. This was partly due to the nature of her particular church and partly due to her painful past. She believed herself to be worthless, unfit to exist in God's presence. She was inherently inadequate and hopelessly lost. Any sense of rhythm with God was gone and its return out of the question. Christian religion was destroying her slowly and painfully. Fortunately, through counseling God re/introduced himself to her, unveiling the reality of the intimate union he shared with her unconditionally. God peeled away her shame, introduced her to life under grace, and her soul was resuscitated. Mica released religion and traded it for rhythm. Her Christianity regained a beautiful flow. Mica's change was so immediate, drastic, and noticeable that her pastor who knew I was counseling her called me to ask what had happened.

Rhythm-less Christianity wanes more by the minute. Increasingly, its song is ceasing to move people. Its rhythm isn't smooth, reflective, resonant, contagious, soul-provoking, and inviting. It's offbeat and off beat with disjointed, dispassionate, legalistic, contrived, pretentious, and sloppy movement. Even worse, this herky-jerky motion offends many people...and not for the godly reasons we would hope. Christianity's rhythm lacks resonance, and is getting continually more cacophonous.

Authentic Christianity has rhythm and flow...it resonates. I spent most of my life not knowing Christianity could be rhythmic and flowing. My Christian religion was characterized by straining and striving, producing occasional fruit, but more often guilt, shame, anxiety, and fear. It had its oscillating ups and downs but I certainly wouldn't call

its movement rhythmic. I have found hope in a Christian spirituality characterized by rhythm and flow. To embrace such a hopeful, free spirituality of sacred flow we must lose our religion.

losing my religion...and santa

Legalism throws off our rhythm, stunts our flow. In my view, the terms *legalism* and *religion* are interchangeable. Legalism is a less loaded term, safer to use without being misunderstood. Legalism can be interpreted in relation to faith or in a secular sense. In general, legalists are sticklers for the rules. Rules or principles *are* life or at least the way to build and maintain a successful life. For legalists, rules trump relationship or rhythm... inadvertently most of the time. Paradoxically, good principles, even biblical principles have a way of slowly corrupting and consuming us, and before we know it we are neck deep in legalism. I believe this is primarily what is crippling our spirituality.

Legalism in the Christian community chokes the life of the community and its genuine service to others. The community becomes consumed with written and unwritten principles while life by the Spirit dissipates. The letter (law) goes about killing while the life-giving Spirit becomes marginalized.⁹ With principles as priority, people become frustrated, dry, and spiritually repressed. The mystics in or around the community are seen as weird or uncommitted to the program. As a social psychologist, Maslow acknowledged this,

This cleavage between the mystics and the legalists, if I may call them that, remains at best a mutual tolerance, but it has happened in some churches that the rulers of the organization actually made a heresy out of the mystic experiences and persecuted the mystics themselves.¹⁰

⁹2 Corinthian 3:6.

¹⁰Maslow, *Religion*, 24.

Most legalism is quite subtle. Like radon, it is an invisible, odorless, tasteless poison. Quietly killing all those exposed to it with any intensity or regularity. And like smoking, second hand users are also profoundly affected. Those surrounding a legalistic person or community see the effects of the poison in by-products like intolerance, pride, judgment, fear, hypocrisy, pretension, and self-righteousness.

You might be thinking, “It’s not about religion, and certainly not legalism, it’s about *personal* relationship with God.” Right. Of course. Nonetheless, in practically every Christian community I have ever engaged, the relationship drum has been pounded. No one really wants to be deemed legalistic. In reality, the relational drum-skin is often authentic, mostly natural, but the drum-well contains a mixture that includes rigidity and legalism. Unfortunately, in the recesses of the typical Christian soul (and community) it is held that religion or legalism leads to spiritual *life*. This deception maims and kills our spirituality when Christ within us desires to heal us and have us experience *his life*.

Our legalism betrays Jesus. Authentic Christianity does not promote legalism, but grace-given profoundly intimate union-relationship with God. Any attempt to adhere to principles, prescriptions, or rules to gain life, earn acceptance, or obtain *more* favor with God undermines Jesus. The whole approach is an assault on grace – Jesus. Divine life, acceptance, union, and favor were already given through Jesus. Any further pleading disrespects the gift and the giver.

*God alone made it possible for you to be in Christ Jesus. For our benefit
God made Christ to be wisdom itself. He is the one who made us acceptable to
God. He made us pure and holy, and he gave himself to purchase our freedom.
1 Corinthians 1:30*

God did the heavy lifting through Jesus. We need conversion regarding how we perceive Christianity. We need to move within what God has and is accomplishing. Again, the

center of Christianity is Christ in our center, and our center (and the rest of us) rhythmically moving with him.

When I was a kid I worried about Jesus turning out to be like Santa Claus, a virtual myth, a fallacy. When would my parents tell me religion, this whole God thing, was all a charade like Santa, the Easter Bunny,

and the Tooth Fairy? After all, it seemed to me that good, well meaning religious people were far more passionate about Santa Claus than God.

I had plenty of Christmas' under my belt to prove this. On any given Sunday for years I would watch people file into the church services and superficially go through the motions. This seemed odd and ill-fitting to me. Why do we wake up early, put on uncomfortable clothes, go to a hall, forcibly sing a few songs, pray the invisible God forgives us, receive a better-

John's [the Apostle] special concern seems to derive from the fact that Christians of his day already had begun to succumb to that most dangerous temptation of sacramental religion, namely, the careful observance of ritual without that deep, spiritual counterpart that constitutes the true meaning and purpose of the ritual. This temptation is so dangerous because it is so much easier to observe rituals than to undertake personal conversion.

- Demetrius R. Dumm
A Mystical Portrait of Jesus

behavior pep talk, eat a donut...or three, and go home. Granted, this may not be your church experience but many of us are in denial, unable to admit our religious faith and the "things" that comprise it are uninspiring or simply not working.

I worried the following type of statement would come at some point, "Artie, its time we told you...there is no living Jesus, God, or Holy Spirit. You are old enough now that you have a moral compass; we thought it was safe to tell you. Now that you know, please play along for the younger kids' sake." Religion was so dull and guilt driven

sometimes that I would have welcomed that statement. It would have made my perceived lack of the supernatural understandable. Instead, with the purest heart my dad would attempt to inspire me by saying “Give God his hour each week; it is the least you can do for him. He deserves it. After all, consider all the good he has done for you.” Mom would always say (and still does), “Be careful and be good,” and “Do your best and never ever quit.” My parents simply did their best to encourage me and my faith throughout my whole childhood. Nonetheless, I interpreted from these statements and my whole religious experience through to my mid-twenties, “Go to church, try hard, do your best, never give up, be good, and God will be good to you,”...you know...like Santa Claus.

I believe this is where many of us live spiritually despite what we say or do externally. We pay lip service to a graceful intimate faith and life service to religion. A rhythmic faith is beyond us. We subconsciously believe that we are conditionally cared for by a God that just might disappear any minute, that is, if he actually exists. If he exists we are not sure he is really closely engaged or invested in our story. He is an ever-present impotent vapor if anything. If he truly engages our story he may vaporize us since we can't seem to get it together and keep it together. However, if we can just manage to get it together, blessings will abound.

We've got to let go of this Santa-like version of God and the accompanying legalism. We've grown up. The simplistic black and white, firmly structured version of Christianity served us well as children providing us with some footing early in our faith. But now it must be shed for a mature, fluid *religion of the Spirit*.

christianity flows

As a young pastor I was too embarrassed to admit the miserable state of my soul. I continued to push through. I knew there had to be more to Christianity or at least a more meaningful way to experience it. If God were real, the creator and sustainer of all things, the one who gave himself to humanity, then why should the content of my spirituality boil off to – try harder...and never give up. The *more* I longed for began flooding my soul through a single question.

Are you living *for* God or *from* God?

I am embarrassed to say that such a pithy statement broke my spiritual dam. You've likely heard it before...several times. It is such a simplistic question...but with profound implications. It was the first words mouthed by a speaker at a conference I

attended about ten years ago. He went on to say that the only authentic way to live *for* God is to live *from* God. We are meant to employ his strength not

The Lord is *at* the center of your being; therefore, He must *become* the center of your being.

**- Jeanne Guyon
*Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ***

simply our own. Paul encapsulates what it means to live *from* God when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."¹¹ The Christian life is Christ living in me, and my part is to trust him to do so.

Maybe this lifestyle is and has always been obvious to you, but to me at the time it was nothing short of a divine revelation. Yes, I had read this verse of Scripture before and

¹¹Galatians 2:20.

others like it countless times, but their true weight and implication never really registered...until that moment.

With this simple question about living from God my heart resonated with conviction, grief, and resurrection. I had tried so hard for so long to please God, myself, and others. I was overwhelmed and spiritually exhausted at twenty-six. I didn't like church really and Jesus' reputation was deflating by association. I was frustrated and burnt out but longing for more of God. I didn't think my wanting more was beyond God but I certainly was not experiencing that *more*. Living from God presented a new way of being with God. It would be truly relational, spiritual, dynamic, and rhythmic.

In a non-descript conference chair sitting next to a good friend, I felt alive finally....resurrected. I was writhing with the paradox and soul ecstasy associated with death and birth in a single moment. I felt like running from the room to shed some tears or dance, or both. A wholesale revolution in my understanding of Christianity was birthing. Paradise lost had found me. I would discover what it means to give up on my religious-effort and reputation-building and wholly lean into God's grace. My soul sighed with relief. Soon, my pain and angst were exchanged for a cool fresh breath of hope. Life would never be the same. I soaked in the rest of the conference and thus my journey deeper into God's grace engaged *light* speed. Peace, freedom, intimacy, and rhythm were on the horizon.

With this revolution came an unexpected integration. A few months later, by what I believe was divine providence, I was randomly surfing sports psychology websites. In my skimming I ran across a page detailing the characteristic fruits of flow – *the zone*. This was of interest to me since I had experienced life in the zone quite a few times as an

athlete, but I had never seen it articulated this way. I had no idea it had been formally researched for decades.

While flowing, people reported experiencing a unitive consciousness, intrinsic validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action awareness merge, inner calm, effortlessness, spontaneity, intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, and a sense of control. Life in my newfound grace-filled spiritual paradigm was producing many of these same characteristic fruits.

Epiphany.

Christianity flows!

It makes sense. The Spirit-wind and living water flow. God's life in, through, and around us could easily produce these and other phenomenal fruits. And this fruit easily relates, even synchronizes with the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹² As I dove into flow I discovered that beyond its fruit; flow's nature and the elements that facilitate it had meaningful parallels in Christian spirituality as well. Eventually I determined that flow provides a compelling way to articulate living, moving, and being in God – walking by his Spirit. This connection with flow confirmed and continued my conversion to a new way of living with God.

Christianity flows. It is the faith Jesus spoke of when he says, "*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*"¹³ The Spirit's flow within cures our spiritual thirst and the overflow refreshes all who surround

¹²Galatians 5:22, 23.

¹³John 7:38.

us. The Spirit flows in and through each of us. This flow is more than enough...we just rarely expect it, recognize it, trust it, and live by it. Let's start.

christianity converted

We were on our way to a visit another church. This is not among my favorite hobbies though I feel I have done it enough to officially consider it one. I stopped in for gas and while pumping I left the radio on in the minivan since the kids were happily singing along to a song. While gassing up, our battery died. I dug out my jumper cables and began scanning others pumping gas to see whom I could approach for a jump. Just adjacent I saw what I thought was a no-brainer choice, a truck with two oversized shiny Christian fish emblems on the tailgate. Surely he will help me out. I politely asked him if he minded giving me a jump. He replied, "Oh.....um.... I'm sorry, I can't. I'm late for church." I said nothing. I was in such shock at the irony of it all that I smugly chuckled, turned, and walked away. This really happened.

I did get the car started. A weary mom who had risen early to pick up her son from night shift at Wal-Mart gladly helped us. In a final bit of irony, I ended up directly behind the shiny fish truck at the first stoplight outside of the gas station.

I have been that guy. This is an example of what Christian religion has done to us. This incident microcosmically characterizes what is wrong with Christianity today. Ritual rules over rhythm and flow. Acknowledgement of daily grace and grace-giving scarcely takes place in the life of the everyday Christian. Our Spirit-guide leading us toward the unbeaten path is often ignored, primarily because most of do not recognize our inner trailblazer's voice.

Jesus didn't come to found a set of approved behaviors like "one should always go to church...and be on time." Jesus' purpose was not limited to offering judgment, forgiveness, and lending our

personal life a helping hand. Jesus was not concerned with creating a well defined belief system or

God is a flowing and ebbing sea which flows without ceasing into all his beloved, according to everyone's need and dignity.

**- Jan van Ruusbroec
*The Spiritual Espousals***

acceptable behavior. He modeled an intimate rhythmically flowing relationship with the Father and made a way for humanity to have the same relationship. His was a passionate, intimate, resonant union with the Father. His relationship was scandalously intimate. It made people feel uncomfortable, particularly religious people. It still does.

When Jesus entered the ministry scene people were getting beat up by religion and culture much like they are today. Jesus comes offering rest, rhythm, and flow.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

Matthew 11: 28-30

The way Eugene Peterson expresses Matthew 11: 28-30 above in *The Message* nourishes me to the point of leaning back in my chair and letting go of a deep sigh.... like when I've just finished a massive plate of my mom's homemade gnocchi and meatballs bathed in the family recipe marinara sauce. It's so tasty, organic, meaty, and even light (relatively...I am Italian). He uses delicious words like; unforced, rhythm, freely, lightly, walk, real, rest, recover, walk, life, grace, watch, and learn.

In these verses Jesus imperatively commands those of us who are heavy burdened with religious ceremony and spiritual anxiety to *come* to him for rest – an intermission,

recreation...a soul vacation.¹⁴ He promises another way. In other translations of these verses, Jesus encourages his listeners to take his yoke – *take my yoke upon you and learn from me*. In Jewish religious culture, the yoke figuratively represented a rabbi's interpretation of the Scriptures, specifically the Law. More than this, the teacher's yoke was his way of life. Jesus invites us to follow his lifestyle, his rule. When Jesus claims his yoke is *easy*, the word easy can also be translated *comfortable* or *better*.¹⁵ His way fits us well, comfortably...best. Jesus' yoke is not easy for us because he holds a lax view of the Scriptures, but because taking on Jesus' yoke means he bears the load for us, in us, and through us. He is the new way.

Let's convert Christianity.

Let's convert Christianity so that we experience a Christianity that fully reflects what Jesus shares in Matthew 11. In reality, it's not Christianity itself that needs converting; it is our version of Christianity that necessitates revision and re-vision. We must lose our religion, release our legalism. Taking Jesus' yoke upon us, we discover real *intermission, recreation and vacation* in him.

To convert means to change, to transform, or to modify. Converting our Christianity means we change, transform, or modify our attitude, approach, framework, perception/vision, and paradigm concerning it. Essentially, I am proposing more of a reversion than a conversion. Our conversion is a reversion to the love-compelled, Spirit-empowered rhythmic lifestyle evidenced in the life of Jesus.

Let's lose our religion and recover rhythm, release our legalism and recover love. It's not meant to lead us to a stressful, self-focused, self-induced wrestling match to make

¹⁴Rick Meyers, *e-Sword* (Equipping Ministries Foundation: Franklin, TN, 2005), Matthew 11:28-30.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

ourselves acceptable, to be and do better so that we *feel* closer to God...for ten minutes. Receiving rather than achieving characterizes authentic Christianity. It's not to be a life of spiritual grunting; trying to believe narrow propositions and following wise but lifeless principles. It's so much more, it's a life embedded in the rhythm and flow of the Almighty.

Are you ready to convert?

This chapter has taken us from religion to rhythm, from a faith locked in legalism to one that flows. It called upon us to convert our Christianity to a mystical-practical flowing faith that reflects the way of Jesus. Chapter two dives more specifically into rhythm and flow in order to provide a foundation and a framework for the spiritual integration in the chapters that follow it.

being formed by God's flow

1. Think over your story. How has your faith been religious and/or rhythmic?
2. How has religion (the Sisyphus system) hampered your connection or rhythm with God? Ask God to deconstruct any Religion in your way of life.
3. In connection with this deconstruction, where are you stuck? What areas in your daily life need integration with a Christianity that flows? Invite God to sift and sort through this with you.

3

Absorption

Discovering the Flow

The moment I turn to God it is like turning on an electric current which I feel through my whole being.
- Frank Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic*

The ball rocketed a mile high and deep down the right field line. I swung, and it was like a dream, I barely felt the impact of the ball. The ball floated over the fence, a grand slam. It was my third homerun in two days at our conference tournament. I looked into our dugout as I trotted to first base and shrugged with amazement. I was in the zone. I could do no wrong. In the game prior I hit the longest homerun I think I ever hit. It practically left the field before I left the batter's box.

I can think of many other times I experienced the bliss of flow and not just in sport. It is an unmistakable oasis. Once we have experienced flow we easily become flow junkies. We even like watching other people in the flow. After having experienced it we get a sense when someone else is *feeling the flow*. I have come across very few people who haven't experienced flow. Even if they cannot articulate it or remember having had such an experience most people have heard of flow.

Flow is intriguing, mysterious, and mystical even. It's sought after by many and rightfully so. Elite athletes hope to experience flow routinely and prepare in ways that

intend to foster it. Psychologists coach clients toward flow knowing that flow leads to peak performance beyond the client's perceived potential. Flow is a highlight of human experience – pure enjoyment.

Flow's nature, elements, and fruit integrate quite seamlessly with Christian spirituality. It's likely you have not coupled the two, few ever have. People, Christians included, typically think of Christianity in different terms. I hope this book changes that. Continuing our conversion, this chapter orients the terms *rhythm* and *flow* within our context, then it provides us with more definition regarding the flow state that will help us establish a foundation for sacred flow.

reorienting rhythm and flow

To convert our Christianity from religion to rhythm – sacred flow, we have to reclaim and reorient *rhythm* and *flow* as concepts within Christianity. These concepts are more commonly understood within the contexts of the Eastern Religions or the New Age movement. Go ahead, Google these words and see how many references to Christian spirituality you find as opposed to other spiritualities. These two concepts often make Christians uneasy and queasy. I understand the sensitivity but it's time we move on by reorienting these powerful ideals. They provide us the opportunity to uniquely re-center and catalyze a supernatural grace-filled Christian spirituality.

**You heard me in my tune when
I just heard confusion.**
- U2, *All Because of You*

We are meant to engage in a Christianity of rhythm and flow - living and learning, keeping in step with Jesus, in his restful unforced rhythm.¹ Again, this simply advocates a conversion or reversion to authentic discipleship. To be a disciple is to be a learner, a

¹Matthew 11:28-30.

student, an apprentice, and an astute follower. We are meant to follow God gracefully by his rhythmic but unpredictable Spirit.

Let me be clear, for sacred flow to be truly valid and universally credible, it must be as viable to an extremely poor Haitian as it is to an affluent American. It must profit the person dying with AIDS the same as does the rock star playing a benefit concert to fight the disease. Living in his unforced rhythm of grace does not denote a long poolside nap with a cocktail upon waking. Sacred flowing doesn't drain away life's difficulties, pain, and tragedy, but it provides us a fresh God-centered, Spirit-enabled approach to the stress and mess life constantly brings. As we suffer, by entrusting ourselves to God, focusing on him, we move in his rhythm. This rhythmic movement may take us to our death as it did Jesus. The Spirit has given us life and we are privileged to have the opportunity to be dynamically led by the Spirit's rhythm in everything we say and do or don't do....no matter what our circumstances.²

Jesus, *the* life, who we are invited to follow, learn from, and offload our burdens to, is now within. This is not pie in the sky pop mysticism, it is mystical-practical, real Christianity. God's life resides in us, empowering authentic spirituality. Many of us have too long trusted in religion (ourselves) and not engaged the courage it takes to allow God to be God within us. The day to day work for us Christian converts is to catch God's rhythm, remain in it, and flow through him, with him, and in him despite life's happenings.

The word rhythm from the Greek *rhythmus* or *rhythmos* means, "movement in time" or "measured flow." Rhythm is a regular or patterned recurrence (flow) of elements

²Galatians 5:25, New Living Translation.

(beats, accents, motifs, themes, etc) in a system of motion.³ Have you ever been in an elevator or a nice restaurant and the soft instrumental music you hear sounds familiar but you can't seem to place it....then it hits you....it's the Beatles...as elevator music! There were no lyrics but the song's rhythm – its basic repeated pattern of beats, accents, etc, was recognizable to you.

We are systems/organisms of motion. Our spirit, soul, and body undulate constantly. We rhythmically move though we don't always recognize it. If your favorite song were playing right now, you would likely naturally begin moving to its rhythm - tapping, swaying, humming, singing, etc. You would organically adjust your physical movement, or rhythm, to match the flow of the song. On another level, the song may resonate with your soul. Those of us who struggle with rhythm have difficulty matching repeating beats, themes, etc. whether it is music or spirituality. Nonetheless, we still have rhythm and are moved by those things that resonate within us.

Spiritually speaking, God initiates and sustains rhythm for all humanity. God not only moves rhythmically, he brings us into his rhythm and injects his rhythm into us. This gives great affirmation to those who groove naturally and hope to us who are rhythmically challenged. We only need to be open to the beat. God's recurring theme, accent, or beat is his love. A paradox exists in that his love often seems erratic, lacking any pattern whatsoever. We are loved and led to love in ways and to places that don't seem to reflect God having rhythm. The complexity of God's mysterious rhythm invites us into us to a deeper trust and a textured rhythm far beyond anything we could create.

³Rhythm, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rhythm>, (accessed 8/10/08).

Rhythm and flow are closely related. Rhythm's first cousin is the Latin term, *rhein* which means, "to flow."⁴ As stated in the introduction, flow is a state of consciousness in which we become totally absorbed in and harmoniously merge with what we are doing. Flow is

easily perceived as a spiritual experience occurring in a practical context. This intense

**For God's love is like a river springing up in the depth of the Divine Substance and flowing endlessly through His creation, filling all things with life and goodness and strength.
- Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation***

merge reflects our interflowing union with God. Sacred flow realizes a life in which we learn to live, move, and simply be absorbed in the rhythm and flow of God's Spirit.

Rhythm describes our more general underlying everyday movement with God, while flow has distinct elements and by products related to fully engaging in activity. Rhythm is movement with God in the commonplace; lazy strolls, time spent with family, eating dinner, brushing your teeth, reading, walking the dog, vegging out, driving to work, sleeping, playing with your kids, etc. Flow is movement with God in the midst of more intense activity or challenge; busy days at the office, intense days at play, demanding service projects, renovation at home, training for or competing in a competition, passionate conversation, etc. In sacred flow, ebb and flow becomes rhythm and flow as we engage and pull back, speed up and slow down. Maslow defines these two experiences as plateau-experiences and peak-experiences.⁵ Both are high ground. Sacred flow leads us to live between the high plains and the summit of human experience.

Sacred flow is a river. In areas, it flows slowly, gently, sometimes moving so slowly that its movement is barely perceptible – rhythm. In other areas, the river races,

⁴Ibid.

⁵Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994), xv.

creating rapids while quickly and effortlessly dipping and diving – flow. We are streams or currents within Him, the river. We are one, united, always rhythmically flowing in him, but doing so at varying paces under diverse circumstances.

flow defined

What is flow? Thus far I have noted many of the terms used to describe it and acknowledged its mystery and universality. Flow is a euphoric, mysterious, yet pragmatic experience or state of being. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi describe it in the following way,

It [flow] is a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions.... More than just focus, however, flow is a harmonious experience where mind and body are working together effortlessly.⁶

Flow's nature, like Christian spirituality, is mystical-practical. Both dynamically exist in two worlds. Flow is mysterious in that registers as nothing less than mystical, otherworldly at times. Flow is grace. It is a mystifying gift that cannot be manufactured. We may establish an appropriate atmosphere, foster a fertile disposition, but flow cannot be forced. Flow or peak-experience proves difficult to

articulate but is very much a reality. Flow's mystery finds roots in the real. It's pragmatic. Flow happens

**Happiness is absorption.
- T. E. Lawrence**

during *ordinary* activities and produces *extraordinary* bona fide results. Flow and Christian spirituality reflect divinity meeting humanity, the ethereal mixing it up with the corporeal.

Many cultures share the saying, "Time flies when you are having fun." During normal activities we float, fully absorbed, and our consciousness of ourselves, time, fear,

⁶Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports: The Keys to Optimal Experiences and Performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999), 5.

worry, etc. fades. We dial into ultimate Frisbee, reading, playing, praying, cards, dancing, singing, hiking, biking, or whatever it is that we do for fun. Often times when we do, flow happens.

Attention is the fundamental element of flow. Attention or psychic energy as Csikszentmihalyi calls it is energy we choose to invest each moment, and that investment ultimately determines our quality of life.⁷ Our devotion of attention-energy sparks the flow state. Csikszentmihalyi believes control of attention, more broadly, consciousness, leads to flow and therefore optimal enjoyment in life. In flow, we are so focused that no attention-energy exists to invest anywhere else. We witness this when we try to talk to children engrossed in play.

When our attention is not directed and our consciousness unbridled, it can be manipulated by anything internally or externally. This happens to us often as our culture overloads us with stimuli. There is plenty of opportunity for our consciousness to be distracted or simply unplugged and adrift. Csikszentmihalyi describes this drifting as psychic entropy and flow as negentropic – bringing order to the consciousness.⁸

Volumes have been written about human consciousness, its nature, qualities, composition, and role in our lives. In an effort to continue moving forward with the book I want to quickly offer a broad and basic definition concerning consciousness. Very simply, consciousness can be understood as differing levels of awareness of our existence along with our ability to respond to stimuli. Gerald May offers the following accessible description, “Human consciousness is the capacity to perceive and appreciate not only

⁷Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), 33.

⁸Here the term *psychic* refers to the cognitive, not the supernatural or telepathic. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 40.

various stimuli but the ongoing process of being, and the mystery of that process.”⁹ Our consciousness mysteriously ponders our existence while processing various stimuli all at once. In keeping with this, our consciousness shares the paradoxical nature of Christian spirituality and flow – mystery and practicality.

Are there activities in which you participate for the sake of the experience itself? You passionately dive into this activity without need for results or reward. You do “it” purely, and it brings real enjoyment. Your motivation is internal, organic, and intrinsic. This approach to activity characterizes the second fundamental component in defining flow’s nature. The artists Csikszentmihalyi initially studied painted for the sake of painting. Their motivation was internal and related specifically to the task being performed at the moment.¹⁰ This was a psychological anomaly. Why would anyone do something so attentively, so passionately without external motivation or expectation of reward? Csikszentmihalyi termed this anomaly *autotelic*, derived from two Greek roots: *auto* meaning self and *telos* meaning goal.¹¹ The goal is the activity itself. The cliché “The journey is the destination” applies here. This approach is reminiscent of Christian mystic Brother Lawrence’s notion of practicing the presence of God, Trappist monk Thomas Merton’s idea of contemplation and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. Activities are engaged for the sake of the experience that particular activity brings, nothing beyond. External focus or dependence upon reward corrupts our truest experience.

⁹Gerald May, M.D., *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983), 43.

¹⁰Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), xii.

¹¹Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 117.

Csikszentmihalyi believes this anomaly can become a disposition. Any person who generally does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later reward embodies an *autotelic* personality. Complete attention and ultimate intention dedicated to the each moment make flow a way of life.

the elements of flow

Have you ever noticed the elements that facilitated your past flow-like experiences? Do you remember being fully concentrated and engaged, absorbed? Can you recall the clarity of your intention, your goal? Did the activity tax your abilities? Life alone is enough to do this much of the time. Do you remember being flexible with regard to making adjustments? All of these questions echo the elements of flow.

You may sense a paradox brewing, a tension building...

Flow has elements? Rules?

Does living in the elements mean living in the flow rules?

There are in fact elements that set the stage for flow. These are components fundamental to flow. However, we need not approach them mechanically, in fact that will never do. To flow, the elements are to be freely and fluidly engaged. Flow happens when we are deeply concentrated, our goals are clear, feedback is readily available, skills and demands are balanced, and activity is approached for its own sake.¹² Flow cannot be contrived or forced by these elements or any others. These components lay the groundwork for flow to happen. They seed the field as we farm for flow. When these elements are realized opportunity for flow arises. More often than not these conditions are met unintentionally, particularly outside of sport.

¹²Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 71-77.

The great paradox of flow consists of the need to live in distinct elements in order to freely flow. Sacred flow engages the elements relationally and gracefully through desirable soul postures and with the aid of spiritual practices. Chapter eight shares in depth regarding these three postures; holistic awareness, mind-setting, and rhythmic engagement that nurture our sacred flow. I hope to help you create a way of life, a rhythm within your Christian spirituality that establishes continuous opportunity for intense flow with God.

In this world, the rays of God's love, unbeknownst to man, encircle man all about, hungrily seeking to penetrate him.

- Catherine of Genoa
The Spiritual Dialogue

The remainder of this chapter turns to detail the elements and characteristic fruits of flow, and later chapters five and will integrate flow's elements and produce with Christian spirituality.

deep concentration

In today's frenzied boisterous culture concentration is nothing less than a lost art form. Being able to disregard distraction and focus has become increasingly difficult. Nonetheless, concentration is the anchor component of flow. Concentration unifies our consciousness enabling us to disregard things unnecessary for the activity at hand. Without giving complete attention, flow cannot occur. Flow is focus. Concentration's initiation and maintenance largely has to do with the object of our concentration and our ability to disregard or manage distractions. So, if we are clear about what we are doing, the object of our concentration, it is easier to deeply concentrate. Also, if we remove distractions or are immune to those in our surroundings then concentration begins and deepens more readily. The problem is that we rarely set goals or focal points for our

concentration. In addition, we commonly attempt to concentrate in the worst environments. For example, I have tried to research in a McDonald's play area while my kids were playing. How do you think that went? Not only was I distracted, I got ketchup all over my book.

Timothy Gallwey adds that healthy focus must be nonjudgmental.¹³ Pure concentration is focus without condemnation concerning anything internal or external. In order to move our concentration toward flow our self evaluation cannot turn to castigation. Nonjudgmental observation affords us vision without defensiveness, denial, shame, or guilt. Our vision clouds and concentration breaks or never truly begins when we are overly self-conscious or we berate ourselves. Our lack of self-condemnation staves off negative distraction, thus allowing concentration to deepen.

clear goals

Superficially, something about setting goals feels unnatural to me. I'm no slacker, it's just that goal setting can feel legalistic, rigid, or like I am following the steps in an infomercial success kit. Deeper down, I know that goals don't have to sour my soul. It is all in why I am setting them, their content, how I set them, hold them, move toward them, relate to them, etc. It is my personal culture of goals that needs tending.

Goals are a must for flow, but there is no need for us to be stressed. We may just need to perceive goals differently – adjust our culture. Goals provide forward movement for our focus or desire. Clarity of our intention helps us focus our attention and manage distractions.

Without dreams, without risks, only a trivial semblance of living can be achieved.
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*

¹³Timothy Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001), 57.

If goals are vague or unreachable, focus falters and flow never begins or at best fades quickly. In essence, goals are our desires made measurable. Participating in desired activities makes focus and goal setting much easier. Goals are not meant to be pursued mechanically. While flowing, we pursue goals with rhythmic natural action, not mechanical precision or disjointed clumsiness. Our daily domestic “to do” list can become a set of goals that we approach rhythmically. The same goes for our task list at the office. These can be viewed as desires for the day, goals that set us up for flow.

What about goals for more subjective activities or roles such as artists, writers, and poets? This would include our goal of allowing Christ to uniquely live in through us. Csikszentmihalyi acknowledges the difficulty artists and others who work in the abstract face in setting clear goals. He stresses their need to form some kind of unconscious internal mechanism to inform their decisions and direction.¹⁴ They must develop their own sense for what must be done each moment as well as set an overall direction. They set goals, but do so intuitively.

Additionally, Csikszentmihalyi unearthed what he terms *emergent* motivation and goals. Many times we engage in activities with motivation and goals that are weak or nonexistent. It’s just part of life. Inevitably, life forces us to do activities we don’t particularly desire, i.e. many items on my daily domestic “to do” list just mentioned. However, as our engagement in these activities continues, our focus may spawn motivation as well as goal setting and flow may then occur.¹⁵ Emergent motivation makes flow possible for us in some of life’s most mundane activities.

¹⁴Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996), 114.

¹⁵Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Sami Abuhamdeh, and Jeanne Nakamura *Flow*, <http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/CsikFlow.pdf> (accessed 6/04/08).

Lastly, Csikszentmihalyi also considered flow in light of life's meaning or goal.

He asserts that meaning is made in life when an overarching unified purpose extends our influence beyond us and guides our choice of secondary goals.¹⁶ We manage the stress of life well when we consider challenges (obstacles) opportunities for flow experiences toward meaningful goals. In addition, inner conflict is minimal when purposeful goals are settled and given full attention.¹⁷ In other words, when we know what we want and go for it we are much less conflicted.

feedback

I was a decent wrestler in high school. The primary reason I won was my ability to respond to feedback. As I wrestled, I would simply listen to my coaches and do as I was told. They were wise, skilled wrestlers themselves; one being a former World Cup contender. They constantly provided feedback during my matches and I wrestled accordingly. This led me to plenty of flow experiences and a lot of wins. Their input and my responsiveness were essential.

In order to nurture flow we must have and be responsive to instant and comprehensible feedback. Our source of feedback may be internal, external, or both. While competing, many athletes tune into their body, evaluate the feedback, and make adjustments.¹⁸ Most of us have someone or many around us offering feedback in addition to our intuition. Unfortunately, many of us deny or neglect feedback, fail to adjust, and therefore miss opportunities to experience flow. When we have a good sense of how the activity is going, tweaking may occur to initiate or maintain the flow state. However, this tweaking must happen without distracting our attention from the goal.

¹⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 216.

¹⁷*Ibid*, 228.

¹⁸Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 22.

For artists and the like, Csikszentmihalyi again confesses the existence of a distinction, as with goals. Who gives a poet or the mystic immediate feedback? Here again, those involved in abstract creative activity must rely primarily on intrinsic feedback. They must know where their work is going, when it is on or off track, and when it is finished. Csikszentmihalyi calls this, “internalizing the rules and the judgments of the field.”¹⁹ They know (or learn) their domain well enough to know what is great, what’s not, and what needs to be done next. They intuitively discern and respond.

challenge-skills balance

Have you ever noticed how much more fun you have when you play any game with someone of equal ability rather than someone much better or much worse? For flow to occur with any predictability, a delicate balance must be struck between the challenge faced and the person’s skill level. To experience flow, our skill must match the demand at hand. If our skills outpace the challenge we become bored. If the challenge is too much for our skill level, then anxiety reigns.

Csikszentmihalyi calls this equilibrium the *CS balance* and the “golden rule” of flow.²⁰ As our skill grows we must engage in more difficult challenges in order to experience flow. Flow begins at low skill levels in any given activity as long as the challenge matches the skill level. Sport is conducive to flow because there naturally exists inherent regular opportunity for deep concentration, goals, and the challenge-skills balance. Those who engage the abstract have a more difficult time reaching the CS balance. However, when they do flow, they flow as intensely as or more intensely than others.

¹⁹Ibid, 118.

²⁰Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 6.

autotelic approach

Sometimes I actually enjoy cleaning house....emphasis on sometimes. With three small kids rumbling around there is always plenty of mess. When I strap on my iPod, crank my favorite playlist, and fully engage, I clean more effortlessly. When absorbed in the cleaning and the music I am not thinking of

what I have to do after the cleaning, the lack of pay I'm receiving, or the fact that very soon my work will be dramatically undone. I am fully focused on cleaning while moving to the music. Cleaning happens without frustration or dread.

The name of the game is to set the busy-ness of the mind aside and fully bring one's attention to bear on the immediate task at hand.

**- Andrew Cooper
*Playing in the Zone***

This final essential component of flow, mentioned already in defining flow, is the *autotelic* approach. In this approach, we engage in any given activity for the sake of participation in the activity (cleaning for the sake of cleaning). Enjoyment relates to the activity, not any reward that follows. We are intrinsically motivated. The validation of the activity is the activity itself.

This is not easy in a demanding culture that cherishes multi-tasking and results. We easily default to acting only for reward, especially financial reward. In our children we see hope for responding differently. We regularly see the *autotelic* approach with kids at play. They regularly become completely absorbed in their activities. While building a ten foot tall teepee in the front yard from scrap branches my kids are not distracted by 95 degree heat, hunger, or the near future hassle of dismantling it before the neighbors freak out. They are totally tuned in to teepee building; placing a branch, evaluating, finding the next branch, placing that branch, and so on.

Summarizing the elements that catalyze flow Csikszentmihalyi says, “It matters little what you do, what matters is how you do it.”²¹ But this is no secret to us really. We lived this way as kids and our parents or grandparents have told us this plenty of times. We just didn’t know it was backed by decades of scientific research. Put simply, give yourself fully to what you are doing...and don’t hesitate to challenge yourself.

the fruits of flow

Flow’s characteristic fruits provide further definition. Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi both discovered a number of universal characteristics that serve as both distinctive markers and fruits of the flow experience – *what you feel when you flow*. You will likely recognize these more than the elements that set the stage for flow. These distinctive fruits of flow compel us to continue flowing and return to it as often as possible. Rightfully so, we become addicted to flow and the accompanying enjoyment.

Synthesizing the research of Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi and others the following characteristic fruits mark flow: unitive consciousness, self-validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action-awareness merge, inner stillness, effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy, self-transcendence, and time disorientation.²² Encapsulating many of these effects basketball great Bill Russell describes his experience by reporting feelings “of profound joy, an acute intuition, a feeling of effortlessness in the midst of intense

²¹Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 99.

²²Michael Murphy, *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sports* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), 9-66. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 48-70. Maslow, *Religion*, 59-68.

exertion, a sense of the action taking place in slow motion, feelings of awe and perfection, increased mastery, and self-transcendence.”²³

Flow has been referred to as a *unitive experience*. In these moments we perceive the whole universe as integrated, beautiful, and whole.²⁴ We even accept the evil in the world as a part of the whole. We don’t like it, and may rail against it, but we embrace its existence. Our perception of the interrelation of all things is mysteriously heightened. Maslow also calls this the unitive consciousness. The peaker catches a glimpse of godlike perspective.

Flow is *self-validating*. Maslow calls peak-experiences end-experiences rather than means-experiences.²⁵ They are self-validating and self-justifying. When they occur we feel awe, grace and gratitude so much so that we live to collect more of these experiences. Maslow writes, “The peak-experiences of pure delight are for my subjects among the ultimate goals of living and the ultimate validations and justifications for it.”²⁶ The experience in and of itself carries sufficient weight and meaning.

Peak-experience discloses our sense of *uniqueness*. We move toward a distinctive identity, a real self not experienced or fully perceived when not flowing. We seem to be functioning within our perfect identity.²⁷ With regard to this, Maslow goes as far as to say that only peakers can achieve their full identity.²⁸ The peaker has become more of an authentic human, a real person.

²³Andrew Cooper, *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports* (Boston: Shambhala Publication, 1998), 33.

²⁴Maslow, *Religions*, 59.

²⁵Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968), 79.

²⁶Ibid, 80.

²⁷Maslow, *Religions*, 67.

²⁸Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, 111.

Attention invested in any moment may increase to the point of *total absorption*.

How many times have you been in a great conversation with a friend and eventually looked at your watch to find an inordinate amount of time had passed? The restaurant in which you are sitting is empty, and the staff is waiting for you to leave. You were totally absorbed in the conversation.

Total absorption is the culmination of undivided attention over time. We invest all our psychic energy in the present moment as if nothing else exists. Csikszentmihalyi calls this the unified conscious.²⁹ This is not to be confused with Maslow's unitive consciousness, which is our perception of universal interrelation. A unified consciousness is a narrowed, singular focused mind.

We may be absorbed in a sport,
painting, reading, or playing chess.

This absorption can happen with
anything interesting enough to hold

**There is rest for everything and
movement for everything and these come
from that which, transcending rest and
movement, establishes each being
according to an appropriate principle and
gives each the movement suitable to it.**

- Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*

our attention completely.³⁰ We get totally lost in the moment ignoring all distractions.

Some athletes describe this aspect of flow as a cocoon of "concentration" or a "player's trance".³¹

Neurologically, our brain chemically aids our absorption. When we give full attention, deeply concentrate, the brain chemical dopamine excretes fixing our attention and encouraging us to continue. As we give that something more attention, more

²⁹Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*, 20.

³⁰Abraham H. Maslow, *The Further Reaches of Human Nature* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976), 60.

³¹Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 34.

dopamine is released.³² Essentially, dopamine makes us feel high, a la...all *doped* up. This might explain the physical euphoria often associated with flow or why we sense our awareness and action becoming one. Either way, a dopamine rush does not discredit the flow state, its physical phenomenology, or its spiritual implications. On the contrary, it proves flow a more holistic integrated *happening* of spirit, mind, and body harmony.

Total absorption leads to a *unification of our awareness and our actions* making us feel one with what we are doing. Sport's psychologist Ken Ravizza asserts that awareness is not merely focused thinking but more of a sensation, a wider perceptive knowledge.³³ Effective engaged awareness makes our body sensitive to needed adjustments and intuitively the body attempts to make adjustments. In the flow state people report becoming one with their body and their present activity. The dualism between us and our activity fades. When this occurs even extremely strenuous complex activities become effortless, spontaneous, and automatic.³⁴ You might have said or heard people say things like, "The skis felt like extensions of my feet," "The racket was an extension of my hand," or "I actually felt I was the character in the story I was reading."

Inner stillness characterizes flow. This calm gives credence to the general sense of well-being or harmony we experience while flowing. Many athletes testify to experiencing deep peace or stillness, calmness within fear, in the midst of chaotic circumstances or extreme risk.³⁵ The mind de-stresses when fully tuned. Fear, anxiety,

³²D. Mezmer, *The Flow Experience: The Summa Cum Lousy of Bad Psychology*. <http://flowstate.homestead.com/files/zflowlousy.htm> (accessed 3/20/2008).

³³Ken Ravizza, and Tom Hanson, *Heads-Up Baseball* (Chicago, IL: Masters Press, 1995), 47.

³⁴Andrew Cooper, *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports*. (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publication, Inc., 1998), 33. Michael Murphy, *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sports* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), 86.

³⁵Murphy, *In the Zone*, 11.

inhibition, irrational restraint, and confusion disappear. We are deeply relaxed. Though the body may be exerting itself to its limits and beyond, in flow it does so gracefully.

Flow provides a mystical-practical space for people to *effortlessly* operate even while fully exerting their mental and physical capacities over long periods of time.³⁶ Things seem to simply happen. The whole person functions in concert with unforced rhythm. While in the flow-state we feel that we have a much greater command over ourselves and our environment. Michael Murphy explains that the power and control we feel in the flow experience can be all-encompassing, “At its fullest, the feeling of being in control is a unifying experience involving

the athlete’s entire sense of self, the environment, and even his destiny.”³⁷

Anxiety related to loss of control does not

When our spirit is joined intimately with the life-giving Spirit, it is filled with life; and nothing can limit that life.

- Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man*

exist while flowing. When experiencing this sensation of increased mastery and supreme control, we become free to engage new and more extreme challenges. We are free agents with more “free will” to exert over or into our situation.³⁸

Related to many other characteristic fruits, peakers experience *spontaneous intuitive action*. They spontaneously and intuitively react to their circumstances. In keeping with this, when athletes make extraordinary plays they do so spontaneously, fluidly without reflection upon prior instruction or practice.³⁹ This does not negate their training, it transcends it. In flow, appropriate responses happen naturally with appropriate timing.

³⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

³⁷Michael Murphy, *In the Zone*, 20.

³⁸Maslow, *Religions*, 67.

³⁹Murphy, *In the Zone*. 24.

Many interviewees detail the significance of instinct. Hockey great Wayne Gretzky had an uncanny ability to instinctively go where the puck would be next. This provided him with a great advantage over other players. A master writer or poet regularly takes intuitive turns ultimately leading to a masterpiece composition. With regularity we witness baseball's outfielders sprint to the wall, leap and snag would-be homeruns. The most fluid, stirring speeches ever given have simply flowed from the mouth of the speaker, the weight of their words magnified – *I have a dream*. This *dream* idea was not intended to be the center of Dr. King's speech. Intuitive initiative leads the way for extraordinary spontaneous responses in the midst of flow. Elite athletes acknowledge this leading and are careful not to disrupt it.⁴⁰

While totally absorbed we *lack self-consciousness*. We have no psychic attention-energy left to be self-conscious. Self-interference is neutralized when we completely focus.⁴¹ Worry, doubt, fear, and low self-esteem subside. Deep focus neutralizes self-interference.⁴² The person has no attention left to experience anxiety about the way he perceives himself, or is perceived by others. Negative self-talk and self-condemnation disappear. Csikszentmihalyi explains this loss of self-consciousness is not a loss of self, or of consciousness, but a loss of consciousness *of self*.⁴³ While flowing we are actually more conscious than in any other state.

Emotional buoyancy also marks flow. We are able to embrace emotions without being controlled by them. We are connected, emotional, but buoyant, floating, gently bobbing within our circumstances - floating. We process and integrate positive and

⁴⁰Ibid, 26.

⁴¹Gallwey, *Inner Game of Work*, 44.

⁴²Tim Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work*, (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001), 44.

⁴³Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64.

negative emotion without slipping from flow. We have seen this buoyancy or lack thereof in competition many times. One player or team maintains consistent composure and comes away victorious while the other player or team falls apart becoming emotionally tense.

Peak-experience grants a sense of *self-transcendence*, a detachment of sorts. The sensation resembles a lack of self-consciousness. Ray Murly speaks to this experience,

We are separate, yet in touch with things around us; we cooperate rather than resist; move forward, rather than backward; look for the positive, gliding past the negative; think of possibilities rather than obstacles. We are open to multiple alternatives. We feel hopeful, and experience a general sense of well being.⁴⁴

Some people have communicated this detachment as an out of body-like experience, as if they or someone else was remotely controlling their body. We become like a spectator watching with amazement the action we are performing.⁴⁵ We are unbound from things that normally tether us down.

**For the love of God is always
flowing into us with new gifts.
- Jan van Ruusbroec, *The Little
Book of Enlightenment***

Lastly, while consumed with the moment, we experience an *altered sense of time*. Our sense of duration of time gets warped as hours pass by in what feels like minutes, and minutes stretch out to what seems like hours.⁴⁶ We move with lightening quickness or seemingly in slow motion. Time integrates into the experience. It mysteriously warps as if it were under our control.

⁴⁴Ray Murly, *In the Zone: Making Winning Moments Your Way of Life* (Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers, 1995), 21.

⁴⁵Cooper, *Playing in the Zone*, 117.

⁴⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

Flow is a phenomenon practically everyone acknowledges but few can clearly or sufficiently articulate. Even fewer connect it with Christian spirituality. This chapter has given us a sense of flow's nature, elements, and characteristic fruit. Having established and described flow we may begin more fully integrating it with Christian spirituality. To introduce Christian spirituality as sacred flow it's only sensible that we start with Jesus. The next chapter shares something crucial and revolutionary that may not have occurred to you until reading this book – Jesus flows.

being formed by God's flow

1. Think about times you have experienced flow. Did you sense God's presence? As you reflect over these experiences ask God to reveal himself within them. Going forward, give attention to God's presence as you experience flow.
2. Take some time to reflect over the terms *rhythm* and *flow*. If needed, invite God to redefine these terms in your context. How does God want to use these ideals to set you free in his flow?
3. What are the elements of your daily life? What anchors your rhythm? What fruits are born from giving attention to these elements? Give God permission to reset, reframe, or reprioritize these elements?

4

Revelation

Jesus Flows...

For From Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
- Romans 11:36

The Word always flows!
- Meister Eckhart, *The Granum Sinapus*

My alarm rings...again...

...awake. I stumble to the kitchen to make coffee before falling asleep again. Get dressed.

A shower is out of the question, I woke too late. My momentum picks up to hurry. Wake the kids. Fumble through their drawers and get them dressed. Coax the kids to eat quickly and brush their teeth...and hair. Slug coffee. Hurry. Quickly change at least one kid's shirt soiled with breakfast residue. By now I'm sweating. Troll for their shoes. Get their shoes on them and get them out the door.

"Get in your car seats. Come on guys, put the lizard down and get in the car... No!....you didn't....you did...Aww man...you know to pee in the potty not in your pants. @\$%*(\$^# (twice). Hurry, let's go back inside and change your pants."

Find more pants...and socks. Change pants and socks. Sweat more. Back to the car. Go. Sigh...exhausted...and hungry...I forgot to eat breakfast.

Sound familiar?

I feel like 98% of my life can be lost in some form of hustle and bustle if I am not careful.

My movement becomes a blur without focus or intention, without flow. Any restful rhythm I experience, spiritual or otherwise, gets sidetracked quite easily.

Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus never hustled....or bustled? He kept a rhythmic pace. In addition, he always had sufficient ability and energy to carry out what each situation

**The truly spiritual man
is he that sees God in all
things all things in God.
- William Law
*The Devout life***

demanding of him. His restful rhythm was well established and maintained. It seems that if anyone should have hurried it's a messiah who had the span of about three years to get his message across in order to save the world. He simply did not hurry, more to the opposite. He told stories and spent a lot of time with sick people and friends. He never pretentiously showed off divine ability or energy. He moved rhythmically with care.

Jesus' rhythmic lack of hustle and bustle and his humble wielding of ability and energy offer us hope. He tuned in to another paradigm regarding his perception of time and activity. He moved with grace and peace guided by his Father. He simply flowed attuned to the Father. As his followers, friends, brother and sisters, co-heirs, and carriers of his Spirit, our birthright is to live as he did.

Jesus is the flow

Paradise was lost when our original ancestors surrendered their divine Source. They were given more than adequate supply in a glorious lush garden. They floated and flowed in relationship with God their provider. The Tempter then offered the undeniable; self-sourcing, something beyond intended human capacity. They had an opportunity to be like God determining good and evil, right and wrong, a capacity difficult to refuse. Conversely, they were meant to freely flow in the life of God allowing him to make value judgments and determine direction.

Their independence would secure creative control of their lives...or at least the illusion of it.

They would become their own creators and life-givers.

In striking out on their own they lost their Source. The life-giver, their ultimate provider, separated himself from his rebel children. They lost touch with the *Logos*; God's life, wisdom, creative energy, and revelation.

The *Logos* is the flow that is both of God and from God. John opens his gospel account referring to Jesus as the *Logos*,

In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.¹

The *Logos* serves as God's agent performing the creative will of the Father. George Maloney affirms this, writing, "All things are created through the Logos, through whom the creative will of the Father flows."² Leonard Sweet writes, "Every religion has a 'root metaphor' that gives it depth and substance...For the Christian it is the *Logos*."³ Metaphorically and more, Jesus serves as both the substance and the agent of the *Logos* – God's creative flow.

Historically, the Greek term *logos* has carried several meanings. The English term *word* only hints at its capacity. In Greek philosophy *logos* was understood as the coherent universal cosmic principle of order and reason, the unifying force of the universe.⁴ It was to thank for humankind's rational capacity. In Jewish thought the *logos* referred to God in action, particularly

¹John 1:1-5, 14.

²George Maloney, *Discovering the Hidden Reality: A Journey into Christian Mystical Prayer* (Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul, 2004), 116.

³Leonard Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1994), 62.

⁴F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 29.

in creation, revelation, and redemption.⁵ They also understood it as personified wisdom, the thought of God. The *Logos* is the self-expression of God, more than a single word; it is the whole message that reveals God.⁶ In the Gospel of John we read that the *Logos* served as the agent of creation and later was incarnate in creation.⁷ Integrating these ideas we could say the *Logos* is the divine Intent, the ultimate Wisdom, the Reality, divine Cause, the Source, the Almighty Breath, the creative Energy, and the eternal Agent.

The New Testament adds another profound dimension – the *Logos* is a person, Jesus. He is personable and personal. He is intimate, inviting, and compassionate. Jesus is the culmination of the integration of all things *logos*. All things emanate from him, are for him, and return to him.⁸

Jesus *is* energy. This relates to the *Logos* as the Source and the Cause. John describes the *Logos* as both the life and the light. John writes, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”⁹ This *Logos*-life light became human. He is the divine energy flow from God lighting up all of creation including its primary creatures - us. Integrating many of the metaphoric identities assigned to Jesus into the term *Logos* Evelyn Underhill writes,

The Logos, which is in essence the *energetic expression* of the Divine Nature, creative Spirit ever seeking to penetrate and mould the material world, he describes as Light struggling with darkness, as the “Life of men,” pouring itself out from the fountain of Godhead like “living water”; as the Bread which feeds man, the Paraclete which perpetually helps and enlightens him, the Door through which finite returns to infinite; the living, growing Vine of which men are but the branches; and at the same time as the personal Son of God, the Saviour and Shepherd of Souls. This richly-various manifestation of Eternal Reality, he says, broke out through mankind in its perfect and

⁵Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 29.

⁶Barclay Newman, and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on The Gospel of John* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980), 7.

⁷Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 62.

⁸Colossians 1: 15-17, Revelation 21:6.

⁹John 1:4.

“saving” form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. There the divine energy found its perfect thoroughfare, and appeared “in the flesh.”¹⁰

Sweet affirms Underhill and the *Logos* as an energetic expression fittingly conveying the *Logos* as an, “energy releasing event and essential for the emergence of life, biological or spiritual.”¹¹

Logos-light flowed into the world as Jesus. John writes that Jesus is the Light that enlightens everyone. Jesus comes offering not only God’s life but revelation, discovery, and awakening – light. His flow illuminates everything in its path, unmatched by the darkness that comes against it. God-light brings God’s reality.

Jesus embodies Trinitarian energy – flow. Theologian Miroslav Volf states that in Jesus’ incarnation the interflow of the Trinitarian energy released “outbound flow” into humanity.¹² He represents divine life in human form and offers us his form of life.¹³ Jesus is the full flow of God made human, both as the possessor and giver of God’s life.¹⁴ As a person of the Trinity, Jesus has and will always flow. He has interflowed with the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally – One God, three persons, both divisible and indivisible. He enjoys perfect union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity being distinct identities participate in and with one another to the extent that all is united, shared, and mutually exchanged.¹⁵ Jesus flows forth

¹⁰Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (New York, NY: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD., 1913), 222.

¹¹Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality*, 68.

¹²Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, eds. *God's Life in the Trinity* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2006), 11.

¹³Wilson Paroschi, *Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:18)*. 2006, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006), 39.

¹⁴Colossians 2:9, Colossians 1:15-17, 19.

¹⁵This accommodates the concept of perichoresis (mutual interpenetration) – individuality and co-penetration of life, and appropriation - each person of the Trinity involved in every outward action of the Godhead. Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, Second Edition ed. 1997, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 299.

from the Trinity as the *Logos* exposing and expressing God as well as granting us access to the Godhead.¹⁶

The *Logos* flows offering us divine insight, supreme wisdom. Through Jesus, God invites us to fully receive and give ourselves to his eternal current. Astonishingly, we carry Jesus, the *Logos*-flow, within us. In a mysterious but real sense, we have joined the interflow of the Trinity.¹⁷ The flow richly dwells in us and us in him.

Jesus flows

For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.
John 3:34-35

In addition to the profundity of Jesus *being* flow, Jesus in his humanity modeled rhythm and flow with his Father as a way of life. In doing so, he demonstrated authentic humanness, the way God intended us to live. He spent his time doing a myriad of natural and supernatural activities moving rhythmically within the confines of a mostly typical human life for his era. He walked a lot, worked a lot, he ate, slept, celebrated, worshiped, etc. He spoke publicly and spent plenty of time with friends and in silence. Jesus repeatedly pulled away to be alone with the Father. His unrushed rhythm modeled to us a healthy way of life. He did everything in tune with and empowered by his Father.

Considering Jesus' way of life alongside the elements of flow we see the manner and depth of his flow. Sticking to the elements of flow, the primary requirement for Jesus to flow with the Father is union, connection – *absorption*. He *deeply concentrated* upon the Father and his will. He shared unified purpose or *goals* with the Father. In his relationship with the Father,

¹⁶Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God; One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996), 17.

¹⁷John 14:20. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

he enjoyed constant *feedback* and conversation. He was *challenged* or tested in various ways throughout his earthly life. Lastly, he was *fully present* to people and tasks.

We don't need to read very much of the New Testament to glean that Jesus lived in perfect union with his Father. John's gospel records many of Jesus' sayings related to union or mutual indwelling with the

Father. He not only claims that God sent him but that God is with him. More so, Jesus reports that he is *in* the Father and the Father is *in* him. He declares that

God has given to the earth the breath which feeds it. It is his breath that gives life to all things. And if he were to hold his breath, everything would be annihilated. His breath vibrates in yours, in your voice. It is the breath of God that you breathe – and you are unaware of it.

**- Theophilus of Antioch
*Three Books of Autolycus***

if you have seen him you have seen the Father. He boldly claims to possess the glory of God and oneness with him.¹⁸ Jesus understood himself to be absorbed in the Father yet distinct and vice versa.

Jesus appreciated the elements and benefits of spiritual union with the Father. He surrendered his divine privileges, choosing to operate in unison with the Almighty. He had been given the mission and privilege of flowing forth from his Father every moment of his earthly existence. His flow took the form of a fully awakened and attuned human.

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.'
John 5:19

Many texts in the gospel of John particularly, support the idea of Jesus flowing. The verse just above doesn't communicate subordination but unity of action or harmony. The son

¹⁸John 14:11, 20, 6:57, 12:45, 8:29, 17:22.

followed in his Father's footsteps like an exceptional apprentice.¹⁹ Jesus, deeply concentrated upon the Father, chose to do whatever the Father initiated, approved, or did himself. They operated in perfect concert with one another.

*I can do nothing on My own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just,
because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.*
John 5:30

*As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father,
so he who eats of Me, he also will live because of Me.*
John 6:57

Jesus stressed his complete abandonment to the initiation and authority of the Father on several occasions. He actually says he does *nothing* without the Father. What he does, he does in connection with and empowered by the Father. His life comes directly from the Father. He judges with the judgment of the Father because his role is to simply pass along judgment the Father voices to him. He is an agent, a conduit meant to carry out a commission exactly as the commissioner requires.²⁰ Jesus repeatedly claims that he has come to do the will of his Father not his own.

*For I have come down from heaven, not to do
My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*
John 6:38

*Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to
you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.*
John 14:10

The will of his Father serves as Jesus' clear *goal* or *purpose*. Jesus doesn't claim that he does any work "for God." Instead, the Father dwelling in him does the Father's works through him. He claims the works he does are owned by the Father. The Father acts in and through the

¹⁹A.T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. M.D. Hooker. New York, NY: Continuum, 2005), 202.

²⁰Ibid, 229.

person of Jesus. Jesus flows from and for the Father. The Father mediates his life to all of humankind through Jesus.²¹ Jesus' whole life flows.

*So Jesus answered them and said,
"My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me."
John 7:16*

*For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.
John 12:49-50*

Jesus' teaching and spoken words are words given by the Father. He gives perfect and complete expression to the Father.²² The Father even shares with him *how* to say what he says. Jesus flows so tightly with the Father that he understands the tone with which the Father would have him speak. He's fully present to the Father. This constitutes an incomprehensible level of intimacy with the Father.

Jesus' life and ministry aligns naturally and seamlessly with the elements of flow.

deep concentration – upon the Father and people in his presence.
clear goals – the Father's will (love).
challenge-skills balance – set by the Father.
consistent feedback – from the Trinity; Father and Holy Spirit.
autotelic approach – he lived in the present, attuned to the Father.

He was *deeply concentrated* upon the Father. He lived attentively, intrinsically motivated and in *complete harmony* with the Father. His definitive *goal* was the Father's will – love. His *challenge* was to trust his Father through all life, suffering, and death. His *feedback* came intrinsically from the other two persons of the Trinity. He clearly lived *autotelically*. He was present to everyone at all times. He lived each moment mindfully. His mind, body, and movement acted in unison with the Father.

²¹G.E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 285.

²²Ibid.

These elements are evident in many stories in the life of Jesus. They manifest themselves organically. One primary example is Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar. Jesus, tired from his long walk from Judea into Galilee, sits down at a well. A Samaritan woman comes along to pull up some water. Jesus not only acknowledges the woman, he asks a favor – *Give me a drink*. He offers his *full attention* in a discussion that radically changes her life. This was totally adverse to the culture and the woman is readily aware of this.

**Hasten to the springs, draw from the wells.
In God is the wellspring of life,
A spring that can never fail.
In his light is found a light
That nothing can darken.
Desire that light which your eyes know not!
Your inward eye is preparing to see the light.
You inward thirst burns to be quenched at
the spring.**

**- Augustine of Hippo
*Commentary on the Psalms***

Shocked, she responds, "How is it that you a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am Samaritan woman?" Being fully engaged, he betrayed the cultural standards of ignoring her as both Samaritan and a woman.

In tune with the Father and in conversation with the woman, Jesus both exposes his identity and mission. He declares himself the living flow, the Messiah, for whom she and everyone else is waiting. With feedback from the Father, he exposes the woman's wayward lifestyle and offers his life. This simple encounter with the presence of Christ, God's flow, brings alignment with the Father. He draws this outcast into his flow – transforming her understanding of God and self and moving her from resistance to resonance. Leaving the water pot, she goes into the city, despite her poor reputation, to tell of this encounter with Messiah.

Today, we represent both the Samaritan woman and Jesus. As outcasts ignorant of living water, we meet a God who confronts our thirst-driven waywardness and invites us without condition to drink up God's flow. Then, as those containing the flow and living from it, we

courageously move according to a kingdom rhythm that has us touch the untouchables in our cultural context offering them life-giving flow.

The Gospels are littered with examples of Jesus living within the elements of flow. In these narratives, Jesus often exhibits the fruits of flow as well. In addition to living in the elements of flow, Jesus projected all of flow's fruit: *unitive consciousness, self-validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action-awareness merge, inner stillness, effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy, self-transcendence, and time disorientation*. Granted, these

Those who have the wind of the Holy Spirit in their souls glide ahead even while they sleep.

- Brother Lawrence

The Practice the Presence of God

fruits seem more fitting to Eastern religions or new age spirituality, but re-contextualized, they effectively express the way of Jesus. Hopefully any discomfort we have with them will fade after considering them in the context of Jesus' spirituality and our relationship with him.

unitive consciousness

As the agent of creation and its sustainer, the beginning and the end, he consciously understood all things as *connected, interrelated*. He was one with the consciousness of the Father even as he walked the earth. He saw the big picture. In his omnipotent wisdom he very intentionally called seemingly unlikely, even unsavory characters to be his disciples. They were practically nobodies. Peter, a nominally educated stubborn fisherman, eventually receives the keys to the kingdom. These nobodies facilitated a faith in their local community that extends through history up to today. Conscious of where his life is going, Jesus mentions his impending suffering and death on several occasions. Jesus, the sum of all things, flowed in concert and consciousness of the Father's plan and the unity of all things.

self-validation

Jesus' flow *validated his identity* and the mission of his Father. He confessed that his food was to do the will of the Father. His sacred flow with the Father was an end in itself. As noted earlier, many statements in John's gospel reflect that Jesus' validation came in being himself – the son of God. His everyday movement with and in the Father as the *Logos*, the revelatory communication of God, was validating not only for him but those who heard him. Jesus, as the flow, is the beginning and the end....and the middle of all valid things.

uniqueness of identity

Jesus' uniqueness was validated prior to him doing any official "ministry." As Jesus was baptized a dove descended upon him and the voice of God confirmed his exclusive identity as the Son of God. As he flowed with the Father toward the cross, it is clear he grasped his unique identity. Jesus claimed himself as the *path*, the *route*, the *road*, the *gate* to the Father. In Luke's gospel when the council of elders presses him about his identity he admits that he is the son of God, the Messiah. While with his friends Jesus is transfigured and God acknowledges again that Jesus is his son in whom he is well pleased. His flow authenticated and expressed his *unique identity*.

total absorption and action-awareness merge

The next two products of flow are closely related; total absorption and action and awareness merge. Jesus' whole life was one *absorbed in the Father*. Remember, he says that he lived because of the Father. He was absorbed in the Father and the Father in him. Jesus was the Father in human form. Additionally, Jesus did nothing outside of the intention of the Father. He listened to the Father for what to do and when to do it as well as what to say and how to say it.

John writes that the Jews marveled at what Jesus knew of the Scriptures without having studied. This would be impossible without his attention being absorbed in the Father.

inner stillness

Throughout his life Jesus acted out of an *inner calmness* or *inner stillness*. Nothing rattled him. He faced down the evil one for forty days in the desert without losing his cool. When he was questioned about a woman accused of adultery just prior to her being stoned; he stoops, writes in the dirt, and diffuses the whole event with a profound invitation – *let he who has no sin cast the first stone*. When his life is in jeopardy by Pharisee-endorsed assassination attempts, he calmly and quietly slips away. He sleeps in an undersized boat during an oversized storm only to later wake up and calm the storm with a few words. Knowing he faced flogging and execution he didn't meltdown and flee. He wrestled with his role for a moment, but he didn't panic. He was fully attuned to the Father and his ultimate goal – offering new life and union.

effortlessness

Jesus worked *effortlessly* in the power of the Father. He carries out miraculous feats without strain. He feeds over five thousand with barely enough food for three. He turns vats of water into fine wine by simply telling servants to fill the containers with water. He heals countless people without hesitation or strain; including resurrection and the casting out of demons. This is not to say that his ministry was not demanding. In the midst of the demands he moved with grace and peace. He did not cave in to the huge expectations placed upon him. He glided. Even in the garden, in his toughest hour, he processed his fear and pain and moved forward in the will of the Father.

control

We easily perceive Jesus' projection of *control*. He readily wielded authority over the spiritual and physical realms. As already mentioned, he fed crowds, calmed the storm, turned water into wine, healed the sick, cast out demons, walked on water, etc. He ran the money changers out of the Temple as if he owned it. He knew what others were thinking. Perhaps most powerfully, he resurrected the dead on more than one occasion. He knew his life was under the control of the Father. Tuned in to the Father's voice and timing, he was in touch with his story and destiny. His control projected the Father's sovereignty. Ultimately, his control led him to an excruciating death in order to usher in a new heavenly kingdom.

spontaneous intuitive action

Jesus' dependent lifestyle moved him *spontaneously* and *intuitively*. He didn't have a set schedule. He moved as guided by the Father. This Father-funneled movement cost his good friend Lazarus his life...and led to his resurrection to display the glory of God. Jesus knowing of Lazarus' sickness, stalls. He comes when Lazarus is dead to the point of exuding a rotten stench. He explains that his stalling had to do with the Father's guidance and glory.

The divine Logos, who once for all was born in the flesh, always in His compassion desires to be born in spirit in those who desire Him.
- Maximus the Confessor, *On the Divine Names*

Jesus went to dinner parties on a whim. Remember Zacchaeus? Jesus was walking through Jericho when he spots Zacchaeus up in a tree. Jesus invites himself over to Zacchaeus' house for dinner.²³ The Spirit-wind blew him about in a Father-intentioned pattern. In another instance Jesus says he will not go into Jerusalem for a feast day and later decides to go. He sends a disciple ahead to reserve a donkey for the ride. While in Jerusalem he slips away rather than confront a plot to seize him. Jesus intuitively sensed where people were emotionally and

²³Luke 19:1-6.

empathized with them. To a woman suffering from a disease who fought through the crowd to touch his garment, immediately he responds by healing her and affirming her faith.

lack of self-consciousness

Jesus lacked *self-consciousness*. He focused upon the Father rather than himself – not his will but the Father’s be done. He didn’t have high or low self esteem, he had appropriate self-esteem. He valued himself and others properly. He had nothing to prove. He was secure in his identity as a beloved son of the Father. John’s account of the last supper provides an example of Jesus’ *other-consciousness*. He washed the feet of his friends. Jesus, with perfect self-esteem and confidence in where he had come from and where he was going, took on the lowliest job of the day in order to serve his friends and set an example. Soon afterward, he allowed himself to be beaten almost to the point of death only to be later executed as a lowly criminal. He endured this shame not being conscious of himself but of us and our need.²⁴

emotional buoyancy

Jesus’ life portrays *emotional buoyancy*. We get the impression that he was never really high or really low. He expressed intense emotions but did not allow them to control his disposition or actions. We see Jesus wrestle with emotion at times. He wept over Jerusalem, when Lazarus died, and he was genuinely tormented at Gethsemane. Certainly, his desert temptation was an emotional experience. When tempted, instead of giving himself to the emotional manipulation of the devil, he responds with truth from his Father’s words. During his ministry he is headed for suffering and death yet he continues onward with an even emotional keel. In the garden during his final moments of freedom, he is terribly troubled but allows himself to continue in the flow of God’s will. Despite what he encountered, he embraced emotion, processed it, and moved forward without being crippled or overwhelmed.

²⁴Hebrews 12:2.

self-transcendence

Jesus experienced *self-transcendence*. He is the eternal *Logos*, the word, the message of God in human form. Jesus makes claims beyond the standard human. He claimed to be the bread of life, the gate, the life, the way, the truth, the light of the world, etc. Also, as a person of the Trinity his connection with the Father transcended normal humanity. Though fully human, his unity with the Father and his activity following the Father was so intense and thorough that it was other-worldly. Even right now, Jesus mysteriously indwells humanity and heaven, being transcendentally seated at the right hand of the Father and in our hearts. Most significantly for us, Jesus demonstrated the secret to transcending one's self – depend wholly upon the Father. We tap into the ultimate *Self* by looking and living beyond our *self*.

time disorientation

Jesus' displays a unique experience of *time*. He exists inside and outside of time as a person of the Trinity. He is the beginning and the end – the Alpha and the Omega, eternal, and yet present to each moment in time. He is *I AM*. He saturates the time-space continuum bending it at the will of the Father. He altered the course of human history and humanity's destiny in what was likely less than three years of public presence. His death and resurrection happened in a short few days, but affect all of time and eternity.

Experiencing and exhibiting this flow's fruit with relationship to Jesus is our heritage. As we move in the *logos*-flow of God, we will uniquely embody these fruits. Chapter six specifically addresses how, as we flow with Trinity, we experience, exhibit and offer this delicious fruit.

prodigal flow

Jesus' parable about the lost son, popularly called *The Prodigal Son*, would more astutely be titled *Prodigal Father* or *Prodigal Love*. The term prodigal means *wastefully* or *recklessly extravagant, lavishly abundant*. The father's love in this story is *prodigal*. It is prodigal in his giving the young son his inheritance prematurely. He demonstrates prodigal love by having heartfelt compassion when he sees the returning ingrate ragamuffin son from afar. Unthinkably, he runs to him and kisses him (literally falls on his neck), a very prodigal thing to do. Then, in an unprecedented manner, he calls for the best robe in the house, the family signet ring, shoes, and a homecoming feast. Lastly, the prodigal father leaves the party to meet his disgruntled *uncompassionate* pouting older son whose relationship and inheritance he reassures. Clearly, this father has lost his senses just as his young son returned to his. This story vividly communicates God's prodigal character including his reckless love for us.

**This whole world is pregnant
with God!**

**- Angela of Foligno
Complete Works**

God prodigally flows. The lesson learned in this chapter where all three parables regard something lost is that God's love is extravagant, reckless, and abundant. God wildly flows, intensely and compassionately seeking us, always inviting us home.

God's flow created the universe and all things in it knowing humanity would betray him. Everyone on earth throughout history to this day has benefited from his prodigal flow whether they have acknowledged him or not. He extravagantly flows establishing and sustaining all things. He unremittingly makes this flow available to everyone even those who refuse to acknowledge existence or blatantly disrespect him or his sacrifice. His prodigal presence saturates the earth. Gracefully, he lavishes his *Logos*-life and love perpetually calling people into

deeper experiences of his sacred flow. Jesus' compassion for us goes above and beyond by his serving as the substance of flow, modeling a flowing lifestyle, and empowering our sacred flow.

His flow is unstoppable regardless of our regard or disregard. It penetrates the most unworthy and worst of individuals. If we could really grasp just how prodigal is his flow, many of us would find ourselves outside with the older brother, upset about God's seemingly unjust flow distribution. However, I trust that when he comes out to meet us we would come to our senses and return to the party...and his flow.

Jesus is the prodigal *Logos*-flow given into humanity and into us. Jesus' lifestyle was an archetype. He modeled dependent rhythm and flow with the Father demonstrating to us the only way to be truly human. He lived a super and natural life. Jesus secured for us a level of intimacy with the father that few of us have ever really experienced or expressed. He provides himself as the substance of our sacred flow leading us into his way of life. Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi, Sweet, and other thinkers have tapped into a flow phenomenon that has profound, meaningful spiritual roots. Sacred flow connects flow with Jesus, creating opportunity for a mystical-practical, ancient-future Christian spirituality. The second current, chapters 5 through 7, uses this well-founded connection to frame our faith as sacred flow.

being formed by God's flow

1. Consider what it means for Jesus to *be* the flow, the *substance* of God, from God. How does this change the way you perceive your Christian Spirituality?
2. Does your life reflect the *dependent flow* of Jesus? Listen hard for the Spirit's voice of peace and guidance. Consider what it means that the *Logos*-energy of God resides in you.

3. Look around for God's *prodigal* flow - reckless, extravagant divine love that shows no favoritism. Embrace it for yourself and ask God to reveal to you how to love others with prodigal love.

The Second Current

Framing Faith in the Flow

5

Incarnation

... and We Can Too

Indeed, truly believing in Jesus, and therefore living in him, means also living in God, i.e., living in that flow of life that Jesus shares with his Father. This makes all other kinds of living seem unreal.
- Demetrius R. Dumm, *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus*

Ancient Celtic Christians were known for their holistic spirituality including intimate community and personal association with nature. They believed the spiritual realm remained closely connected with the material realm. God is near. The two realms touched at “thin times” or in “thin places.” Thin times were communal times of celebration and mourning like weddings and funerals, or time spent alone in *thin* places. Thin places included mountains, wells, the homes of a faithful people, or places deeply connected with Celtic history like the Isle of Iona. The Celts made a point to pay attention to these thin times and places hoping to remain on the margins or edges experiencing the spiritual and the material world simultaneously.¹

Every place and time is *thin*. Sacred flow embraces life in the margins or on the edges, but recognizes every time and place as potentially *thin*. God’s incarnation invasion in Christ has made every time and place thin, so thin in fact, no boundary truly exists. We are *one* with he who

¹Timothy Joyce, *Celtic Christianity: A Sacred Tradition, a Vision of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 25, 154.

serves as the gate, the gatekeeper, and the key to each realm. The vastness of God and our puny human capacity make the distance between us fatten up to *seem* thin.

becoming pragmystic

A bitter irony exists in typical Christian communities today. Much time, money, and heartache is spent by ministries and individuals attempting to get their faith community or themselves “closer to God.” Instead of moving out into the community as ministers of reconciliation most spend their time attempting to *get* what they *already* possess – union with

God. You may have driven past a church sign displaying a statement like this, “If you feel distant from God, who moved?” Clearly, God did not move away, so the separation is of your

**Just as wherever birds fly they
always encounter the air, so also
wherever we go or wherever we are,
we find God present.**

- Frances de Sales

Introduction to the Devout Life

doing. Many say it is presumptuous, even arrogant to assume you have arrived with regard to sustained union with God. Because we don’t experience this union every moment does not preclude its reality. On the contrary, our mutual indwelling spells out an undeniable intimate unconditional union with God. A. W. Tozer acknowledged this irony more than a half a century ago,

God dwells in His creation and is everywhere indivisibly present in all His work. This is boldly taught by prophet and apostle and is accepted by Christian theology generally. That is, it appears in the books, but for some reason it has not sunk into the average Christian’s heart so as to become a part of his believing self. Christian teachers shy away from its full implications, and, if they mention it at all, mute it down till it has little meaning.²

Jesus declares the idea of his followers ‘getting closer to God’ redundant. Jesus tells his friends, “When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in

²A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), 77.

me, and I am in you.”³ We have ingested the flow and he had ingested us. Jesus’ people are simultaneously housing God and being housed by God. God envelopes us like oxygen and permeates us like the water in our cells. This union explains our ability to exude his spiritual fragrance. Jesus brought union, a union to be experienced, celebrated and shared.

We live and move in him, can’t get away from him!
Acts 17:28

This natural longing we have for intimacy is better articulated as the desire for a more explicit realization or awareness of the union we possess. The biblical assertion to draw near to God so that he will draw near to you speaks to experienced union rather than spiritual-spatial proximity.

We focus too much on ourselves, how we superficially feel about God, or what we vaguely perceive rather than living into the reality of what God has done and is doing. We employ innumerable strategies, ploys, programs or tricks to coax God back to us or for us to strain toward him. Our knowledge of union and how to lean into it has left us.

Christian mystics have long sought to authentically experience God, requiring much more than appropriate strategy or pious behavior. For centuries they have devoted their time and focus to directly experiencing the Source of all things. Unfortunately, most of our renowned mystics are dead and hallowed or tend to be tucked away in monasteries baking bread and making organic jams. Out in the mainstream, Christian spirituality has been de-mysticized.

If we are going to truly experience the sacred flow of Jesus we must be familiarized or re-familiarized with Christian mysticism. This remembrance should resolve any tension we have regarding mysticism. For many mainstream Christians today, mysticism is too reminiscent of distant age-old Catholicism, the New Age movement, Eastern religions, or uncomfortable

³John 14:20, New Living Translation.

versions of Christianity. The word brings imagery of ecstatic trance, monks, etc. Mysticism doesn't require us to turn the lights low, light candles, incense, chant, and pray untold hours hoping for an out of body experience. This is exactly what I want you to shake from our mind. Even if we may think of mystics as neat, intriguing, devoted people, we tend to keep them on the fringe. Mysticism seems too eccentric, spiritually volatile, or uncontrollable to give it ground in the center of Christian spirituality.

Ironically, Jesus is the core of Christian mysticism. The mystic means to tap into Jesus' divine life. Certainly, experiencing and expressing Jesus can be volatile, uncontrollable, uncomfortable, and sometimes lead us to the fringe. Nonetheless, the notion of returning Jesus to the center of Christian spirituality should be welcomed.

The Christian faith claims that the resurrected son of God lives within humanity individually and corporately. His Spirit/wind teaches, guides, counsels, and comforts them from the inside and out. Equally mystical and mysterious, God has placed his followers in himself.

Paul explains to the Colossians that they have died (spiritually) and their real life is hiding with Christ inside

Authentic Christian mysticism is nothing but a living of the Gospel at a deep level of consciousness.

- William Johnston, *Mystical Theology*

God.⁴ We are present to heaven and earth every moment of our existence. Experiencing and expressing this mutual indwelling here on earth serves as the substance of Christian spirituality. Ours is mystical faith no matter how we attempt to rationalize, normalize, or humanize it. It's mysticism grounded in our humanity. I'm sure you have heard the following before, but it needs to be restated here,

To be a Christian is to be a mystic.

⁴Colossians 3:4.

Providing some history and definition or description of Christian mysticism will be helpful. At the root of the term mysticism is mystery; in both its origin and definition. The term mystery, *mysterion* in Greek, refers to a secret, a mystery, to shutting one's mouth.⁵ Mystics intentionally and intensely probe the mystery that is God. Broadly, the full identity and availability of God, the extent of his participation with us and vice versa, is this mystery's core content.

Insight into this mystery lies at the depths of the written word of God. A read through does not suffice. Mystics desire and demand more than a read through and legalistic following of the biblical text. They desire to experience the full embrace offered by the text's author. Mystics believe the biblical text offers a glimpse of a flowing, actively creative God. This is not to minimize the value of the Scriptures. The text serves as a foundation, God's words transcribed, a guide, and a diving board. Inanimate biblical words supernaturally inspire and empower when truly illuminated by the Animator of all things.

Historically, three primary themes have dominated Christian mysticism: mystery, union, and love. We addressed the ultimate mystery already – God. Mystics desire and seek God and his love through union. Love serves as mysticism's goal, method, and result. Experienced union with God is where love is realized. As we experience loving union with God we are compelled to love without restraint in an untold number of practical ways.

Throughout the centuries mysticism has addressed different dimensions of God's mystery, union, and love. *Apophatic* mysticism asserts that God exists beyond words, wisdom, light or any other human concepts. Knowing him leads us to an unknowing and a darkness so bright we cannot bear it. Despite this very strange paradox we seek to know, love, and experience God as fully as possible. *Cataphatic* mysticism affirms that we can relate to God

⁵Rick Meyers, *e-Sword* (Equipping Ministries Foundation: Franklin, TN, 2005), mystery.

through all that is created with the understanding that God himself is bigger than any category. He is incomprehensible. Again, we find ourselves receiving from God anything he offers of himself; self-knowledge or presence.

Effectively, Christian mysticism boils down to presence, God's presence. We desire to directly experience and express the intimate presence of God that Jesus has secured for us. Mysticism provides an opportunity and expectation for spiritual discovery. This discovery transforms us again and again as we continually seek to know God, his presence...and our authentic selves in light of his presence.

Jesus was a *pragmystic*; both a pragmatist and mystic. He lived the human life fully attuned to the divine. Many limit his mysticism to ecstatic experiences like the voice of God at his baptism and the transfiguration.

Jesus' mysticism was grounded in the attention he lent to the presence of the heavenly Father moment by moment coupled with his daily encounters with

However far we may be drawn into the divine spaces opened up to us by Christian mysticism, we never depart from the Jesus of the Gospels. On the contrary, we feel a growing need to enfold ourselves ever more firmly within his human truth.

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin
The Divine Milieu

people. He flowed from the Father in everything he did and did not do. This mysticism manifested itself in a pragmatic life. He deeply cared for people in a practical manner. He did very natural activities (and supernatural activities) while being guided and empowered in an extraordinary way.

Paul was a *pragmystic*. We witness his pragmatism in his letters to churches offering specific encouragement, advice, and correction regarding daily life as a follower of Jesus. Nonetheless, the foundation of his pragmatism was his mysticism. As with Jesus, we often relegate Paul's mysticism to a couple ecstatic experiences, instead of a way of life he modeled,

wrote about, and hoped to pass on to others. The bulk of Paul's writing in the New Testament connects a mystical Jesus with his followers and teaches what can easily be interpreted as a mystical way of life. Paul himself experienced sacred flow. Paul grasps the mysticism of Jesus, embodies it, and passes it on. He asserts that to live is Christ, God wills and acts in him, his life is hidden with Christ in God, and that by faith Christ lives through him. He strains according to the power of Christ within him.⁶ All of these concepts are inherently mystical, rhythmic, and serve as cornerstones of Christianity. Christian mystics throughout the ages have cherished and used Paul's writing to support their mystical theology and experience.

We are meant to live as pragmystics. We have one foot in divine mystery and the other in the earthly trench. Jesus declares we, like him, are in the world not of it. We are to live consciously aware of God's enveloping presence as we do all that we do in this world. Pragmysticism is a way of life in the mundane as much as anywhere else. It recognizes our transcendent-immanent God in the practical: lunch break, bathing our kids, going for a jog, reading a book, camping, having coffee with a friend, commuting, and even in boring meetings. Our pragmysticism embraces the living word, the *Logos*, the truth, which sets us free and apart in this world.⁷

A *pragmystical* perception of spirituality leads us to engage the mystery of our union with God (and other mysteries) as part of our daily life. We will never nail these mysteries down, but this is not the point. Wrestling with these unfathomable mysteries regularly serves as needed cardiovascular exercise. Our heart needs the workout. We rhythmically engage, ponder, and process what it means to be indwelt by God, and vice versa as we go about our earthly life. We grapple with what it means to experience God in each moment and have Christ live his life

⁶Philippians 1:21, Philippians 2:13, Colossians 3:3 - 4, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:29.

⁷John 8:32.

through ours uniquely. In the midst of this, our prag mysticism works itself out in our being led by the Spirit – a leading that is far more ordinary, intentional, and intuitive, than ecstatic. Our mystical-practical mutual indwelling sources our prag mystic lifestyle and sacred flow.

embodying the Jesus life

How is sacred flow possible for us? How are we to embody the Jesus life?

Sacred flow becomes possible for us through re-incarnation. Re-incarnation provides the foundation for our prag mystic way. By *re-incarnation* I mean we need to re-cognize or rethink how we have been incarnated by Jesus and how we incarnate him. To incarnate means to *embody*, to *exemplify*, or to *personify*. Incarnating is the making real or concrete of something abstract, in our case the embodying of a supernatural being.⁸ Put simply, Jesus, *the* Incarnation of God, made God real to us. Through flesh and blood, he personified and exemplified the nature, character, and will of God. God, the abstract, became God, the tangible and touchable.

We are real, concrete human beings, meant to express the nature, character, and will of God. We are the ongoing remnant of Jesus. God means to manifest himself through us in tangible earthly ways. No, we are not Jesus, but we possess his life and his life possesses us. Recollecting incarnation means recollecting our true identity; our authentic self that welcomes and makes its self available to the Spirit of Christ within. We recollect our identity in his flow. Incarnating Christ means giving ourselves to a mode of action or a lifestyle in which we are sacred flowing, guided and empowered by God.

⁸Incarnation, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/incarnation>, (accessed 5/15/08).

We need daily re-cognition of two incarnations. First, we need to bring back to the forefront of our minds that Jesus' life was the embodied life of God. Secondly, we need a fresh

and constant "knowing" of the reality

that Jesus has taken up residence in us

and that we have been put into him (and

the Father).⁹ Gospel writer John tells us

**The place in which we are invited to dwell
is the infinitely mysterious center of the
Covenant, for Jesus Christ is the Covenant.**

**- Hans Urs Von Balthasar
*Christian Meditation***

that those who say Jesus is God's son abide in God and God in them.¹⁰ These dynamic

incarnations represent God's redemption of humanity and our resulting union, supplying

theological foundation for our sacred flow. Being so intimately connected with God puts us in a

position to live in the rhythm and interflow of the Trinity.

Incarnation serves as the centerpiece of the new covenant in Christ. We don't have much context for covenants in our culture today outside of a letter from our homeowner's association saying the height of our grass has violated the association's covenant. The term has lost its significance and spiritual weight.

Covenants in early Jewish culture were extremely serious and nothing less than sacred. A covenant went beyond a simple agreement or contract. The term comes from the Hebrew *berith*, meaning "to bind or fetter; a binding obligation."¹¹ The covenant often represented the ultimate expression of unconditional love between two parties. It signified two parties fusing together, becoming one, and establishing themselves in league with one another forever. Covenants also represented a treaty-like agreement established between a dominant nation and a much weaker

⁹John 14:20.

¹⁰1 John 14:15.

¹¹Malcolm Smith, *The Power of the Blood Covenant: Uncover the Secret Strength in God's Eternal Oath* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2002) 12.

one. The more powerful nation established a covenant agreeing to integrate rather than annihilate the weaker nation, tribe, or clan.

Covenants were cut, literally. Ceremonially, the two parties, with arms or hands cut and bound together, walked as one through the blood of a sacrifice that was split in half and laid out on the ground. It was a bloody affair. Altogether, covenant making required representatives from two parties, a mediator, a sacrifice to be split, and promises or laws. The parties established and spoke promises detailing their commitment to one another. The ceremony ended with a celebration including a covenant feast.

Jesus alone mediated this eternal covenant with us in that he embodied all of the mediating roles. He was a perfect representative of God and of humanity, the eternal priest-mediator, the perfect eternal sacrifice, and the new eternal law.¹² He was God and human, mysteriously a perfect representation of both. To make the covenant, the best of God and humanity was put forth. The incarnation of Jesus allowed him serve as God's representative and ours as well as our sacrifice.

The writer of Hebrews points to Jesus' uniqueness as our eternal perfect priest. Jesus always lives to advocate and intercede for us. Almost comically the writer of Hebrews says that there were great numbers of priests in the former covenant because death prevented them from perpetually interceding on behalf of the people. Though God's Law was perfect, imperfect men offered sacrifices for forgiveness. Jesus' sinless flow with the Father also qualified him to mediate for us. He was made perfect forever, fathered and appointed by God, and came *after* the Law to establish an unending grace covenant.¹³

¹²Hebrews 7-10.

¹³Hebrews 7:23, 24, 26, 28.

Jesus' served as a suffering sacrifice once to take away sins eternally. This is a vast improvement on the prior agreement in which sacrifices needed to continually be made only to *cover* wrongdoing. Once a year the priests ceremonially carried out God's instructions to *cover* the sins of the people. Then comes Jesus, the blameless lamb of God who *takes away* the sins of the world. He removed sins, literally *lifted them up*. Another representative picture here is that of *sailing away*. Jesus sailed away our sins. The letter to the Hebrews says he did so by offering his untainted blood once on heaven's original altar, not an earthly facsimile. He appeared before God on our behalf to take care of this issue completely. This notion is radically different than constant sacrifice and constant asking of forgiveness for temporary covering.¹⁴ The final aspect of this new and exciting covenant, the Jesus law, will be addressed later in the chapter where a whole section is dedicated to it.

God's *new* covenant in Christ was new in that nothing like it had existed before. God had not related to his creation in the way that he would through this *new* covenant. He would possess his people in a new way. Jesus' return home resulted in him incarnating us and us him, thereby establishing him as our eternal internal promise keeper and the substance of our sacred flow. The new covenant was an unthinkable dream – YHWH...God unspeakable, un-writeable, and untouchable would now be one with his people. How could it be?

We are tasked with humbly receiving this radical provision. The only way into God's new covenant is receiving. We receive our way in. Not only to enter the covenant but to reign in life we must routinely receive God's abundance of grace and his gift of being made right with him.¹⁵ Through *receiving* this covenant we become eternally fused, one with God, adopted as sons, daughters, and heirs.

¹⁴Hebrews 9:24-26, 10:10.

¹⁵Romans 5:17.

Where does this covenant talk fit into sacred flow? Why is it important?

Remember, *covenants define relationships*. A new covenant of incarnation means a new shape for our relationship with God. In the former covenant God worked primarily outside in and now he works primarily inside out. The new covenant flows. Sacred flow comfortably fits within the shape of our new agreement with God.

planted in Christ

Some years ago my parents purchased a condominium on a beach in Florida. In doing so, they included my sisters and I as “owners” with reference to the Condo. As owners, by virtue of our parents, we retained the same rights and

privileges as they did but without paying for them.

Our relationship with the management at the Condo is

the same as our parents. My sisters and I simply had

to receive our ownership. This was weird at first. I would go to the fully furnished condo and

think to myself, “I am an owner of 16B...This is my couch...this is my silverware...that is my

boogie board...this is my view of the ocean, that is my designated parking spot, etc.” It seemed

surreal, really humbling. My only reasonable response was to receive the gift, be thankful, and

use it respectfully. My parents were happy to include us. By being included “in them” I

essentially became one with them as an owner of 16B despite being gifted in, having not paid

anything. I was “in them”.

**The soul is in God and God is in
the soul as a fish is in the sea and
the sea in a fish.**

**- Catherine of Siena
*The Dialogue***

This designation holds true for the Christian *in Christ*. Our being put into Christ provides us with all of the rights, relationships, privileges and benefits Jesus possesses. Jesus becomes what we need when we need it. God put us into Christ and Christ took on the role of being our

wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.¹⁶ Perhaps the most significant of our benefits is unconditional union. Our being placed into Jesus' death and resurrection provided a way for humanity to exist in perfect union with the God.

Jesus becoming separate from God, literally becoming the problem, allowed his followers to become whole and wholly united with God.

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,
that we might become the righteousness of Christ in Him.
2 Corinthians 5:21*

Jesus made us right *by* providing us with his “rightness.” He became our representative wrongdoer making us as “right” with God as he is right with God. Righteousness returns us to our rightful place.¹⁷ By his rightness becoming ours, we wrongly consider ourselves sinners (though we still sin). We are saints or holy ones, righteous, forgiven and free, who sin from time to time. We are right and rightly joined with God. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, we are *one spirit with him*.¹⁸ Spiritual dualism ended when Jesus removed everything that separated us from God and God planted us *in Him*.

In his letter to the Romans and Galatians, Paul articulates when and how we are placed into Christ.¹⁹ Mysteriously, we too were crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. Our crucifixion and resurrection *with* Christ made way for our complete union and new way of life. The term *with* in the Greek, *sustauroo*, means to impale in company with.²⁰ Also, this crucifixion with Christ is written in the *aorist* tense in Greek meaning the event was a past occurrence with

¹⁶1 Corinthians 1:30.

¹⁷ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow; What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001) 36.

¹⁸1 Corinthians 6:17.

¹⁹Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20.

²⁰Meyers, *e-Sword*, Galatians 2:20.

lasting effect.²¹ Paul's crucifixion had already happened as he wrote, but the effects were lasting, eternal. Therefore, he may consider himself dead, and not go about attempting to crucify himself again and again. Just as he mysteriously died, he mysteriously rose to a new life in Christ.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

Romans 6:5-8

Paul writes of being baptized into Christ's death, even being buried with him. The primary definition of the Greek term *baptizo* is "to make whelmed," immerse completely, dunk.²² We are dunked into Christ's death. Taking this figuratively, the sacrament of baptism provides a meaningful metaphor. Considering this spiritually, we were mysteriously immersed into Christ and his death. The word

picture related to being united with Jesus *in the likeness of his death* is that of being planted together.²³ The idea is that of being grown along with, closely united, fused, related in nature, firmly united, associated in

**In every place, if you look, His symbol is there,
And when you read, you will find His types.
For by Him were created all creatures,
and He engraved His symbols upon His
possessions.
When He created the world,
He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.
Streams of His symbols were opened,
flowed and poured forth
His symbols on His members.**

- Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*

²¹F.F. Bruce, *Romans* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. C.L. Morris. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 131.

²²Meyers, *e-Sword*, Romans 6:3.

²³Meyers, *e-Sword*, Romans 6:5.

birth or origin, being in close accord, congenial, being of the same birth, or being of the same birth.²⁴ Followers of Christ were mysteriously placed on the cross and then in the ground with or in Christ. This co-planting initiates a union that is paradoxically complete and growing.

Just as we were crucified with Jesus we were also raised with him. He carries us out of death into a new life, real life...his life. Paul writes to the Ephesians that Christ followers have been raised up, resurrected with and in Christ.

But God's mercy is great, and he loved us very much. Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he gave us new life with Christ. You have been saved by God's grace. And he raised us up with Christ and gave us a seat with him in the heavens. He did this for those in Christ Jesus.
Ephesians 2:4-6

Paul claims that we are seated with Christ, in Christ, in heavenly places even as you read this book. Somehow we are here and there simultaneously. What a hopeful mystery! It's our faith that holds onto this union and leads us to live out of it despite not being able to wrap our minds around it. He has taken us into himself...an astonishing provision.

Christ planted in us

In 1990 researchers throughout the world immersed themselves in the Human Genome Project. The project set out to determine the sequencing of human DNA and classify the approximately 25,000 genes in the humane genome. The completed findings of the project were published back in 2003 with additional findings continuing today. This was and is one of the greatest undertakings in modern science. The overarching hope is that by gaining this knowledge, they will be able to influence genes and therefore cure and prevent diseases, as well as enhance general well-being. Ultimately, the project will accomplish this by influencing a person's physical innermost, their fundamental blueprint.

²⁴Connate, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/connate> (accessed 5/23/2008).

Altering someone's genes would essentially be altering them from the inside out.

Whatever you changed in their root fundamental code could manifest itself in myriad of external ways. It might affect seemingly inconsequential superficial characteristics such as eye or hair color. However, it may be as consequential as saving a person's life if you altered genes that would prevent a fatal disease from germinating. Additionally, gene alteration may internally prevent unnecessary psychological ills. These alterations made at our deepest physical level when played out into our practical lives save us or significantly alter our lifestyles.

God has recreated and rejuvenated our spiritual genome. He has altered our innermost. He has injected his divine *Gene* into us. This genetic renewal and saturation carries with it substantial far-reaching consequences. This genome rebirth and continual enhancement finds its way into most of our practical life. It does not modify our physical genes but modifies how we live from them. More specifically, our spiritual genetics may advise which jeans we wear and where we go while wearing them. It doesn't alter our eye color but certainly how we appreciate and use our eyes.

This (spiritual) genetic revolution was God's secret plan for ages. God's spiritual genome project via the promised new covenant God was shrouded in mystery alluded to in the writings of the prophets. The specific timing and shape of the agreement was not commonly known. Expectation soared but true understanding was minimal. The apostle Paul discloses the mystery in his letter to the Colossians.

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
Colossians 1:25-27

Many scholars believe the mystery Paul speaks of here is the opening of salvation to the non-Jew. This may be true but another mystery proves fundamental and far-reaching. The mystery, or at least a portion of it, is as Paul clearly states, “Christ in you.” This was and is beyond what anyone could have imagined – Yahweh embedded, inborn, indwelling.

Messiah has come to dwell in and among humankind simultaneously. The term *in* found here in Colossians is a primary preposition indicating a *fixed location*.²⁵ If so, Christ is fixed inside his followers. This fixation is even more profound and compassionate considering our continuing stumbles, foibles, and failures. Even the worst behaved believers, despite their reprehensible behavior, house God’s Spirit. Paul calls the badly behaving Corinthians saints and reminds them (and us) that God had purchased them and therefore they are the physical temple of the living God. This being the case, they are to act like it.²⁶

Paul’s incarnation statement in Colossians resonates with a prophecy given by Ezekiel about six hundred years prior. God foretold of his incarnating us hundreds of years prior to Jesus’ birth. The prophet Ezekiel announced that God would make a new covenant with the people. In this new covenant the people would be made new spiritually, injected with God’s Spirit, and led from within.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart (with new and right desires) and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone (your heart of sin) from your flesh and give you a (new) heart of flesh (obedient heart). I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my Statutes and you will be careful to obey my ordinances (do whatever I command).
Ezekiel 36:25-27

According to Ezekiel, God would provide a cleansing (of sins), a new spiritual identity, a new heart, and His Spirit. First, all of our sin and idol worship is forgiven, taken away by Jesus.

²⁵Meyers, *e-Sword*, Colossians 1:27.

²⁶1 Corinthians 6:19.

God replaces anything and everything we idolize – prioritize above him. He becomes our life.

Our new spiritual identity is the *right* or righteous identity referred to earlier in this chapter.

The heart in this case is literally associated with the center of everything we consider our soul; the inseparable mixture of our emotions, will, and intellect.²⁷ God-responsive hearts replace our stony untrustworthy hearts. The deceitful heart that the prophet Jeremiah and other religious leaders have warned us about has been replaced with a softer God-oriented version.²⁸ We no longer need to live in fear of our heart. Instead, we have the freedom and joy of learning to live boldly from a new heart. God has renewed the seat of our soul.

The Holy Spirit, the very voice of Divine Liberty, must always be like the wind in “blowing where he pleases.” In the mystery of the Old Testament there was already a tension between the Law and the Prophets. In the New Testament the Spirit himself is the Law, and he is everywhere.

**- Thomas Merton
A Letter to Pablo Antonio
Cuadra concerning Giants**

Lastly, the prophecy claims God will send his Spirit to dwell within us so we will do what he leads us to do. God’s indwelling Spirit intends to *cause* us to walk in his ways. God has taken it upon himself to move in and move within those in covenant with him. Ezekiel’s prophecy addresses how God will deal with the wayward spirit of humans, their sin-saturated souls, and their impulsive humanness. He promises to recreate, renovate, and redirect us.

the Jesus law: our freedom to flow

While living in Czech Republic I often got pulled over while driving. Foreigners’ cars had blue license plates while Czechs had white plates. This made foreigners an easy target for corrupt police officers. The police assumed foreigners would have money so they would stop us often for bogus reasons. After a few months driving I learned of a new law that was enacted to

²⁷Meyers, *e-Sword*, Ezekiel 36:27.

²⁸Jeremiah 17:9.

protect foreigners from police corruption. Any legitimate ticket could be paid at the post office. I was pulled over many times after learning of this new law. Cognizant of it, I learned the Czech phrase, “I would like to pay at the Post Office.” When I dribbled out this line to the policemen, immediately they knew that I knew the law...and they would stutter, stammer, and excuse themselves... They would return shortly thereafter and release me without a citation. Once I knew the new law, I immediately began living by it. The new law set me free quite a few times over the years.

Have you ever experienced a law change that set you free? Have you ever had problems adjusting to a law change even though it set you free? You might repeatedly forget the new law. Or you are hesitant to test it. You may even feel false guilt in association with doing what is now actually legal.

All this applies to the law change we are meant to receive through the new covenant in Christ. The new covenant changed the priesthood from the Levites to Jesus, and according to God’s economy when the priesthood changes *the law must change*.²⁹ In opening his gospel, John discloses that the Law was given through Moses and grace and truth have come or been realized in Jesus.³⁰ The new law is *Jesus* who embodies grace and truth. The new law fulfills and overshadows the former, leaving it to fade and become obsolete.³¹ The new covenant that builds upon the last (Mosaic) and released us from it. He mediates to us a superior covenant, not because God or the Law was flawed, but because the people could not keep up their end of the agreement. They consistently betrayed their commitment.³²

²⁹Hebrews 7:12.

³⁰John 1:17.

³¹Hebrews 8:13.

³²Hebrews 7:22, 8:6, 7.

Jesus presents us a new way of thinking of law. Paul writes to the Romans that Jesus was the end or the goal of the law. *The law is a person*. Our death in Christ freed us from our relationship with the Law and united us with Jesus so that we could freely live with and for God by the Spirit.³³ We are not to be anti-Law; we simply no longer have a relationship with it.

The law proved our inadequacy and led us to Jesus and his grace-filled flow. Paul explains law-living puts us under a curse since we cannot possibly keep the law.³⁴ The curse of the law is death. Jesus kept the Law and became a curse in order to redeem and rescue us from the Law.³⁵ Paul writes to the Galatians that the law holds us, protects us, breaks us, and leaves us at the feet of Christ. From there, a faith that flows is to become our new paradigm. We may return to the law paradigm anytime. But in a full-proof manner, the law always results in death leading us to our only hope – Jesus. The letter kills but the spirit gives life.³⁶ We have been birthed out of law-living into *logos*-living.³⁷

*This is a covenant, not of written (or unwritten) laws, but of the Spirit.
The old way ends in death; in the new way, the Holy Spirit gives life.
2 Corinthians 2:6*

We have been released into a new way of living, a new life principle, a new flow – the law of Christ. We are not released into a balancing act of law and grace but into grace alone. Grace *is* the gospel. The Christ-law within us gracefully rules. Christ in us lives to God and as we simply trust him we do as well.³⁸

The Galatian Christian community began sliding into mixing grace-living and law-keeping. Paul wrote to call them back to unadulterated grace, recognizing the indwelling Spirit of Christ as their law of life. They were being duped by false teachers into law-keeping, specifically

³³Hebrews 7:12, Romans 10:4, Romans 7:4, 6, Galatians 2:19, 20, 21

³⁴Galatians 3:10.

³⁵Galatians 3:13.

³⁶2 Corinthians 3:6.

³⁷Romans 7:1-4.

³⁸Romans 6:10.

concerning the need to be circumcised. Paul viscerally responds to this saying he hopes these teachers would mutilate or castrate themselves. Believers were set free to be free...to live, love, and serve others freely in the grace of Christ.

Pragmatically and plainly, the law of Christ is love because he *is* love. The whole Law is summed up in love.³⁹ Matthew records Jesus' explanation that the whole law hangs on these two commands: Love God and love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.⁴⁰ Paul restates this to the Galatians. The love-law of Christ meets and reaches a higher standard than the Law of Moses. It reaches into our spirit, heart, mind, and soul. The law of Christ reaches to our intention and motivation.

As we know, Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses giving full expression to God's standard of holiness.⁴¹ Then, he turns and offers to inject his holiness in us. He gives himself as our law within. He not only implants higher law, his presence naturally empowers our fulfillment of it.⁴² Putting this all together, the "doing" of the new law of Christ comes down to wholly loving God and neighbor as one's self. And this *doing* is done by faith being enabled and empowered by his Spirit. We will dive into his love more in the next chapter.

Paul explains that where the Spirit is, there is liberty...to flow.⁴³ We are to stand firmly in our grace-found freedom. A return to law-living profoundly betrays Christ.⁴⁴ Without liberty sacred flow is impossible. Through our cross-covenant we receive Jesus' earthly relationship with the father. The three primary obstacles to intimacy and flow have been removed: our sin; inherent identity rebellion, our sins; behavioral rebellion, and law-living; self-sufficient legalism. God has set us free for sacred flow.

³⁹Galatians 5:14.

⁴⁰Matthew 22:37-38.

⁴¹Matthew 5:17.

⁴²Romans 6:10.

⁴³2 Corinthians 3:17.

⁴⁴Galatians 2:17, 5:1.

Christ as life

Referring again to Ezekiel's prophecy of the new covenant Ezekiel 36:27 says, "I will put My Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." God claims he will, by his Spirit, emphatically *cause* us to walk in his ways. The verb *cause* in this case literally means "to do or make in the broadest sense or application, bring forth".⁴⁵ Jesus is our source, our cause, our principle of life, the substance of our flow bringing forth his ways. Jesus says, "I am the *way*." He is the path, the street, the route, and even more dynamically he is our *mode* and *means*. No one connects with the Father, experiences the Father, except by means of him.⁴⁶

To the Galatians Paul writes, "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God..."⁴⁷ The old Paul was slain at the cross, embedded in Jesus, and no longer lives. Christ became his way of life. The mystical presence of Christ lived in and through him. Christ did not make Paul a puppet or nullify his personality, but fulfilled him. Paul became more Paul than ever before. In this new life he experienced peace and complete union with God and himself. He recognized that the Spirit of the living God served as his advocate, counselor, teacher, and source of strength. Union with God has been accomplished and a boundless internal source made available to us.

Our doing and working are but the fruit of Christ's work in us.

- Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*

We trust our infinite Source to come through for us, rather than us constantly calling on our own strength. God's grace-strength becomes most real in the midst of our utter hopelessness.⁴⁸ We cannot truly befriend grace without coming to grips with the brokenness and

⁴⁵Meyers, *e-Sword*, Ezekiel 36:27.

⁴⁶John 14:7.

⁴⁷Galatians 2:20.

⁴⁸2 Corinthians 12:9.

inadequacy of our self-strength. From our weakness we are better able to see and comprehend his strength.

George Maloney asserts, “We Christians are raised to a new life by possessing a new principle of activity, Christ himself.”⁴⁹ In like manner, regarding resurrection life Thomas Merton clearly and concisely states that Christ manifests himself in us becoming a new source of life, identity, and method.⁵⁰ Christ is not in us to keep us in line, he is the line. Jesus is much more than our personal assistant; he is our way of life.

Our mutual indwelling and its implication serve as a great mystery of the Christian faith. We have the privilege and benefit of access to and empowerment by the interflow of Trinity. As you read this chapter you may have dismissed my point of view as too mystical, out of touch, and far-fetched...or too literal, technical, and reductionist. We may not believe or grasp our spiritual co-crucifixion and resurrection or the resultant union. It may seem impossible or absurd that God himself has not only recreated our spirit but eternally enmeshed his Spirit with ours. We may question the idea that Christ is our life, and that he is the sacred flow within us who not only allows us to flow but leads us to do so. To some extent we will wrestle with these mysteries and their weight throughout our lives.

Our faith bridges the gap. I am asking us to take a significant risk by *faithing* that we are in complete union with God, and by the power indwelling us, we can live in the rhythm and flow of the Father as Jesus did. By faith, we lean into his love, mystery, paradox, and flow.

The just shall live by flow... God's flow.

⁴⁹George Maloney, *The Mystery of Christ in You: The Mystical Vision of Saint Paul* (New York: Alba House, 1998), 31.

⁵⁰Thomas Merton, *The New Man*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, 1961), 167.

Jesus has been established as the *Logos-flow* and our model flow-er. He has embedded himself in us and sent us out in his way of sacred flow. We have been forgiven, made new, united with God, and released into the grace-life. As free flow-ers, we are new creations, partakers of the divine nature, saints – holy ones, children of God, instruments of peace, co-heirs with Christ, ministers of reconciliation, royal priests, lights of the world – revealers, the salt of the earth – seasoning and conservationists, fragrant, and radiant.⁵¹ Establishing our new identity, forgiveness, and freedom begins to frame our faith as sacred flow.

being formed by God's flow

1. Does your life have *pragmystic* balance? Do you overweight the *super* to the point of superstition or passivity? Or do you rely too much on the *natural* leaning toward independence and self-reliance?
2. Spend some time meditating on your mutual indwelling with God. Consider what it means to be and to live *in* God. Also, consider what it means for Christ to live *in* you. Read through Paul's letter to the Ephesians and Romans (especially chapters 4 – 8).
3. Are you free to flow or bound in legalism? Meditate on Christ being your life and what it means to live by faith moment by moment, trusting Christ to live through you. Celebrate your freedom by reading through Paul's letter to the Galatians.

⁵¹2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Peter 1:4, Ephesians 1:1, Galatians 3:26, Romans 12:18, 14:19, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 5:18, 1 Peter 2:9, Matthew 5:14, Matthew 5:13, 2 Corinthians 2:15, John 17:22.

6

Integration

Living in the Elements

Alleluia! light
burst from your untouched
womb like a flower
on the farther side
of death. The world-tree
is blossoming. Two
realms become one.
- Hildegard of Bingen
Symphonia

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one
and only Son into the world that we might live through him.
- 1 John 4: 9

Since early in human history earth, air, fire, and water have been considered the basic elements of the material universe. Ancient historians understood them as fundamental in explaining nature and all things in it. They were recognized as indivisible building blocks for existence and the happenings in the material world. Later, science divided the indivisible. It became common knowledge that tiny particles comprise earth, air, fire, and water. Modern science refers to these rudiments as chemical elements noting one hundred seventeen, most naturally existent on earth. All matter consists of a

combination these elements.⁵² These elements provide foundation and stability for science though many of the elements themselves are unstable. Being able to rely upon the elements as groundwork helps science grow and flourish. This is the case with other fields or realms as well.

Elements serve as components of something larger, more complex. Wisely, in many fields we return to the elements or the basics, the fundamentals, to consider or reconsider more superficial problems

we have or want to avoid in the future.

To maximize our effectiveness, we

must grasp and live in the elements.

Living with reference to the elements

In him he has expressed everything he can do and, most of all, what he wishes to do. Thus all things have been expressed in him, his Son – in that center, which, so to speak is his art...

- Bonaventure

Collationes Hexaemeron

keeps us focused on our foundation while we build, grow, and move forward. We have heard the coach of a struggling team, a leader of a hurting community, or an executive of an ailing company say, “We need to return to the fundamentals. We have lost sight of the basics and we must now return to them.” The elements are the building blocks of both the physical and spiritual realm.

Integrating Christian spirituality with flow’s elements returns us to its roots. The elements lead us back to the focal point of Christianity – *Jesus*. These elements; concentration, presence, goals, challenge-skills balance, and feedback, provide a solid pragmistical foundation making way for our spiritual capacity to organically and authentically flourish. They serve as fundamental building blocks for a flowing faith.

⁵²Chemical element, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/108636/chemical-element> (accessed 12/10/2008).

Turning to frame faith in the flow, we consider the fundamentals Christian spirituality within flow's elements. As with Jesus, the components of flow integrate smoothly with his followers. They don't do so as a rigid religious empirical structure but as a gracious wonder-filled frame facilitating a flowing relationship. The elements are just that, elements, essentials, not flow-laws. They are more like anchors holding and focusing our faith in Jesus. The elements lead us home or back home....to experience deeper intimacy and rhythm with God. Living in the elements cultivates sacred flow. The elements facilitate us in finding God's rhythm, getting inside his beat, living there, and returning there again and again. They provide grounding for our pragmythic sacred flowing faith.

concentration: tapping into the Source

Referring to chapter two, to concentrate is to bridle our attention, to unify it. Concentration is the intentional narrowing of our consciousness. Concentration equals focus. During Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha in Bethany, Mary sits at Jesus' feet concentrating on his every word. Martha becomes increasingly frustrated with Mary's lack of help with preparations to the point that she asks Jesus to reprimand Mary. Jesus responds by saying something of this nature, *only one thing is truly worth your attention, Mary has chosen it and I am not going to interrupt her.*⁵³ The verse encourages Mary (and us) to intensely concentrate upon Jesus, his way and his words. Our doing is meant to flow from our attentiveness to him. So, any buzzing about the house preparing for a party emanates from our reflective consciousness of God. The 'one good thing' is to focus upon Jesus, hang upon him, the word, *logos*. He reveals, revives, creates, and compels us.

⁵³Luke 10:42.

Deep concentration means recollecting a God-consciousness that we lost in life's last tussle; a tussle lasting ten seconds, ten minutes, or ten years. Turning to God sparks renewal and rhythm. Evelyn Underhill asserts that by simplification, removal of distraction, and turning to one's consciousness inward we can unite our rhythm with the rhythm of God.⁵⁴ Deep concentration re-orient's God as our *Source*.

As Jesus perceived the Father as his focal point, we understand the whole Trinity as ours - ours is a Trinitarian concentration. By narrowing our life's focus to the Trinity, our world opens up. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit supply plenty of depth and breadth for our concentration. Their distinct interflow with us in a vast assortment of life's circumstances provides us opportunity to relate and concentrate on each of them individually and as a whole. The mystery of the Trinity itself keeps our concentration acute and open to continuing revelation. We may find ourselves pondering God's identity, character, will, way, or specific activity in a given situation. As we enter the vast expanse of God's perspective via the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we better comprehend and appropriate God's fatherly and motherly love, Jesus' sacrificial compassion, and the Holy Spirit's incessant but gentle breeze.

Concentration leads to faith, clarity, and transformation. While concentrating upon God, we more clearly perceive him, whom God has made us to be, and how he is leading us to live. Our concentration upon him brings revelation, re-orientation, re-imagination, redirection and re-empowerment.

In our Trinitarian concentration, God directs what, who, when, and where we are to give our attention in each moment. Have you ever lived tapped into the Source this

⁵⁴Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*. Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986), 27, 28.

way? You sense God is leading you to pray for a certain person at a certain time, to call them, meet with them...and you don't really know why? This may be a person that has not so much as entered your mind for a decade. Or, in a moment of stillness, you sense God inspiring you to give

attention to something

you have put off for

weeks, even months, or

Attention is power...Attention is the singular act of creativity that is available to each of us every waking moment...We create ourselves by what we choose to notice.

– Dr. Lucy Jo Palladino, *Find Your Focus*

maybe even years. Maybe you have had a hellacious Monday and at some point you paused, took a breath, and asked God to move you from fury to focus...and He does. On several occasions in specific moments I have sensed God leading me to console my family, to give them a word of encouragement, a reassuring hug or a kiss. It is difficult to go wrong responding to that particular spiritual nudge.

Researching for this book proved difficult. It was no small task to re-frame Christian spirituality using flow as both a guiding metaphor and a framework. I found myself studying many directions and at varying depths in those directions. The Bible alone provides infinite depth and story for the task. A wealth of great content surfaced to study, much of it I had to superficially skim. My primary desire was to trust God's direction with regards to when and where to concentrate my study, which stories to use or not use, etc. – to follow his flow in writing about sacred flow.

God may not reveal *why* he has directed our attention in a particular direction at a particular time. Notice above that I did not include *why* with reference to God's leading. On countless occasions I have asked God, "*What was that all about?*"(many times in frustration). Specifically, I have posed this question when I have felt God directed me in

an odd manner, or to or from a particular place. This peculiar direction may be brief, comical, inconsequential or possibly consume years of our lives. Furthermore, we may harbor intense hurt and anger with God about moving us toward or away from a certain place or person. In the midst of our confusion, frustration, or befuddlement, we simply must learn to have faith in his flow, not faith without doubt or tough questions, but faith nonetheless.

The following two stories inspired the question, “*God, what was that all about?*”

I wanted to do something nice for my wife on our tenth wedding anniversary.

What could be nicer than a three night, four day cruise to the Caribbean in December? No kids, just us, the sun, gourmet food, and margaritas. We dropped our kids off with their grandparents and drove excitedly to the port. We boarded the boat and immediately sensed debacle. We got to our room and it smelled musty, like the wet towel at the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper. We soon learned that we were on the smallest, oldest ship in the fleet. Oh no. We literally pondered getting off the boat, bailing, and just staying in a nice hotel for a couple days. Instead, we stayed aboard...big mistake. It stormed the entire trip. The boat rocked for days as passengers literally lost their lunch and their footing in multiple places. Also, when it rains for three days and you are on the smallest ship in the fleet, there is next to nothing to do but eat. To be expected on this ill-fated trip, the food was subpar. So, we spent most of our time watching television in our stuffy cabin. Fittingly, we watched *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* about three times. The icing on the cake – we could not get off the ship in one of our two ports due to wind and at the other port it rained the entire time we were ashore. At least the ship didn't sink. God, I still don't know what that was about.

Joseph loved filmmaking as a kid. Passionate about it throughout his teenage years, he attended film school. As a senior he was specially chosen from among his classmates to direct a short film. The film was good enough to be shopped around Hollywood in hopes of a directing job. Hollywood loved it but told him to go make a feature length film, prove himself on a larger scale. So, Joseph did. It took five long arduous years of fundraising, writing, directing, filming, etc. He finished and returned to Hollywood. They loved the film...and without offering any future financing or a job they told him they couldn't wait to see his next one. Joseph was exhausted and disappointed. He decided to take a brief respite from filmmaking. The break led back to his hometown where he took another job. Within a week back in his hometown he met his future wife. A few months later they began dating, in less than a year they were married, and now they are parents. Having transitioned careers and coasts, gaining a wife and a child, happy with the outcome, he still doesn't know the reason for his prolonged filmmaking quest! God, what was that all about?

disbelief, self-deprecation, and distraction

Three fundamental hindrances to our deep God-centration are disbelief, self-deprecation, and distraction. First, we may not believe our concentration upon God will unclog our lives leading us to sacred flow. Maybe we have so long been living with the Sisyphus syndrome, pushing our rock up the hill that we have given up on the power of grace.

How could simply focusing on God lead to transformation...of any kind?

— because attention leads to availability.

As we concentrate on God we become open to his miraculous divine life moving in and through us. Paul communicates to the Galatians, who have been duped by sellers of the Sisyphus system, that the only way to truly betray grace-living is to go back to law-living – rock pushing. We tend to believe our betrayal of grace occurs through flagrant sinful behavior, but Paul says it's quite the opposite. In returning a rules-based lifestyle, the way of sin management, we fall away from Christ and grace.⁵⁵ Focusing fully upon God and his empowerment constitutes living in grace, real grace, and grace leads to godly, sensible, self-controlled living.⁵⁶

**Tell me to what you pay attention
and I will tell you who you are.
- Jose Ortega y Gasset**

Living in the elements with the God means we work through our disbelief regarding a life in grace. If we have fallen victim to the Sisyphus syndrome, and we will, we need to sit down in the shade of our rock and rest for a moment...maybe even nap. Then, wake up, stand up, and walk away from the rock and into his flow.

As we learn to engage in concentrating upon God as way of life we will face setbacks. To live a life in which we concentrate upon on God in each moment proves to be quite challenging. It will require us to release any self-deprecation. We simply have to embrace the fact that our concentration level will waver. Sometimes our minds and actions will be in the fleshly flow. When this happens, we admit it, thank God for his forgiveness, and re-collect the Spirit's flow. Time we spend berating ourselves about our lack of God-focus could be time spent re-entering concentration. We may blame ourselves, easily get caught in a downward spiral, and a fruitless festival of un-focus will

⁵⁵Galatians 2:17-19.

⁵⁶Titus 2:11-12.

begin. Our freedom to flow includes freedom from condemnation.⁵⁷ God does not scold us, so it is absurd for us to do so to ourselves. Rather than belittling ourselves, we may choose to freely acknowledge our scatteredness, disbelief, distraction, etc, offering it to God as a way to move back toward concentration.

Distraction betrays deep concentration. It drags us from heaven and its perspective to a myriad of temporal places and perceptions. In today's culture, opportunity for distraction overwhelms us. Our attention is a priceless commodity. As targets of marketers and the evil one, we are exposed to false messaging all day everyday. As long as we live, we will face the opportunity to be distracted...in practically every moment. Nonetheless, we are tasked with concentrating on a God and a kingdom not readily visible.

At times I have spent hours distracted from my intended tasks. I may turn to watching television, surfing the internet, thumbing through junk mail, calling a friend, reading a random magazine article, or even cleaning. Many times in the midst of my distraction I sense God intuitively calling me back to my task. Often, I roll through his stop signs. Finally, at some point I come to my senses... In that moment I am tempted to harshly reproach myself (self-deprecation), which only leads to panic and paralysis since I have not been doing what I intended. My more mature response is to take a deep breath, re-engage and move on fluidly picking up from where I was sidetracked. As unavoidable distractions present themselves, we acknowledge them and let them pass. He leads, we follow, and onward we go in the sacred flow.

In sacred flow we learn to listen, respond, stop at those stop signs...and turn. Maintaining concentration requires God's grace. We desperately need and trust God to

⁵⁷Romans 8:1.

rescue us from the abyss of disbelief, self-deprecation, and distraction. He retrieves us from these pitch-black frigid waters drawing us upward to warmer water, where the sapphire sky is visible and his sun makes everything clear. Christ consistently leads our consciousness back to him. When we don't immediately return, which of course will happen, we grace ourselves and re-turn our concentration to God and the task at hand.

presence: living in the here and now

In the context of Christian spirituality, the *autotelic* approach as coined by Csikszentmihalyi leads us to be fully present to our present activity. Henri Nouwen translates this as living in the *here and now*.⁵⁸ This means we engage in the activity of the moment for the sake of the activity of the moment,

keenly looking for God in the moment. Internally and in the moment, we focus on God and are motivated by him. Concentrating on those things outside of the moment will not allow us to experience sacred flow. Instead, we acknowledge and receive each moment as our most recent gift from God and surrender

Highly productive and creative artists, entrepreneurs, statesmen, and scientists, tend to experience their jobs like our hunting ancestors did theirs – as completely integrated with the rest of their lives.

**- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
*Finding Flow***

ourselves to it. Many times when I am with my kids eating dinner, wrestling, watching a movie with them piled on me, playing outside, etc. I intentionally inhale the moment, savor it, look around in it and let it wash over me. As we learn to flow in God's rhythm, absorbing the here and now becomes our way of being.

Christian mystics throughout the centuries have spoken to the importance of slowing or stopping to experience the presence of God in each moment. Evelyn Underhill

⁵⁸Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 19.

asserted, “To be a mystic is to engage in the now, the eternal real, in the most complete way possible to man.”⁵⁹ Saturating ourselves in the *here and now* is the place of God’s grace. Breathe. Pay attention. Pick your eyes up from this book and look around. Our great I AM is a God of *now* – right *now*, with you, in you, through you. How many gifts have we missed as minutes, hours, days, even months have slid by without us really paying attention? Giving ourselves to each moment may seem exhausting, but paradoxically, this is how we connect with God’s empowering presence. Our attention and intention appropriates God’s energy as our intrinsic source. Mindful God-ward attention in the moment allows God to energize us rather than that same moment draining on us.

More specifically, we attend to God and what he would have us do or say...or not do or say in each moment. As we concentrate and pour our attention into the moment our path unfolds. God discloses what comes next and provides what is needed. In keeping with this, Francois Fenelon comments, “The present moment is your sole treasure for this is where the will of God is found.”⁶⁰ God leads us to an *autotelic*, here and now personality in which we treasure every moment and live it mindfully.

The past and the future potentially serve as the enemy of the present. The past may haunt us in innumerable ways. It may stifle or paralyze us with the traumatic memories of past abuse or loss. Overwhelming ache from the past may numb our present, locking us inside ourselves. The past may torture or disillusion us with memories of long gone but hurtful failings. Also, our past successes may haunt us in our present idleness or failure. Conversely, the past may also promote arrogance by regularly calling up proud

⁵⁹Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York, NY E. P. Dutton, 1912), 447.

⁶⁰Francois Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart* (Sargent, GA: The Seedsowers, 1962), 65.

memories of our former triumphs. We so trust ourselves and expect future success that we have no reverence for the present. No matter what our story, living in the past, brooding over it, locked into it, unable to digest it, does not allow us to truly embrace our here and now. Without living here and now sacred flow ceases. It's from the present that God takes us back to deal with our hurt, abuse, failure, guilt, shame, denial, pride, etc. He does so in the present with an eye on the future. God's present tense approach keeps us in his flow as we process our past, integrate it and flow toward our future.

The future is now! Hurry. Hurry and worry has no patience for the present. They inhibit our experience of the here and now. Hurry and worry prevent or truncate concentration. They drag our focus on the eternal *next*. Culture promotes and pushes for us to get to what's *next* as soon as possible. Regrettably, we multi-task our way through life. How much can we possibly manage at once?

A fundamental lie surrounds hurry. Somehow hurry makes us somebody important, valuable, or wanted. Being busy equals significance. The more we hurry and accomplish the *more* we are. People who live slowly, soaking up the present are often perceived as underachievers, out of touch with reality, disengaged, or even ignorant.

More often than not, hurry serves as a coping rhythm to keep our mind occupied enough to stifle *worry*. If we slow down we face uncontrollable manifestations of our insecurities. We falsely believe that if we keep busy the worry will disappear.

In one of my more recent “slow downs” God confronted me with an insecurity of mine that lies beneath the surface stirring hurry, worry, and stress. God revealed to me that *I don’t believe everything is going to be okay*. In other words, I don’t trust him. In spite of my walking with him, flowing with him, and belief in his grace, I am still waiting, dreading the other shoe to fall. Life *will* fall apart, it’s unavoidable. Buried in me, a response or outgrowth from my story

is the dreadful belief that I am not going to make it, I am going to fail. At best, I will be mediocre, second or third place. Even worse, I am going to know horrific tragedy. Inevitably, I am going to suffer, and when I do God’s presence will not be real enough to carry me through. That is a harsh revelation for me to own. My hurry had been hiding it. Daily, I am allowing God to massage that wound, trusting him to prove his presence and love despite where my future story takes me.

What is the secret of finding the Treasure? There isn’t one. The treasure is everywhere. It is offered to us at every moment and wherever we find ourselves. All creatures, friends or enemies, pour it out abundantly, and it courses through every fiber of our body and soul until it reaches the very core of our being. If we open our mouths they will be filled. God’s activity runs through the entire universe. It wells up around and penetrates every created being. Wherever they are, it is there also. It runs ahead of them, it stays with them, and follows after them.

- Jean Pierre de Caussade
Abandonment to Divine Providence

Jesus unfolded a kingdom paradigm dissolving our need to remain in the past’s mire and freeing us from hurrying and worrying our way into the future. He tells us to focus on him – his kingdom and his rightness.⁶¹ Our Father knows what we need today and tomorrow. In his kingdom with his rightness we need not to waste a moment stuck in the past or obsessing over the future. The rest of the world does this naturally. We have been liberated to live worry-free in the here and now. We are free to fully flow into what

⁶¹Matthew 6:33.

we are doing in each moment. We are profoundly cared for by a Father who not only knows what we need but has the means to supply it. He is a gloriously wasteful God who loves *hilarious* givers because he is a *hilarious* giver.⁶² Seeking his kingdom means seeking him in each moment, every day. We look intently for him, inside and out. We trust he will come through for us...even though we may not understand how or why he does so in the way he does so.⁶³ Sacred flow happens as we choose the present, the eternal now, over the past or future.

Living in God's flow we may find ourselves doing relief work, sleeping, working a menial job, mourning, directing a band, laughing hysterically, babysitting, coaching little league, teaching, taking a walk, suffering with cancer, jogging, buying a couch, leading a company, skydiving, angry, attending a silent retreat, blissful, volunteering at a substance abuse center, eating a cheeseburger or chopping wood. Life's possibilities are endless. In Christ, we have the benefit of fully flowing into each moment, allowing God's rhythm to overtake us.

goals: love God. love neighbor. love self.

Our discovery of flow in chapter two taught us that goals provide clarity for our intention and attention. Odd as it may seem, this is true in our spirituality as well. Distraction is kept at bay as we focus on God-intended goals. Goal-setting serves as another element of our sacred flow. God births and accomplishes goals in and through us. Having clear goals sets our priorities and bolsters our concentration. Goals lead us inward and onward keeping us focused. Jesus' intention and attention had singular focus. Jesus was consumed with and in turn consumed the will of the Father so much so that he was

⁶²2 Corinthians 9:7.

⁶³Matthew 6:25-34.

one with the Father. Jesus says his sustenance was the will of the Father. Jesus modeled the goal of the kingdom living to us; the will of the Father. We are heirs of that kingdom, one with the King, and purposed with carrying out the will of the King. Sacred flow leads us into the will of the Father.

Our first act of freedom should be to choose our priorities wisely.

- Alan Wallace, *The Attention Revolution*

The pragmatic and pragmystic articulation of this goal is *love*. God's will, his actions, and his being characterize his love, God is love.⁶⁴ Put into flow's context and brought down to daily life, the clear goal of Christian spirituality is love. The will of God for his followers is love – to love as he loves.⁶⁵ Love God and one's neighbor as one's self.

But what is love?

As with the term *grace*, the word *love* has been worn out. Everyone owns it and uses it indiscriminately. It holds a vast range of meaning in culture. We hear the term used to express the depth of Christ's passion in choosing to die for humanity, spoken between dysfunctional family members, and by severely inebriated partygoers, "I love you man, really..." Despite the latter usage and other dismissive usages, love still maintains super-natural value, especially when related to God and his kingdom.

Agape or agapao from Greek *agapan* means to love deeply, spiritually, in both a social and a moral sense...and with God's sacrificial love.⁶⁶ This term *agape* also means to stand in wonder or amazement with your mouth wide open – gaping. This jaw drop is

⁶⁴Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000), 93.

⁶⁵John 13:34.

⁶⁶Meyers, *e-Sword*, (Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2005), Mark 12:30.

our natural response when we catch a legitimate glimpse of the extent of God's love for us. As we flow in his love yielding and wielding agape, we impact the world causing far-reaching ripples of jaw dropping.

One of the most robust descriptions of love's true characteristics we hear at practically every wedding we attend. Unfortunately, this profoundly insightful description gets lost in wedding-world, its depth neglected.

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.
1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Real love, deep love, God's love....and therefore God himself is patient, kind, *unjealous*, *unbraggadocios*, humble, refined, unselfish, calm, forgiving, empathetic, justice-loving, tough, faithful, hopeful, *unfailing*. This brand of love permeates us in Christ, meaning we too are all these things. We are meant to uniquely express God's agape in our contexts. We are his love.

The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
Mark 12:30, 31

Loving God, self, and others is interconnected and interflowing. The act of love is Trinitarian-like; one love, three distinct components. We cannot love ourselves or others without receiving God's love and loving God. We cannot fully release ourselves into God's love or loving others without a healthy love of ourselves. Lastly, we cannot love God or ourselves without truly loving others. All three loves interrelate with each feeding from the other. In this way, God has made love holistic.

To love God means we live in him and remain there as we advocate for his kingdom. It means we surrender all that we know of ourselves to him moment by moment, entrusting ourselves wholly to him. This brand of surrender breeds freedom. In our surrender-freedom we dream wildly and desire deeply. We offer every morsel of our soul to him. I believe God even leads us in how to love him. He speaks into us what to let go of and pick up in order to know and love him more intimately. Without loving God deeply, our love for self and others gets twisted. We offer a warped love through natural strength and questionable motive. An intense love for God lends perspective, divinity, and depth to our love for our self and people.

God is love. He is the ecstasy of Love, overflowing outside himself, enabling creatures to share in his life. Through his life they share the same overflowing force.

- Oliver Clement

The Roots of Christian Mysticism

Loving God means we revel in and relish his love for us, living without shame, loving confidently and creatively as his children. God is loved when we fully receive his love. In receiving his love, we are finally able to accept ourselves just as we *are*, and not for what we *might be* someday. Without accepting his acceptance, we essentially hold a higher standard for ourselves than God. We betray his grace by denying it. When we courageously accept his acceptance of us, we grow *toward* our authentic self and others.

We cannot truly love others without first loving ourselves. Without healthy self-love our love for others becomes self-serving codependency. We love only to be loved. If we are not confident in our grace-given inherent validation we are constantly looking to subtly or overtly manipulate others to validate us. I have fallen prey to this plenty of times. Lacking confidence in my value, I fish for validation from others. To love

ourselves in a healthy manner means we recognize God's validation of us. Therefore, we don't think too highly or lowly of ourselves. We don't allow others to trample us nor do we trample others. We embrace the sacredness of ourselves and others. We maintain proper self-esteem and self-care in light of our identity in Christ acknowledging ourselves as royal children and priests of God. We reverence ourselves as bearers and brandishers of the *Logos* of God, the most powerful creative energy in the universe.

Love is *advocacy*. It is advocacy for the well being of others. To love others means to willingly lay down our self for them rather than live in self-protection or self-idolatry. At its depth, loving means losing our life.⁶⁷ Jesus defined and modeled this sacrificial version of love. We entered his love and we carry on his model as his followers.

This selfless love calls us to be loyal and tough. It's not for the faint of heart. We accept others without condition advocating, reconciling, and lending our voice on their behalf. We stick with people and sometimes as a part of this we are called to stick it to them for their own wellbeing. To love others means to facilitate their reconciliation be it spiritual, emotional, or physical. Loving our neighbor means bearing their load with them. We willingly crawl under their pile with them.

Recently, I spent a year working at a large corporation. Coming from a ministry background to a corporate setting, respect from my supervisors and many of my peers was not inherent or apparent. Naively, I worked without giving proper credence to corporate politics. I connected with most people on some level, but it was not clear whom I could genuinely engage. Additionally, for most of the year, I worked under leadership that I perceived as coercive, manipulative, and incredibly difficult to follow...this

⁶⁷John 12:25.

perception was mutual among the thirty-plus people in my department. Almost daily I had an opportunity to join in a slanderfest. Sadly, I did at times I'm embarrassed to say. It was challenging for me stay neutral, much less, to love or advocate for anyone in this setting. I stumbled, failing quite often, but I constantly had opportunity to move forward humbly and creatively loving others in a tense complex environment. Workplaces spanning the globe, likely yours too, offer similar opportunities.

The somewhat recent trend in Christianity toward more intentional embedded marketplace and community engagement, social justice, and long-term service to the poor reflects infinite potential for authentic love of neighbor – agape-advocacy. The term often used to articulate this externally focused incarnational Christianity is *missional*. Christians and Christian communities alike are trending from *missions*; program orientation, to *missional*; incarnation orientation. Though it may have become this to some already, the missional approach need not become a new strategy since it is at its core *real* kingdom loving. I pray this particular trend continues movement toward *missional* living being understood as originally intended kingdom living and loving, rather than the next program or a new strategy. Living missionally is core to identity as believers.

Loving manifests itself in innumerable ways. We fulfill the *love-goal* in obvious and obscure ways, in direct and indirect ways. The Spirit directs how, when, where, and who we love in each moment. God, in his unpredictability, guides us through his uniqueness and ours to love authentically and creatively in every situation. The love of God has been poured out in us and now compels us.⁶⁸ Our gut, our intuition has been infused with God himself. The infinite advocate lives embedded in our soul serving as

⁶⁸2 Corinthians 5:14.

our purpose, method, and compulsion. Thus, Spirit-walking serves as our mode for fulfilling our goals.

Referring again to Csikszentmihalyi's research, love being our goal puts us into the category of the mystic, poet, painter, writer...the artist. Our goal is intuitively set and carried out. Love is meaningful, tangible, but fluid. Essentially, loving is an art form. We ask ourselves each moment, "*Father, how would you have me love in this moment?*"

Any given moment may be filled with contention, joy, fury, worry, ambivalence, lust, pride, praise, indifference, mourning, hate, laughter, fear, happiness, angst, peace, pain, doubt, faith, etc. As we trust the Spirit, we artfully love, employing an extensive array of activity or non-activity. Some tasks are quite simple, requiring only a moment of our time, while others stretch into many years. The Spirit within informs us regarding our accepting and accomplishing agape-goals. The Spirit also supplies the courage needed to carry out artful love.

A few months ago I was walking out of Lowe's home improvement store and I noticed two ladies walking out beside me rolling a cart with two fifty pound bags of cement. I sensed God prompting me to ask if I could load it for them. So I did. No big deal right? Maybe, maybe not. I will likely never know, but I know that I sensed God leading me to help. It took an ounce of courage to ask and ten seconds to load. Sometimes these very simple acts of goodness profoundly impact people.

While living in the Czech Republic, we were financially supported by many people. It was a humbling experience for us. We were blown away by our friends' generosity to sacrificially give to us and the ministry in which we were involved. For five years they loved us through their financial giving.

Those who have chosen to have or adopt children have taken on a love relationship that lasts a lifetime. This comes with untold joy and pain and includes countless other love-goals within it. God's sacred call to flow in his love raising children leads us to unexpected situations, places, and decisions. Responding to this particular call is not an easy, simple, or short-lived commitment.

Love serves as more than our goal, it is our way of life. Csikszentmihalyi noted in his study that the person who creates, maintains, and concentrates upon a meaningful unified overarching purpose or goal, experiences flow as a way of life.⁶⁹ God's love, receiving it and offering it, serves as our unifying purpose, making sacred flow our way of life.

God's love pervades us, flows through every molecule, vibrates every particle of our being.

**– Dr. Gerald May
*Addiction and Grace***

balance: living on the edge

Too often I have stuffed myself with food to avoid dealing with challenges and/or suffering I've faced. Food is cheap and readily available for me, an easy high or comfort. I have used it to insulate. Many of us insulate ourselves from life's challenge or suffering, and not only by overeating. We don't invite challenge or suffering in any of its various forms. Naturally, we desire, even fight for a sense of security, but compulsive insulation is flight. Too often we have an inordinate obsession with avoiding pain or wanting something for nothing. Some of us are insulating as a response the horrid abuses life dealt us decades ago. While others of us (myself included), when we feel out of control and

⁶⁹Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow : The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), 21, 149, 214, 217.

dissatisfied, food or other “medications” bring us a brief moment of insulation, solace and pleasure.

Our body and soul need *balance*.

Csikszentmihalyi discovered that not only do we need to face challenge; we need to invite it, look for it, and dive into it. Doing so leads us to a more fulfilling life. He established that to experience flow we must face challenges that roughly match our skills.⁷⁰ Those who challenge themselves enjoy life much more than those who camp on the couch in front of the big screen. Those who consistently tackle challenges matching their skills flow through life. They forfeit their insulation for flow.

About eight months ago I reconnected with an old high school friend. In high school we were wrestling teammates who constantly challenged one another. Both wanting get in shape again, we decided to join a gym together. We began meeting at the gym in the morning four to five days a week. At first it was tough, the challenge proving almost too much. Now we look forward to it so much that we really don’t like to miss a session. This challenge has kindled both of us. It has given us new life, deeper friendship, and an overall sense of enjoyment.

God has crafted our bodies to face a certain amount of resistance – challenge. We need an optimal amount of resistance (spirit, soul, and body) to remain healthy, thrive, and grow. Overwhelming challenge or extraordinary suffering breaks us. Too little challenge or suffering and we atrophy; spirit, soul, and body. Either way our soul becomes brittle, sick. We are made to live on the edge with our challenges meeting and expanding our capacity. We are made to live rhythmically; ebbing into rest and recovery and flowing toward our capacity, stretching our potential.

⁷⁰Ibid, 74, 75.

Christ followers reach the challenge-skills balance by embracing those challenges God lays before them and through self-imposed challenges. God causes and sustains all things. Given this, he arranges our circumstances, and therefore ultimately he creates and maintains our challenge-skills balance. It is he who determined when, where, how, and to whom we would be born. David tells

us in the Psalms that God has assigned our portion and our cup-our portion meaning our prosperity and our cup meaning our trials.⁷¹

You have gifted me with power from yourself, eternal Father, and my understanding with your wisdom – such wisdom as is proper to your only-begotten Son; and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from you and from your Son, has given me a will, and so I am able to love.

- Catherine of Siena
The Dialogue

God provides sacred flow opportunities through his sovereignty. He allows circumstances that tax our souls with his ultimate intention being to conform us to the image of Christ. He knows the capacity of our faith and what is needed to mature it.

Suffering of some form or another is to be expected if we are to experience sacred flow. Knowing this, Paul writes encouraging believers to rejoice in the midst of trial. The dark night of the soul is a God-sponsored anguishing challenge leading us toward more intense flow in him. I am aware that this sounds a bit sadistic, uncaring, or out of touch. Ironically, these trials are not meant to test our strength, but our dependence. Challenges test our faith, particularly our willingness to trust in God's strength. God's expectation in the words of Jean-Pierre de Caussade is for us to "accept everything and let God act."⁷² The freer one is from his own effort the faster he is moving toward experiencing God.⁷³

⁷¹Psalm 16:5.

⁷²Jean Pierre De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 55.

⁷³Jeanne Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (Sargent, GA: SeedSowers, 1975), 56.

God will continually challenge us, providing endless opportunities to exercise our depend-ability and experience his sacred flow.

The challenge-skills balance is also struck as we, being led by the Spirit, initiate and undertake challenges. These challenges allow us to grow as we flow and flow as we grow. Freedom to flow releases us to risk. Security in our grace-given identity and God's acceptance of us allows us to freely engage challenges. We no longer have to build or protect a superficial identity or reputation. Therefore, we challenge ourselves not seeking validation but living from the validation we already possess.

These challenges we choose may be wild and far beyond anything we imagined before we grasped the security and freedom we have in Christ. Flow calls us to challenge ourselves, to intensely and creatively dabble, to bite off at least as much as we can chew and a little bit more. Similar to engaging the love-goal, self-challenges may last minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years.

I ran the Prague marathon in May 2001. I remember laboring over the decision to try or not to try, to run or not to run. Training in the winter, January through April, in the Czech Republic would not be pleasant and I had not run a marathon before. Upon praying and thinking through the decision I came to the realization that fear was holding me back ...not fear of freezing, but failure. I had never started something like this and later quit or simply failed. Prior to this I had finished an Olympic distance triathlon and a half marathon, but this was another animal – 26.2 miles.

I needed to recognize that my value or worth was not at risk. No matter what happened it would not alter my identity or value as a person. This recognition or recollection freed me to boldly challenge myself. I gave myself permission to quit or fail. Then, I started training. Ultimately, I enjoyed the challenge. I flowed through the first half of the marathon setting a personal best. The last half proved to be quite different. I finished the race...like a turtle, in severe pain, but I finished.

When teaching people about living solely under God's grace rather than under law or trying to balance law and grace, they often push back. They believe if they only live by grace – the Spirit, they will be lazy. They will sit around while the world fades to ruin. I remind them that God's Spirit is not

lazy...and neither are they. An insanely active creator-God lives in them, possesses them, and compels them. The Spirit and their

The spirit of Christ, which is the immediate spring of grace in the heart, is all life, all power, all act.
- Jonathan Edwards
Religious Affections

freedom lead them to attempt absurd challenges tapping God's indwelling strength.

Challenges offer us opportunity to appropriate Christ's life in our own. We live without reason for fear, supernaturally internally guided by the Holy Trinity. Engaging in heroic challenges is natural for us.

Living in the elements keeps us on the edge – in the challenge-skills balance.

Living deeply concentrated on God and Christ's Spirit as life, attentively being and doing, and agape-loving is challenge enough any person's skills. Living in these elements incessantly challenges us who engage a world full of distraction. We sorely need the Spirit, the rhythm within, to lead us into and return us to these elements.

feedback: embracing the rhythm within

The GPS (global positioning system) makes *getting lost* difficult. Twenty-plus ever-present satellites direct us wherever we desire to travel on the planet. If we get off track they simply redraw from wherever we are at the moment. It does not matter how far we go or how long we betray the directions, the GPS redraws. The satellites constantly transmit messages, locating us to provide us the option to turn toward our original destination or one we chose on the fly.

God's Positioning Spirit serves a similar purpose within us. He constantly transmits signals, leading, guiding, and even empowering us in the flow. This Spirit is the path-keeper who communicates *the Path*. When we go off road, betraying the route, he redraws, constantly sending signals for us to return to the Way. Despite where we go or how long we go off course he *draws* us back.

Regular *draw-back* or feedback is needed to catalyze and maintain flow. The peak-experiencer must be open, pliable, and responsive to feedback in order to flow or continue flowing. As a person continues her activity she must make adjustments to live in the elements. Flow is dynamic. This is true for sacred flow as well. Uniquely, our feedback comes primarily from within. We live attentive to our inner ear, listening for the Spirit's *inner voice of love*.⁷⁴ Sacred flow calls for us to live according to the rhythm within. To have rhythm or to be in rhythm means we closely follow the Spirit's patterns, impressions, accents...we resonate with his beat.

God has given us what we need for life and godliness – himself.⁷⁵ He has planted his rhythm within. We have the Spirit-beat. Jesus told his close friends that he would

⁷⁴Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000), 26, 28.

⁷⁵2 Peter 1:3.

send his rhythm, the counselor, the helper, who would teach them the truth, the way in all things.⁷⁶ George Fox, the founder of Quakerism regularly directed people to be taught by their inward teacher.⁷⁷ We learn to live and move and have our being according to our divinely implanted inner rhythm.⁷⁸

We flow with the divine life within, feeding on God's feedback. We live from the *Word* and words that come from the mouth of God.⁷⁹ We have been freed to trust God with where to go, how to go, what to do, not do, even what to say and not say.⁸⁰ The Spirit-wind blows and we sail.⁸¹ The indwelling Spirit serves to interpret, inspire, teach, counsel, and comfort regarding God's speech or feedback.⁸² With feedback, as with handling goals, we are artists. As noted earlier, Csikszentmihalyi found in his flow studies that artists needed to be intrinsically regulated when it came to feedback. Their intuition informed and guided interpretation of their work and any needed adjustments. God's Spirit informs and guides our intuition. He gracefully regulates us from the inside out.

Having God's rhythm within does not negate external feedback. It may intensify it. God may use anything to speak to us. Clearly, he uses the Scriptures as principal content for the Spirit's voice. Also, he uses our community, our family, friends, mentors, etc. to provide feedback. So often, people closest to us make us aware of our blind spots. In these cases, their counsel is invaluable. Additionally, in life we frequently face complex problems. God encourages us to gather wise counsel as we create and

⁷⁶John 14:26, John 15:26.

⁷⁷Canby Jones, ed. *The Power of the Lord Is Over All* (Richmond, IN Friends United Press, 1989), xxiii.

⁷⁸Acts 17:28, John 6:45.

⁷⁹Matthew 4:4.

⁸⁰John 12:49.

⁸¹John 3:5-8

⁸²John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13.

appropriate solutions. Our lives are so intertwined and interrelated with one others' that it only makes sense that God would use others to provide feedback. Partly, he does so as an additional way for us love one another.

By no means does the rhythm within call off the passion we have for learning and growing. To the contrary, the rhythm within inspires broader discovery. Discovery channels may include formal and informal education including intentional learning of and from our culture or other cultures. Living freely in sacred flow releases us to learn insatiably. Granted, some things we consume may give us indigestion and others may be down right dangerous. This need not dampen our desire for discovery. Through God's guidance we develop a sense of where and when to dive in and swim...and where not to. Our indwelling GPS draws, redraws, directs, evaluates, and interprets all of the information and impressions we collect as we learn.

holy resonance

Sacred flow equates to spiritual resonance. Resonance occurs when the (wave) movement of one system affects another, *inducing* it to match its frequency. The second system echoes the first. The two
vibrate in unison, resounding,
creating a rich, intense prolonged
tone. We experience this when a voice sings out and other harmonize or resonate with it. Together the voices intensify and the tone gets stronger.

**The mystics are artists; and the stuff in which
they work is most often the human life.
- Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism***

God's Spirit *induces* us from within. He calls us to move in unison with him and he works within us to birth desires and make them happen.⁸³ Our life begins to echo his

⁸³Philippians 2:13.

with a robust meaningful tone. A system's resonant frequency is the frequency at which its waves are oscillating at maximum potential. God stimulates us with an aim to conform us to our resonant frequency in him. He creates the perfect rhythmic resonance, inspires and empowers us to tune in. When we do, we echo Jesus in extraordinary ways.

The opposite of resonance is of course dissonance. This mismatch of frequencies causes disagreeable sounds, discord, and cacophony. When we live according to the flesh – fleshly flow, rather than the Spirit, dissonance occurs. Fleshly living is marching to our own self-created rhythm or frequency; attempting to flow without living in the elements – authentic love for God, ourselves and others. We lack resonance with God as we flail around looking for love in all the wrong places. In the fleshly flow, our life creates raucous unpleasant sounds as we attempt to master our own rhythm instead of giving our self to God's.

Living in God's resonant rhythm means we match Jesus' cadence. We embody Galatians 5:25 – *keeping in rhythm with the Spirit in every area of our lives*. Jesus cleared the way for us to flow or Spirit-walk with him. A lifestyle characterized by sacred flow is one of abiding in Christ, our indelible source of life. Jesus declares, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."⁸⁴ To *abide* means to stay in a given state, place, relation or expectancy. It means to *remain, be present, dwell, tarry, and endure*.⁸⁵ Essentially, Jesus says hang with me, hold on to me tightly, stay close to me. For your own sake stick here, catch my rhythm, and you will be amazed by what occurs. Frances de Sales calls this type

⁸⁴John 15:5.

⁸⁵Meyers, *e-Sword*, abide.

of living, abiding in love

and responding, 'spiritual

agility.'⁸⁶ Spiritual agility is

**Every spiritual being is, by nature, a temple of
God, created to receive into itself the glory of God.
- Origen, *Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel***

our resonant respond-ability of living with Jesus. Andrew Murray adds, "Abiding in Jesus is nothing but giving up one's self to be ruled, taught, and led while resting in the arms of Everlasting Love."⁸⁷ When he desires anything of us we trust his life within and respond in his strength.

Living in the elements of flow is the key to experiencing flow and sacred flow. Living distracted by anything including the fruits of flow leaves us *flowless*. We have been given God himself to lead us into the elements and keep us there. In his infinite strength we move with concentration, purpose, responsiveness and presence. Our attention to the elements determines our experience of sacred flow.

Living in these elements discloses sacred flow as what David Augsburger calls a *tripolar* spirituality – *inwardly directed, upwardly compliant, and outwardly committed*.⁸⁸ All three components are essential to sacred flow's definition and expression. Going forward chapter six outlines sacred flow's characteristic fruit in light of the elements and with an eye on the postures and practices forthcoming. Chapters seven and eight introduce postures and practices that cultivate our life in the elements. Together the elements, postures, and practices create a pragmystic trinity from which we exercise these three poles of sacred flow spirituality and experience its resultant fruit.

⁸⁶Wendy Wright, *Frances de Sales: Introduction to the Devout Life and Treatise on the Love of God* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company1993), 44.

⁸⁷Andrew Murray, *Abiding in Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade1997), 22.

⁸⁸David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 13.

To close the chapter I have summarized flow's elements in light of sacred flow.

deep concentration: Upon God; the persons of the Trinity - unceasing God-consciousness.

autotelic approach: Living in the *here and now* attuned to and intrinsically motivated by God: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

clear goal(s): The Father's will - *love*. Regularly asking, "God, how are you leading me to love you, myself, and those around me in this moment?"

challenge-skills balance: God keeps this balance by allowing specific circumstances.

And as we are led by the Spirit, we initiate challenges for ourselves.

Immediate and unambiguous feedback: Comes from the Trinity via the Holy Spirit and externally from anyone or anything God chooses.

being formed by God's flow

1. Be cognizant of being God-conscious as you go throughout your day. Ask God to make his presence more personal and real to you as well as teach you how to better concentrate your whole life within his presence.
2. Allow God to shape and reshape your goals. These goals may pertain to your spiritual, personal, family, or career life. Let the Spirit show you the way to love *God, self, and neighbor*. Journal how God is transforming your goals or desires.
3. Do you trust the rhythm within? Take the risk of moving according to God's rhythmic inner promptings.

7

Produce

Reaping Sacred Flow's Harvest

O Christ, send down on me
This Spirit with the Father,
That he may sprinkle my soul with his dew
And fill it with his royal gifts.
- Synesius of Cyrene, *Hymns*

And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having
all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.
- 2 Corinthians 9:8

The fruits of flow mesmerize us. They amaze us whether we are watching Tiger Woods hit flawless golf shots or we are experiencing these fruits ourselves while engaged in some activity in our backyard or living room. Like the fruit of the Spirit of God, flow's produce represent summit experiences. We find it difficult to avoid focusing on all this incredible fruit and our desire for it. I have spent about ten years mulling over flow and its integration with Christian spirituality. And for a while I put the cart before the horse...and I still do sometimes. I love experiencing the results of flow and more so the fullness of flowing in rhythm with God. Who doesn't?

On more than one occasion I have given more weight to the products, the fruit, than the elements of flow. I have tried to produce flow's fruit attempting to manufacture calm, effortlessness, etc. – *going with the flow*. The same has happened in my Christian

spirituality on occasions when I have venerated spiritual experiences or gifts rather than God himself. I have focused my spirituality on producing the fruit of the Spirit instead of simply turning my full attention to each moment and God in each moment... *allowing* sacred flow to occur. I am sure it has happened to you as well. You were so focused on the positive results that you lost sight of what is needed to make way for the positive results. Your cart spun around in front of your horse.

Trying to produce the results of flow only ensures a lack of flow. Even while flowing if we try to deepen our flow or a particular experience of it, rather than maintaining focus on the activity at hand, our flow falters. Flow's resultant yield simply happens as we dive into the elements. Trying to directly produce flow's effects is backwards, hypocrisy, fake flow.

In Christian spirituality, we attempt to force flow by trying to produce the fruit of the Spirit. We structure religion and religious programs around the idea of *trying* to love, be joyful, live at peace, exhibit patience, be kind, good, faithful, gentle and control ourselves. We attempt to *grow* so that we can be or do these things better. This is backwards. The best we muster is plastic or wooden fruit. Our phony fruit often looks genuine but if others taste it the gig is up.

We aren't meant to live this way.

Jesus declares that we can do absolutely nothing apart from him. He is the vine and the Father is the gardener.¹ The vine and the gardener are the most crucial components, the branches are simply to abide, remain...unclogged. Actual and spiritual fruit cannot be grunted out...fruit happens. Spiritual fruit comes by us remaining surrendered in the vine as a channel, being responsive to both the vine and the master

¹John 15:5.

gardener. We posture ourselves as Spirit-conduits. Tapping into and staying connected with the Source allows fruit to flow. We mature and bear much fruit by trusting in the vine, surrendering to it...not by trying, grunting, straining, etc. Then as we bear fruit, our role expands to displaying it and offering it to others.

This being established, we are to “produce” a surrendered soul that makes way for fruit. Even our surrender requires grace to be *accomplished*. The only way to make something bear much fruit, stay unclogged, is to surrender – die. When a seed dies it bursts forth new life. Our wayward soul-life

must be lost to really live.² Death leads to life. This paradox is central to Christianity.

Death leads to brilliant *logos*-life. To experience deep sacred flow and its fruit we

If God can find a soul filled with a lively faith, He pours His grace into it in a torrent that, having found an open channel, gushes out exuberantly.

- Brother Lawrence
The Practice of the Presence of God

must embrace the death of our self-life...and receive our new God-created, God-oriented, God-compelled life. Like Joseph the son of Jacob, we enter the palace through the pit and the prison. We suffer in the pit and the prison before reigning in the palace.³ Francois Fenelon asserted that living in surrender is living in death continually.⁴ Wholeness and life are born from brokenness. This affirms Paul’s statement, ‘I die daily’ and his loss of everything in order ‘to know Him and the power of his resurrection.’⁵

This daily soul-death does not kill or even maim our God-given personality, but rids us of fleshly flow, freeing us to live into our authentic personality. Remember, the flesh-life is that life that wishes to live independently, without reference to God. This

²John 12:24, 25.

³Genesis 37-41.

⁴Francois Fenelon, *Let Go* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1973), 35.

⁵1 Corinthians 15:31, Philippians 3.

ancient residue from Adam and Eve's rebellious choice runs counter-current to the Spirit's flow. Fleshly flow would have us erect our false self to live in an illusory kingdom that we also create. Our goal is not to transform or reform the flesh, which is impossible, but to simply live by the Spirit. In doing so, we put to death fleshly flow and live into the Spirit-reality. Paul makes this clear to the Galatians telling them that by simply living according to the Spirit prevents them from carrying out the activities of the flesh.⁶

We are meant to live *reckoning* or recognizing our death in Christ, and embracing full surrender to the Spirit in order to experience God's fruitful flow-through. God runs through us producing fragrant truth, beauty, and goodness. In our surrender Thomas Merton asserts that God, "pours out our water, and fills us with his wine."⁷

Similar to farming, sacred flow's harvest comes seasonally as we remain attuned. We farm for flow and its fruit happens in season. Fruit ebbs and flows seasonally ripening in its time. Optimally, we desire to experience and consume an abundance of every fruit year-round. As we flow with God throughout the year assorted fruit happens along the way in the midst of our idleness and activity, mourning and dancing, singing and sighing.

Acknowledging our lack of control over the harvest of fruit...and flow, we give ourselves to sacred flow's elements. As we incorporate the elements into our daily lives, like Jesus, we move in harmony with God and flow's fruit blossoms within the context of our spirituality. According to God's design and timing we begin to experience the effects of flow. We get a glimpse of the big picture; how all things are interrelated. We recognize

⁶Galatians 5:16.

⁷Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 210, 264.

Christ as the sum of all things. We discover each moment and its intrinsic value. We are able to accept our uniqueness as individuals. We sense deep intimacy with God and unified action with him. Our life slows and an inner stillness exudes. Love happens spontaneously and effortlessly. A sense of God's control pours over us. We drop any negative self-consciousness and fully engage the lives of others. Our emotions bounce. We feel a healthy detachment from self-focus and the pull of the world around us. Time no longer rules our soul. Rivers of living water overflow. Our lives flow out into others' and they tend to view us as winsome and contagious.

Please recognize that I am not suggesting that as our spiritual paradigm shifts toward sacred flow that we will float around blissfully *in the zone* munching on flow's magnificent fruit twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We are human and life's circumstances regularly drain on our flow. Sacred flow promotes a dependent way of life in which we intentionally open and present ourselves to God.⁸ As God's infusion becomes real, we experience regular glimpses or pockets of God living in and through us, oftentimes by way of flow's fruit. Our spiritual practice of dependently flowing within God's rhythm will take just that, a whole life's practice. We will see a lot of fruit along the way as well as experience times in which we feel stuck outside of his flow.

The following are flow's characteristic fruit compiled from the work of Maslow and Csikszentmihalyi described in chapter two and integrated into Jesus' life in chapter four: unitive consciousness, intrinsic validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action awareness merge, inner stillness, effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy, self-transcendence, time disorientation. Now we will consider these fruits in light of our life in Christ and his flow.

⁸Romans 6:12, 13.

unitive consciousness

Stefan was traveling with his band to St. Petersburg, Russia during winter in the middle of the night. In his gut he knew if they broke down or crashed they could easily freeze to death before morning. They were traversing an ice-covered road in a small van surrounded by flat vast nothingness. The unthinkable happened; they spun off the road far into a field. The van came to rest literally buried in snow. It would take more than their small group to move it. There was little

chance a single car would pass before dawn.

Stefan, crying, walked back up the road

anyway. He stood on the road sniffing and

**He who binds himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.**

- William Blake, *Eternity*

smoking a cigarette, maybe his last. In desperation he muttered something like, "*God, if you are real...please save us, send help! We will die without your help.*" About twenty minutes later Stefan saw a far off glimmer. It was headlights. As the vehicle approached, Stefan waved it down. It was a tour bus! The bus blew by and Stefan's heart sank. As he watched the bus roll off into the distance it eventually came to a stop and backed up. The bus had passed because the ice was so treacherous that it had taken a kilometer to stop. Unbelievably, out of the bus piled a men's sports team. They moved Stefan's van back to the road, saving him and his band's life in the process. Stefan became a believer that night. He encountered a God of unity, without limitation, who pulls stories together anywhere he chooses with perfect timing.

When flowing, we see the beauty of a world connected, united. We acknowledge all people and happenings as interrelated though we may not understand how or see the true depth of the connection. Our peripheral vision broadens to better observe God

working things together for good.⁹ God's sustaining presence becomes more perceptible in our everyday consciousness. In experiencing a unitive consciousness we experience the *Logos*-perspective gaining more insight into God's insight.

This unity points to our unity with him, and it inspires us to hold all things as sacred. It breaks down our categories. Secular and sacred merge once and for all. Through Christ's incarnation the secular has been swallowed up by the sacred. We understand the miracle that occurred that winter night on a barren road in Russia was not just for the benefit of an unbelieving Stefan and his family but also for his band mates, the bus driver, everyone on the sports team...and me...and you, now that you have heard the story. God's graceful presence has consumed all things secular. This does not mean the ungodly are godly or the dark is light but it means the godless are surrounded with God and the dark with light. Though evil has a presence, the earth is God's as are all things in it. The sacred saturates the secular.

Flowless, disconnected from this particular fruit, we live small compartmentalized lives, without perspective. We view moments, events, and people as independent rather than interdependent. We get stuck in ourselves, and the moment. We view our doings or non-doings, failures or triumphs as defining us rather than being part of a larger narrative for ourselves...and others. We separate sacred and secular according to our feeble determination. Our stuck-ness narrows or blinds our consciousness and this tunnel vision robs our sight of God's infinite grace-filled invasion of all things.

⁹Romans 8:28.

self-validation

My daughter or sons need not “do” anything to validate themselves as my kids. There are not means to an end when it comes to their relationship with me. The moment they arrived in this world, they forever became my children. They may run from me later, maybe to the far-reaches of the planet...and change their name. They still would not need to validate themselves as members of my family... or as a people for that matter. They simply are. They cannot be *invalid*. They are my kids. Their very *being* is in fact self-validating. To be healthy and fulfill their validation, they only need to grow more into themselves.

God spiritually validated us by re/birthing us, placing us in Christ and him in us. We are validated by simply being, because we exist. We experience our validation as we experience him. His validation frees us to live in the elements of flow without pressure. Sacred flow is self-validating...despite any harvest that results. Nevertheless, as we flow in the Spirit we experience fulfillment via the fruit of the Spirit and the fruits of flow.

Many of us are not comfortable as “be-ers” who “do” rather than “do-ers” who “be.” The world teaches and incessantly promotes, pushes, and pressures validation through *doing*. Without God’s flow, we cannot rest in our validation. Our identity and our activity always fall short, despite our level of accomplishment. We work for the ends never quite feeling fulfilled or validated despite the amount of *ends* we attain. Subtly, we consume and perpetuate the lie spun in the garden to the first humans – your *doing* or *knowing* validates your *being*. Buying this lie placed them and us in paradigm of endless and fruitless *doing*. Validation escapes us. Our actual tasks at hand get lost in self-

obsession. Being people of intrinsic validity, we freely accept each moment as well as our *being* and *doing* in it as self-validating.

uniqueness of identity

Roger was set to return to his very conservative seminary as a second year graduate student and assistant to the President. During his time with me spiritually processing in Prague, God began speaking into Roger about his uniqueness, his identity, his authentic self. Roger soon grasped his freedom to flow and began to do so in an unorthodox direction. He left Prague...and **To be moved by the Spirit is an entirely new way of being in the world.**
seminary. Oddly enough, the desire of his **- Thomas Keating**
heart was to work with wood. His sacred ***Open Mind, Open Heart***

flowing had him pack up back in Atlanta and take an apprenticeship with a furniture maker in Southern California. There, he lived and learned, producing high-end furniture while a deeper dream evolved. Now Roger, the artist, creates phenomenal artwork using wood mixed with other materials.¹⁰ A photo of one of Roger's pieces serves as this book's cover. Sacred flow led Roger and leads us into our grace-given uniqueness. As we flow toward experiencing oneness with God, we flow toward our authentic self and its dreams.¹¹

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you.
Jeremiah 1:5*

Finding worth in unique identity is a basic human need. Being a healthy community member starts with our understanding of our own uniqueness. Flowless, this basic intrinsic need fuels an endless search, a quest for individuality in which we either

¹⁰You can get more information about Roger's work at info@rogerbalko.com.

¹¹Merton, *New Seeds*, 31.

work pretentiously to form an identity for ourselves or we reluctantly agonize over our ant-like lack of uniqueness. We may attempt to separate ourselves with trendy fashion, education, careers, piercings, tattoos, music we listen to...the car we buy, etc. The list proves endless. Reflecting again upon self-validation, if we do not believe in our validity as people we fill driven to carve out validation – distinct identity for ourselves. Others of us have searched so long that we have resigned ourselves to a plain vanilla identity with little hope for uniqueness. To the contrary, sacred flow digs us out, appropriates and amplifies our God-given unique identity.

*You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.
Psalm 139:16*

total absorption

I recently saw a documentary of the famous French free climber Alain Robert, also known as “The Human Spider” or “The French Spider-Man.” He has free-climbed the tallest buildings in the world - no ropes, no safety harness, no gloves...just a chalk pouch and spandex. In the show he talks about the freedom and flow he experiences while climbing. His legal freedom is intermittent as he often gets arrested directly following his skyscraper climbs. He talks about his focus. He says something to the effect; nothing gets you more focused on the activity at hand than life and death hanging in the balance with every hand or foot placement. He becomes completely absorbed in the climb as if nothing exists...his life depends on it.

Our spiritual life is a free climb dealing in life or death. We make choices, hand and foot placements, that lead us to experience the divine life that resides in and around us. Or we choose poorly and feel the absence and emptiness of death. The consequences

of our death-like choices may affect our spirit, soul or body. Robert has fallen several times, a few times from fifty feet landing him in the hospital for long periods of time. He has broken his wrists, pelvis, various other bones, and suffered head trauma. Robert's falls have not prevented his continued

I'm learning to fly but I ain't got wings, coming down is the hardest thing.

- Tom Petty, *Learning to Fly*

climbing and our falls should not prevent ours. Our best option to assure life-giving, secure hand and foot placement is not to worry and fret over each grab or step, but to be fully absorbed in the Almighty as we climb.

The elements of sacred flow naturally facilitate absorption. Our deep concentration on the here and now lead us to experience the interflow of the Trinity. We get lost in the moment with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We feel insulated by God's love and presence. Here, we experience his flowing life rather than the death of distraction and superficiality. Total absorption provides us purer perspective of God, our self and others. We pour into God and the moment.

Our absorption benefits us and our neighbor. Doesn't it frustrate you when you share something important with someone and they half listen? They lean back with eyes wandering, offering an occasional *uh huh*. Without absorption, our whole life, including our spirituality is half attentive, scattered, disjointed, and even disrespectful. In a flowless state, we are barely here. Being *somewhat* attentive does not translate to reverencing or loving God, self or neighbor. Sacred flow takes us deep into God, his perspective and his way, benefitting not only us but all those who come in contact with us. Being given into God, we are freely given into our true selves and into others. We listen and love fully absorbed.

action-awareness merge

The last time I snowboarded was idyllic, heavenly. I found an untouched area with fresh snow. I weaved my way through thigh deep powder. I floated, slaloming in and out of snow covered trees. The board and I were one. My action and awareness fused. For a short while I felt completely connected with God, his creation, and my snowboard. My eyes welled up with tears, really. You have likely been in a similar situation, in which you are so connected that any dualism or separation ceases to exist.

The action awareness merge relates closely with total absorption. When we are absorbed we merge. We merge with what we are doing, two become one. Sacred flow affords us varying levels of this experience. Our mutual indwelling with Christ supports this idea. We have spiritually merged with him. We are not Christ but our doing can be his doing and his doing our doing. Sometimes we experience this reality and other times we don't. Many of us may not have opened ourselves to this divine merge. Recognizing our service as the hands and feet of Jesus we may truly sense our connection with him and our activity. Any separation between us, those we serve, and God dissolves. In these miraculous moments we truly sense solidarity with God and others.

Without acknowledging sacred flow or even the possibility of the action awareness merge, our experience becomes disconnected from God, the integrator of all things. We wrestle with nagging dualism, constantly sensing the chasm between ourselves and God as well as with others. We are left to do life's activities for us, and in our own strength...praying for God's assistance. Our disconnected life or service disorients us and others. Not sensing our connection with God, those connecting with us intuitively recognize our deficiency. Flowless, we limp along the path beside the river.

We have strayed from the river's flow into the jungle going it alone. Sacred flow incessantly leads us back to our union with God, pulling us into the merge, not only into the river but the center of the river's flow.

inner stillness

How often do you experience soul-storms? I describe these soul-storms as *churnage*. Churnage is the sensation in our soul when we simply cannot find peace. We can actually feel a rolling soul pain in our gut, maybe even throughout our body. We are deeply rattled, with no resolution in sight. Severe churnage dismantles us when we tragically and suddenly lose a loved one to death or broken relationship. Or we may be personally enduring what seems like endless suffering for an innumerable other reasons. We churn without resolution, our soul in agony with little, if any stillness.

I spent plenty of time churning in college. My churnage was not at the level of losing someone close to me, but many things created a concoction that weighed on me and inside it often felt like my stomach was full of spoiled fish tacos. I had problems passing Chemistry and Physics, deciding a major, dating, measuring up in my Christian *religion* and satisfying my militant baseball coach. This repugnant inner swirl stole my peace.

We all need stillness, unshakable inner stillness...right now and at all times.

Even now, as you read you may face much bigger problems than these. Your churnage may be turning you inside out. Sacred flow leads us into the peace of God given to us in Christ. We have the potential to experience perfect peace in having God within us. He has given us his peace. As we tune into his rhythm and flow, our churnage mysteriously subsides. Like spiritual Alka-Seltzer, Christ mystically bubbles within,

dissolving our churnage, producing in us inner stillness. Granted, this *mystical bubbling* occurs according to God's timing not ours.

The term *joy* in Greek, *chara*, means "calm delight."¹² Calm delight perfectly describes the stillness God delivers. Jesus says don't worry about anything, tell me about it, offer your whole life to me, churnage included, release it...and a peace, a rest, a calm delight beyond your expectation will overwhelm you.¹³ Just be still, cease your striving and flow, know, understand, comprehend, discover me as the living, indwelling God.¹⁴

A flowless spirituality leaves us to settle our churnage with do-it-yourself home remedies. Ironically, we furiously fight to obtain and maintain even a moment of inner stillness. We manage our externals in an effort to calm our internals. This rarely works. Whatever our strategy it proves short-lived and limited to the natural realm. Sacred flow nurtures a profound supernatural stillness that begins from within and works its way outward.

effortlessness

Talking to God in my journal I penned a weird request. I desired to someday to be cast in a film. I really enjoy movies. God regularly uses them to get through to me. Some time later I was living in Prague, Czech Republic carrying out my normal counseling and teaching work as well as filling in as a pastor at a church where the regular pastor was taking a sabbatical. After the church meeting one Sunday, a movie producer sought me out and asked me if I could pray for his film. It was a short film with a spiritual message called *Most*. They were in dire

**Only wonder can comprehend his
incomprehensible power.**

**- Maximus the Confessor
*On the Divine Names***

¹²Meyers, *e-Sword* (Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2005), joy.

¹³Philippians 4:6,7.

¹⁴Psalms 46:10.

straights financially. After praying he asked if people from the church could come out and volunteer as extras for the film. Me and a few others went out to the film set. Instead of being an extra I met the writer and director of the film and we hit it off. I became an impromptu chaplain. As it transpired, I was asked to play a small part in the film. Incredibly, the film won several awards at international film festivals, has been shown at many festivals throughout the United States and was nominated for an Oscar.

For me, this story is less about God answering silly prayers and more about effortlessness. I flowed from journaling to praying for a faltering film to being a part of an Oscar nominated short film. I did not try to be or do anything. I watched God create relationships and move me. I simply showed up and trusted God to do whatever he wanted with the situation.

Any striving or straining in sacred flow is straining in and through his power.¹⁵ We trust in his effort through us. This is the meaning of perhaps the most popular sentence in Paul's letter to the Philippians, "I can do all things through (or *in*) him who strengthens (or *enables*) me." The term *en*, through/in, denotes a fixed position in place, time or state. The Greek term *endunamoo*, strengthen, means to make strong, facilitate.¹⁶ We can handle anything when we approach it from or in the state of Christ making us strong, enabling us. This does not take away gut-wrenching challenge or suffering; it simply invites and engages God's power to face it. Sacred flow makes our effort...less.

Our alternative; try with all of our might...or not at all. Joining the way of the natural world, we do our best with all our strength or withdraw. A few of us float in between. Will it to be so and use all your effort to make *it* happen. Or we hide, afraid of

¹⁵Colossians 1:29.

¹⁶Meyers, *e-Sword*, Philippians 4:13.

failure. We do both to disastrous results...or none whatsoever. We may lose when we win as our time is fully consumed by creating success and/or our pride swallows us up. If we fail, our shame and pain may push us to medicate with substances that eventually land us in life's gutter on the verge of suicide. Whether our efforts lead to unimaginable success or brutal failure they may cost us our families or our soul. Others of us find middle ground that lulls us to sleep within lifeless mediocrity. Be it through resignation or by broad comparison, we somehow find semi-satisfaction in our ability to do *okay*. These options are not options at all.

In his book, *Will and Spirit*, Gerald May uses the terms *willfulness* and *willingness* to expound two ways of living. Willfully, we *will* to make things happen. We push, force, strain, and even manipulate. Ultimately, this is no way to live. It is not holistic or healthy. This trying or earnest willing seems quite noble but without God saturating and indwelling our effort we betray his grace. Willingness refers to a life in which we live open-handedly. We are willing participants with God in whom we live and flow and have our being. Our predominant effort is to consistently offer our whole selves to him in order for his effort to empower our activity.

control

Matthew has spent the past five years in prison for dealing drugs. It's a little odd considering his small town upbringing in an upper middle class family. He was sucked into it by his penchant for cash and control. It started in high school. He learned to manipulate and control, pushing people and drugs. It paid off in material wealth and self worth. In college Matthew competed in a sport and continued his *sales* job. Driven, even

an assassination attempt didn't redirect him. Finally, he went down. The state took control of Matthew. He was sent to prison.

His first two years in prison Matthew continued his manipulative ways. He spent untold hours in solitary confinement for his antics. About three years in, Matthew softened. A combination of his awakening to the pain he had caused his family and almost being stabbed to death turned him. On the outside, a woman Matthew met while drug trafficking and later abused and robbed had changed as well. She had encountered God, forgiven Matthew, and began writing him about new life. Matthew began to acknowledge God and his control. Over the next two years the two wrote often, sharing life with each other as they came to know God's flow and life within it. After Matthew's release the two were engaged.

At Waffle House, over coffee, eggs, and hash browns Matthew shared with me his awe regarding God's sovereign control. Reflecting, he admitted his need for God to break him...particularly of his need for

control. He concluded that a prison sentence of two years, which he almost secured during his trial, would not

**People all over the world are withering
because they are open to God only rarely.
Every waking minute is not too much.**

- Frank Laubach

Letters by a Modern Mystic

have been enough. Had he gotten out in two years he would likely be dead or back in prison for life. Likewise, he would not have the relationship he has with his fiancé. God's control broke Matthew's, rescued him, saved his life, and provided him with a bride.

Absorbed in sacred flow we recognize our circumstances as God-designed and God-directed even as we make terrible choices. This doesn't prevent drastic unpleasant

consequences related to our poor choices, i.e. five years in prison. God's mercy and his sovereignty somehow redeem our choices.

Often God's direction annoys us. Fenelon counsels, "Behind every annoying circumstance learn to see God governing all things."¹⁷ We give ourselves to the flow of his will not really knowing where it will take us, only that he holds us in his rhythm. Sacred flow leads us to *self*-control. A fruit of his flow is self-guidance and restraint. His Spirit enables us to flow in an orderly sensible fashion. We maintain a measure of self-control inside his control. We realize his control and ours as we flow.

Outside of sacred flow, our lives are erratic. Without acknowledging God's flow – his control, we are left to exert any control we can muster over our circumstances. Beyond this, without presenting ourselves to his Spirit for enablement we are left to control ourselves as well. We may choose law-keeping to assist us in gaining only to discover that it makes things worse.¹⁸ Our flowless lives careen out of control or maintain some semblance of control dependent on our ever-straining will power. Sacred flow illuminates God's control in our lives and our capability to rely upon his ability for self-control.

spontaneous intuitive action

One of my favorite films is *The Matrix*, the first in the trilogy. Ten years and thirty to forty viewings later, the film still stirs me. It stirs me because it recounts my story and likely yours. I never understood the main character *Neo* as a messiah. I have always interpreted him as me and you. Mr. Anderson, a normal everyday person is a rebel – sleepless, searching and longing for something more, something *real*. He seeks a

¹⁷Francois Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart* (Sargent, GA: The Seedsowers, 1962), 14.

¹⁸Romans 5:20, 7:8-11.

mysterious, said to be dangerous person, Morpheus, and the truth about the world. Soon, he's reborn, redeemed from being no one to being *the One*. He transforms from old man to new man – Neo, from disillusioned to enlightened, from dead to alive, from controlled action to intuitive action. Neo finds *real* life early on in the film and spends the rest of the film working out his salvation. He must discover his identity – what it means to be *the One*, and live it out. Perhaps the most profound ability Neo possesses is intuition. Morpheus trains him to trust it completely. Before successfully leaping from one skyscraper to the next Morpheus famously says, “You’ve got to let it all go Neo, fear, doubt, disbelief...free your mind.” When he finally grasps the *elements* of his identity, Neo moves spontaneously, intuitively, bending and breaking the rules of the matrix. Radical intuition is fundamental to being *the One* and living as *one* in God’s sacred flow.

In sacred flow we have been released into a similar intuitive freedom. God recreates us, calling us out of fear, doubt, and disbelief into the spontaneous intuitive action associated with being *one* with his Spirit. Our intuitive movement comes from God’s embedded Spirit deep within us. Jesus says this Spirit-wind and its people are quite spontaneous. This wind and these people blow about where the God wishes. No one knows where they come from or where they are going.¹⁹

God created everything to partake of his own nature, to have some degree and share of his own life and happiness.

**- William Law
*The Devout Life***

Sacred flow’s elements lead us to experience the gift of God’s spontaneous initiation. God directs our intuition, our desires, empowering our action as we flow with him.²⁰ Spontaneous intuitive action provides expansive autonomy for us to love deeply

¹⁹John 3:8.

²⁰Philippians 2:13.

and creatively. Also, intuitive action proves to be fluid and genuine rather than flippant or fake. It gives off an aura and fragrance of authenticity. Though it feels abstract, sacred flow bids us to stand firm in this spontaneous intuitive freedom heeding Paul's call to use it to love and serve others.²¹

Christian spirituality without spontaneous intuitive action sticks to moral principles, regimented life – legalism. Legalism represents life in an illusory *matrix* where superficiality motivates a flowless Christianity. We allow external law, pressure, perception and guilt to drive our action. We live a flat, one dimensional, predictable life. God has entered our matrix. His Spirit-wind blows wildly, internally and externally, intending to suck us out of our matrix-bound lives into his flowing *real* rhythm.

lack of self-consciousness

Teresa of Calcutta worked endlessly on behalf of the poorest of the poor in India. She was renowned for her lack of self-consciousness. Her focus was Jesus and loving those he wished to love through her. She operated for decades touching the untouchable, comforting the dying without regard for herself. She simply didn't worry about what others thought of her, so much so that others were concerned about her lack of concern. For example, it is widely known that she rarely, if ever, turned away donors despite their lack of integrity. Mother Teresa took donations from practically anyone, being only concerned for what the funds would do for the poor. Her unconditional acceptance of donations and people alarmed "reputable" donors and others who respected her work.

Recently, Mother Teresa's personal letters exposed the significant doubt she wrestled with quite regularly. This makes her life all the more profound. With severe

²¹Galatians 5:13.

doubt to stall her selflessness she continued to risk, giving everything. She flowed *unself-* consciously into the lives of those who needed her the most but were of no consequence to practically anyone else in the world.

Sacred flow leads us away from self-focus. It rescues us from paralyzing introspection. It incessantly directs us to Christ as our life, the substance of our flow and the center of our consciousness. We live by faith in him, his flow, not trusting in ourselves, our own strength. When absorbed in this approach our focus stays on God and others not ourselves. We don't waste time being concerned about our esteem or inadequacies. Nor do we put unwarranted faith in our super-sufficiency. As we surrender our self-consciousness to sacred flow our selfishness sinks as selflessness rises.

In a flowless lifestyle we think about ourselves so much so that we lose proper perspective including realistic perception of God, ourselves and others. We get stuck in our self-consciousness unable to express our true selves and therefore God. We either think we are great, adequate, God's gift to humanity, or believe ourselves to be a rancid worm, an unworthy flea of a human, invisible. Either way we are stuck, demented...and lost. While self-conscious we strive for God's acceptance and continued approval for our esteem's sake. We sacrifice our experience of our divine life by attempting to save our natural one. We end up trapped within ourselves rather than losing ourselves in him and his flow. Self-focus chokes our sacred flow.

emotional buoyancy

It was late evening and I had just sat down for tea after dinner. I had spent the day with a friend traveling from Prague to Gabrovo, Bulgaria. This entailed a few hours on a plane and a few hours drive winding through snowy Bulgarian mountains. The phone

rang. It was my wife. How did she get my Bulgarian friend's home number? This couldn't be good. Her voice trembling, she said our two year old daughter had just had a seizure and was in the hospital. When she last saw her she was lying unconscious on an emergency room hospital bed. She would call me back when she got more news. With that, the call ended.

I was in shock, feeling oddly numb. I was whole countries away from my distraught wife and my unconscious daughter...petrified and powerless. I called my parents in Atlanta to inform them. I literally couldn't speak. Somehow, eventually I squeaked out the news. I shared the news with my friends in the apartment and we prayed. I surrendered the whole situation and myself as much as possible. The earliest flight back to Prague was at 2:00pm the next day three hours away in Sofia. Needless to say, it was an excruciating night.

Remarkably, I woke with a surprising peace. I boarded a bus at 5:00am for the airport. My emotions rebounded. I was totally out of control and yet okay. My surrender had effectively exhaled the situation to God. I spent all day in the airport waiting for the flight. I was able to focus enough to read a whole book before boarding the flight. The emotional saga continued when I arrived back in Prague. The doctors believed our daughter had epilepsy. The medical culture surrounding communication and treatment was exceptionally frustrating. Thankfully, it was later determined that their original diagnosis was incorrect. Sensing God's closeness to the situation, my emotions stayed reasonably in check throughout the whole ordeal.

Jesus bids us to consider the *unworry* of birds. Birds are so irresponsible. They do nothing of eternal value, have the nerve to fly freely, and yet God provides for them. We

carry infinitely more value than birds. Jesus calls us to proper emotional perspective, to buoyancy. Don't worry. Don't allow your emotions to get the best of you.²² Sacred flow floats our emotions. As we flow, we embrace our emotions and express them while holding tightly to God and his sovereign *doing*.

Jesus points out that the flowless worry about everything. They are not intimately tapped into the Source. Logically, they get bent easily, emotionally unbalanced. Personally, in my flowless moments I get snappy with anger. I rant. More often than not, behind my anger is fear. I use anger to control my fear of being out of control, of failure, of inadequacy, or you fill in the _____. I'm sure you have your own flowless emotional outbursts...or inbursts. Sacred flow turns and returns our emotions to healthy buoyancy.

self-transcendence

Terrance works as a high level economic analyst for a national bank. He provides analysis on television and regularly gives speeches. He told me that sometimes when he gives speeches he transcends himself. He feels beside himself, outside and inside of himself simultaneously. In those moments he believes he could talk for hours fluidly without notes. When this occurs Terrance feels practically numb, detached, but in control of himself and everyone in the room. In these moments he thinks he could successfully convince his audience that the sky is yellow...and falling. In this place of self-transcendence he does his best work.

Sacred flow allows us to move beyond typical physical limitations. We harbor *the* divine creative energy, *the* transcendent one. His flow takes us beyond our human potential. Jesus says we will do greater works than he because of his return to the

²²Matthew 6:22-33.

Father...and into us.²³ Via his flow force within, we (individually and corporately) are able to do more than most of us have ever imagined.²⁴ We transcend ourselves by releasing the Spirit of God to live and flow in and through us. We tap into our God's energy that takes us beyond ours.

Flowless, we live without real connection or context for the supernatural. We stay within ourselves and our resources expecting nothing more. Spiritually, the best we hope for is God's help as our personal assistant. As for our flowless performance, we might flaunt it, make excuses for its lackluster or withdraw from performance altogether. Without transcendent flow, we are limited to whatever we can muster. God births us into his transcendent flow so that we no longer need to be limited to ours.

time disorientation

The thought of a five hour, ten mile hike through a gorge seemed daunting to me. I needed it though. I needed some substantial *me* time having been involved in an intense ministry setting for an extended period. After all, I would likely not get this opportunity again in my lifetime. I was on vacation on the Greek island of Crete. The Samaria National Park housing a beautiful gorge leading down to the sea was an hour ride inland from our guesthouse. At the entrance to the park a towering mountain peak majestically welcomed me, calling me into the gorge. I began my trek.

The Way that is Jesus Christ does not lead us out of real life. Rather, it fills this earthly life with transcendence.
- Michael L. Lindvall
A Geography of God

Mysteriously, my five hour traverse meandering along the riverbed of the gorge seemed like one hour. It felt like time warped ahead and stood still simultaneously. I

²³John 14:12.

²⁴Ephesians 3:20.

walked alone with many other people buzzing around me. I talked with no one, focusing instead on absorbing anything God, through the gorge, offered. Time sorted itself out again as the gorge delivered me into the quaint village of Agia Roumeli, teeming with tourists and Greek cuisine. The village stretched to the electric blue Libyan Sea, a color so rich I can't even describe it. The beauty of the whole experience still moves me today. God's presence pushed in on me as time stood still and raced ahead that day.

Surrendering to sacred flow entails not only giving ourselves to God's timing but also to his time orientation. As we flow with him, he bends our time to his will, at his will. He seemingly speeds time up or slows it, or both. Many times I wish he would warp-drive my times of pain and suffering and slow down my times of health and happiness. Unfortunately, reality oftentimes feels opposite. Nonetheless, God creatively uses these time-warp sensations as imaginative tools to transform us.

Sacred flow leads us to trust God with *our* time, believing he will make the most of it. And if we chose to waste time, we trust him to wake us and move us along. Living in rhythm means living within the timing of his beat. Sacred flow teaches us to listen and lean into God's rhythm. We take the time to look around in each moment despite the pace of its passing. We savor God and others in rhythm with God's timing.

Flowless, we don't often experience these divine time warps. Instead, time weighs on us. It serves as an enemy rather than another of God's intimacy instruments. We may believe God has pulled us out of the game completely, sidelining us for a time. Or we feel he has stopped spending time *with* us. Or God is present but does little or nothing with our time, on our behalf. Maybe the opposite occurs. God seems to be pushing us at a pace we cannot keep. We sense God's presence but time's velocity buries us. In these

instances, time feels disoriented but not in the positive manner associated with sacred flow. Sacred flow means to reset our perception and time orientation, attuning it with God's rhythm.

peak performance

Research has demonstrated that flow leads not only to peak-experience but also peak performance. Acknowledging this, most performance coaches for elite performers hope to regularly facilitate their clients into the flow state. As spectators when we see outlandish god-like performances we often recognize the aura of flow. Many times the performer attempts to describe her euphoric flow experience. The performance went beyond her natural potential. It was dominant, fluid, effortless, and practically supernatural.

**You can't lead if you don't love.
You can't love if you don't serve.
What is the depth of your love?
What is the value of your
service?**

- Cornel West

Peak-performance is the ultimate expression of flow and sacred flow alike. But it serves as their primary paradox. To enter flow we cannot focus on results, fruit – peak performance. This certainly proves true in our spirituality. Just as fruit happens, so does peak performance. We commit to the elements not fruit or peak performance. Living intensely focused in the elements leads us to flow then fruit; be it simply a more supernatural experience of the everyday or peak performance or both. Ironically, sacred flow, in opposing experience seeking and performance-based spirituality, leads us to peak experience and performance beyond our potential.

Considering flow's fruit in light of sacred flow unfolds the experience of living in God's rhythm. As we live in the elements, looking inward and outward to God, trusting him as our flow, fruit happens. The fruit of sacred flow is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control *as well as* unitive consciousness, intrinsic validation, uniqueness of identity, total absorption, action awareness merge, inner stillness, effortlessness, control, spontaneous intuitive action, lack of self-consciousness, emotional buoyancy, self-transcendence, time disorientation. We experience the latter portion of the list as a result of the former. Bearing the Spirit's fruit we experience the diverse fruits of sacred flow at varying levels. As a result, God's irresistible flow-fragrance pours through our lives.

Having integrated Christian spirituality with flow's elements and effects, it's time to consider daily life in sacred flow. How do we posture ourselves to experience sacred flow? What, if anything, can we *do* to create a fertile soul for sacred flow? Chapter seven introduces three soul postures that nurture sacred flow and ultimately its fruit.

being formed by God's flow

1. How have you tried to force fruit production? How have you focused on performance or results rather than living in the elements – the Vine?
2. Allow God to speak into those *flowless* places in your life. Invite God to wake you from denial and unclog your faith, tapping you into his *sap*.
3. Journal about times when you experience the fruit of the Spirit and/or the fruits of sacred flow. Pay attention to where your attention is vested when fruit *happens*.

The Third Current

Living Faith in the Flow

8

Postures

Soul Poses That Catalyze Sacred Flow

Living in the Spirit means that I trust the Holy Spirit to do in me what I cannot do myself...It is not a case of trying but of trusting; not of struggling but of resting in Him.
- Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*

We shall see Christ as the center and focal point toward whom and from whom all things flow.
- George Maloney, *The Mystery of Christ in You*

“Sit up in your chair please.”

During your childhood your mom or grandma, or both, like mine, pestered you about your posture. These well-intentioned barbs were meant to help us establish habits that would protect our long-term health. As kids, we could care less. However, as with most of their advice, this turned out to be true and valuable. Daily life puts our posture to the test. Easily, we slip or slump, crouch or lean. Life takes its toll on us. Proper physical posture keeps our bodies functioning efficiently. Good posture prevents problems with our back, neck, head, muscles, nerves, blood, etc. Posture aligns our body, preventing pain, and facilitates the efficient flow of our blood and other fluids.

Good posture promotes *flow*.

The same is true in our spirituality. Certain postures foster sacred flow. The term *posture* here speaks of positioning our soul – our interior attitude, disposition, or approach. Our soul’s posture influences our spirit and body. Essentially then, we are talking about posturing our perspective or lifestyle. Proper interior posture leads us to a healthy holistic integration of spirit, soul, and body...and therefore a sound spirituality. Over forty years ago Thomas Merton bemoaned that Western religion had lost its *interiority*.¹ Promoting meaningful soul postures as central and indispensable re-prioritizes or *re-interiorizes* Christian spirituality for sacred flow. Graceful posturing creates space for alignment, free bending, stretching, and growing. We posture ourselves to harness the Spirit-wind and when we catch its rhythm it moves us. God’s sacred flow shapes our whole life.

posturing and re-posing

Tim Keel explains that our inner postures reflect how we interpret our environment, God, and ourselves. These *interpretations* seep into our soul’s posture and even into our physical behavior.² Life

brings us an infinite number of situations, people, joys, pains, and problems that shape our belief matrix

He is the source of the most delightful disposition from which all goods of salvation flow.

- Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*

or interpretations. Life easily twists us like pretzels leading to poor postures that feel unnaturally natural. To reflect upon this you might ask yourself, *Am I cognizant of my postures as I receive and respond to life? With what inner attitude or disposition do I*

¹Bonnie Thurston, ed. *Merton & Buddhism; Wisdom, Emptiness, & Everyday Mind* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007), 23.

²Tim Keel, *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor, and Chaos* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 226.

approach daily life...each moment? What internal messages, beliefs, or interpretations drive my postures? Where did these beliefs come from?

Life delivers plenty to prevent healthy soul postures from ever being established. Tragic events, random distractions, the pain of our past, and worry about our future all have the potential to foil our postures and therefore our flow. We have collected messages about God, ourselves, and others throughout our whole life. Interpreting and integrating these defining messages shapes us. Harmful messages pose problems for our identity, relationships, and worldview. God desires to speak his *message* into us as he reforms us. In order for us to re-pose toward a more flow-oriented graceful disposition and expression we must deal with our underlying beliefs or interpretations.

Beliefs, rational or not, influence our emotions and behavior.

For example, you believe the chair you are sitting in will hold you or you would not be sitting in it right now. If your confidence or belief in the chair were weak or nonexistent you would change your behavior by sitting elsewhere.

Alina found it very difficult to be outdoors, especially at night, or to ride the city trams. She would be internally and sometimes externally panicked even thinking about it. She avoided bushes like the black plague. As a small girl her parents warned her to be very careful about attackers lurching from behind bushes. These villains especially watch for women getting off trams...at night. I doubt her parents intended to traumatize her. Nonetheless, this commentary founded and grounded an irrational belief in Alina's psyche that detoured her life and her emotions for decades.

Over time through various experiences, we form beliefs about everything from God to *koosa* (a Lebanese side dish made from squash). Generally, our beliefs form

through a recipe-like mixture of messages on any given matter. We act upon many, if not most of these beliefs without a second thought. You plopped down on the furniture presently holding you without thinking much about its stability. Other of our beliefs may not be well formed or strongly held. For example, I may have never even heard of *koosa*. In these cases, a broader related belief is called upon to shape my feelings and respondent behavior. I may know nothing about *koosa*, but I absolutely love Lebanese food and squash, so my emotions and reaction are likely to be positive. Our story and our interpretive response to it built a belief matrix within us, a conceptual framework through which we perceive, think, emote, and act. Naturally, some of the beliefs making up our matrix are false, irrational, or at least a little skewed. These bent beliefs often torque our postures or prevent them altogether, thereby inhibiting our flow.

Interrelated with our beliefs is a single God-established core need. This need and what we believe about its fulfillment or lack thereof informs our concept of God, self, and others. We all need *love*. Within love and giving more definition to it are other basic needs like *acceptance, value, identity, and security or peace*. Genuine love cannot exist without acceptance. Love acknowledges and affirms identity and value. Lastly, love naturally desires to protect, preserve and secure. Love tightly relates with our belief matrix.

To be healthy and whole people we need to believe we are lovable and loved. Our beliefs regarding this need being met guide our behavior. When we don't believe this core need is being met, we seek resolution ravenously, doing so consciously and subconsciously like an addict battling withdrawal. Ultimately, our insatiable need-meeting lifestyle leads us to personal ruin.

Fortunately, through the power and beauty of the gospel God meets our core need. The gospel brings wholeness by making us the *beloved* children of God – lovable and loved.³ As a people becoming whole, we flow with God coming to accept ourselves as lovable, worthy and secure in God's sovereignty. Living from this place of fulfillment we are set free to move beyond voracious need-meeting to God's rhythm. Even as those receiving God's love, in our humanness we will wrestle with fulfillment and longing in some measure throughout our life. We are human.

**Give me love, love is what I need to
help me know my name.
- Seal, *Love's Divine***

Our lack of belief in this fulfillment doesn't eradicate our need. As just mentioned we ravenously seek fulfillment. In order to deal with the deep-seated need we establish coping rhythms. These are patterns or particular behaviors we *use* in an attempt to get our love-need met apart from God. Though we receive God's love and live in it we will still engage coping rhythms from time to time. Particularly under stress we tend to cope rather than flow deeper in His rhythm. In order to establish a healthy overall posture and the specific soul poses that will be introduced later in the chapter we need to unearth and evade these coping rhythms.

Eating and talking too much are coping rhythms of mine. I can easily fall into either rhythm or both daily, particularly when I am stressed. I get into a fleshly binging and purging. Binging on food and purging words. During these times, my soul and body rarely feel full. Instead, I feel restless, worried, and dissatisfied. In reality, I am not wholly believing in God's love (usually in the way of coming through for me) with regard to my personal worth, my finances, my career, my kids, my marriage, ad

³Galatians 3:26, Romans 8:14-17.

infinitum. I feel hopeless, helpless, and out of control. When this occurs, I don't generally run around chatting up everyone while jamming everything I can find into my mouth. It is much more subtle...as are many of our coping rhythms.

While counseling clients I am rarely shocked when people share how they have coped with their *unmet* need for love. Our coping rhythms can be truly innovative...or frightening. We may do wildly creative activities in an attempt to get our needs met. We may construct elaborate false identities to feel okay about ourselves. We might meticulously cheat people to become wealthy thereby fulfilling our need for significance and security. We might develop a truly remarkable wit, perceiving laughs as value strokes. Darker rhythms may include abusing others emotionally, physically, or sexually to gain a sense of control or validation. There is no limit to the avenues we choose in our vain effort to satisfy our God-embedded love-need.

**Not one drop of
my self worth
depends on your
acceptance of
me.**

- Quincy Jones

More often than not, we simply over-do or pervert healthy rhythms. Returning to my eating example, eating is healthy...overeating is not, even if I am gorging on steamed broccoli. Eating small portions is healthy...starving myself to achieve rail thinness in hopes of being accepted is not. Having a great sense of humor is a gift...using it to secure love is not. Working hard is healthy....becoming a workaholic in order to feel valuable or to avoid other issues is not. Loving others is healthy...needing or obsessing over their love hoping it will validate us is not. Celebration is healthy...using substances to regularly escape reality is not. This list could continue indefinitely. The definition of compulsively overdoing anything with regularity is called *addiction*.

If we know ourselves well enough; our distorted beliefs and how we tend to cope with life in our own strength, then we may flow out of our coping rhythm and back into God's. Taking some time to ask ourselves a few questions may help. *What rhythms have I developed to meet my core need? When I don't believe I am loved or lovable how do I deal with it? When I don't believe I am worthy or valuable how do I cope with it? When I don't believe I am secure, safe, or protected how do I manage?*

When I met Tina she was completely finished with God. She had served as a pastor and a missionary and now she sat with me, shipped in for intensive counseling. To be honest, I did not expect much, if anything, to happen during our short fifteen days. She was raw with lifelong pain feeling unloved and unlovable. I went forward with hearing her story. She was experiencing a rocky relationship with God, her father, and ministry. Her primary coping rhythm had been ministry. Doing ministry granted her love in the form of value, acceptance, identity, security. Increasingly, she felt she couldn't measure up to God's expectations, her father's, her congregation's, or her own. She had given her all and it wasn't enough. She had been emotionally beat up by each. Not only was God distant, he was disappointed. With this bubbling up from her belief system, Tina was broken, depressed, hopeless and angry. She believed no one could love her.

We talked through the origin of many of her false or irrational beliefs about God, ministry, herself, and others. We sifted her story, how it played out, and how she interpreted it to form these beliefs as well as her posture and coping rhythms. Tina needed an extreme belief makeover. I helped her consider new ideas about a graceful God that cherished and loved her for her, not related to her performance. This sparked wholesale restoration in her thoughts and her beliefs about God, ministry, herself, and

others. Tina's countenance changed miraculously and quickly as she began to recognize herself as lovable and loved.

I want to parse our core need, our story, and the resulting belief matrix into the formation of two primary concepts; our concept of God and our concept of self. These two flow into one another to determine how we perceive and relate others. Since we live from our beliefs, what we've learned (or not learned) about God and ourselves from our story is of crucial importance. These false or irrational beliefs may easily derail our soul postures and therefore our sacred flow. We need to expose them. This is much less about having *perfect* or *right* beliefs, and much more about being open for God to love us, heal us, and continually mold us as we move toward wholeness.

Moving towards wholeness with regard to our concept of God and self means we must move out of denial and idolatry. Denial keeps us trapped. We can't experience God's flow if we can't admit our need, pain, or lack of rhythm. As we move out of denial, the crust and rust on our soul softens and we begin to consider another way, reality. Reality may be difficult seemingly overwhelming to face. Thankfully, we face it within God's flow drawing upon his current.

Idolatry literally and figuratively means *image worship*.⁴ To be idolatrous means we worship *images* that do not match reality – God. We worship perverted images of God or material things as God. Generally, we conjure up a male God who is squishy and agreeable or tyrannical, aggressive, and intolerant.⁵ He is an unholy collage that betrays the genuine Reality. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “To everyone God is the kind of God

⁴Rick Meyers, *e-Sword* (Equipping Ministries Foundation: Franklin, TN, 2005), idolatry.

⁵Though I have used masculine pronouns for God throughout the book it should be noted that I do not assume God is male. God is beyond gender categories, assuming and consuming both genders.

he believes in.”⁶ Sacred flow means to awaken us to a new image of God. As we re-posture ourselves for flow our perspective of God shifts. This image worship may happen with our self concept as well. Not being able to accept that we have been created in the *image* of God, we go about creating an image for ourselves...and we worship it.

To heal our concept of God will require asking some fundamental questions and facing the resulting reality. Our conceptions of God may expose that our God doesn't flow or that he has no interest in flowing with us. We might simply be afraid of an intimate relationship with God...as we know him. In these cases and others like them, living in sacred flow's elements and the postures that lead to them proves difficult if not impossible. Thinking and praying through the following basic questions about God may expose our troublesome posture-twisting beliefs and open us for God's healing flow.

Who is God to me? Is God ever-present, all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful? Is God truly compassionate and forgiving? Is God really capable and interested in empowering me? Is God disappointed in me?

Patrick's concept of God directly reflected how he perceived his earthly father. Patrick saw God as a loving but somewhat emotionally distant dictator-like Father to be revered, respected and never crossed. No doubt, Patrick loved his President God and his President God loved him. God's demands and expectations were more unwritten than written. His love and presence felt subtly performance-based and unstable. So, Patrick longing for love, performed, and performed more. His life became about measuring up, being the best soldier-son he could be. Patrick's beliefs and behavior make sense given his story, and it's likely yours do as well.

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963), 205.

Ask God to walk you through your image and beliefs about him....including how and when they formed. You might be surprised to discover how much was formed by what your parents did or did not do, by their presence or lack there of. Take the time to prayerfully dig. Otherwise you may be attempting to live in rhythm with a God that doesn't exist.

What we were specifically taught about God at a young age also shapes our concept of God. A friend of mine has been haunted by a Sunday school song for much of her life. It goes something like this, "Be careful little eyes what you see (repeat three times), the Father's up above, and He's looking down in love, be careful little eyes what you see....be careful little hands what you touch..." You get the idea. God is up there looking down at me...and it doesn't feel like it's in love. This song coupled with children's sermons or lessons that mirror it solidify our self-shaping of God.

Our true self needs neither a muted trumpet to herald our arrival nor a gaudy soapbox to rivet attention from others. We give glory to God simply by being ourselves.

- Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*

With all the children huddled around him at the front of the sanctuary, the pastor, a preaching professor at a local seminary, starting his children's sermon by telling the kids about Jesus' sacrifice for them. Then, using grapes to represent people, he loaded a blender. He explained that many grapes would not choose to believe in Jesus. In the end, those who did not believe would be destroyed...he cranked the blender. I heard this story ten years ago and I'm still bothered by its dreadful, even traumatic content. I can't imagine what a seven year old thought.

How was I exposed to God as a child? What did this exposure teach me about God? Is it true? How has my childhood experience shaped my beliefs about church or spirituality? How have I been hurt along the way?

Ask God to walk you through your beliefs about church and spirituality as well. Our childhood, inside or outside of organized religion, has affected the way we perceive church and spirituality. We may harbor intense pain and frustration related to religion in general. We need clear vision and maybe fresh eyes altogether to integrate spiritual community with sacred flow. Ultimately, we want to connect with a community that promotes sacred flow's soul postures rather than preventing them. Not only will this take a special community, it will lead us to work through our pain regarding the church. God may need to redefine spiritual community for us, and the shape of our relationship with it. Eventually, I am convinced that God will supply us with a safe community that allows us to authentically and intimately connect with him and others.

Most of us have marginal, if not poor, *self-concepts*. If we're not self-loathing, we're misconceiving the difference between narcissism and proper reverence of ourselves. Either way, we're not loving or even liking ourselves well. Many who have struggled through abusive or otherwise difficult childhoods recognize how it has affected their self-concept. Others have come away with many skewed beliefs about themselves despite a positive upbringing with caring parents. Maybe a more recent trauma has pummeled our self-concept. Pain and distraction from our past has substantial power to prevent healthy soul postures, and therefore sacred flow.

Another set of questions may help us discover our beliefs or false beliefs about ourselves. As with our God concept, we need to walk through our story with God asking

him to unearth identity killers. *Am I an acceptable, valuable person? Who am I beyond what I do? Do I covet or crave love from others in an unhealthy way? Do I depend on the love of others to validate me or keep me safe? Do I seek comfort or safety at the expense of others or myself? Am I living freely under grace or under Law?*

“You’re ugly.” A comment made to Betsy by a close friend when she was only ten years old still latently plagues her as a sixty-five year old. It was a verbal punch whose pain has lasted over fifty years. She couldn’t seem to shake it; it was always there in the shadows. Sadly, this assessment has formed and informed Betsy in subtle ways throughout her life.

Healing from our pain regarding our concept of God, ourselves, others, and the church requires more than a transformed belief matrix. It requires forgiveness. Essentially, forgiveness means releasing a debt. A person who has offended us created a debt, and therefore they owe us. To forgive means whatever they owe us is forgiven; they are released without condition or repayment. Paradoxically, our releasing of others frees *us*. Without forgiveness we carry everyone and everything that has ever hurt us. This weight certainly affects our posture. Instead of flowing, we sulk, sink, bend, crack, and eventually break.

Many of us may feel God owes us. He allowed harsh circumstances in our life and surrounded us with harsh people. Or he simply has not come through. We may need to forgive God for his unwillingness to meet our expectations. Officially, of course God doesn’t need our forgiveness; he’s done nothing wrong. In reality, his only *offense* to us is his mystery or conversely our humanness. We can’t see the whole picture. We are spiritual beings currently locked into an earthly experience. So, we are left with the

tension of faith and mystery. To freely flow, we will have to release God and allow him to reshape his image and our concept of him.

Likewise, we must forgive others to set ourselves free. Forgiving others is not predicated upon their asking. This small detail makes forgiveness excruciatingly painful. We may need to forgive people who have not admitted their offense or even worse those who intentionally refuse to ask for forgiveness. Others may not even know they have hurt us. Genuine forgiveness requires grace. We intentionally choose to forgive these who are tough to release, trusting God's grace in his timing to heal our associated emotional wounds. Our releasing of them doesn't often equate to forgetting their offense or immediate emotional release for us. Forgiveness can be tough, but it's vital for healthy spirituality.

**In Christ we are reshaped
according to the pattern
we were created to bear.
- Marjorie Thompson
*Soul Feast***

When my good friend Frank grasped his freedom to flow intense emotions welled up in him. Namely, joy, sadness, and anger erupted. He was overwhelmed by a new understanding of the freedom he had as a follower of Christ. The thought of being indwelt and changed from the inside out by God's presence was a welcomed revolution. Flowing with God by his Spirit resonated intensely within him. It felt like returning home.

Speaking of home, Frank's anger and sadness related to his upbringing as a missionary kid. Earlier in life he had forced himself into a parent-induced mold of the "good Christian." Through life his frustration with his own, his parents' and other Christians' hypocrisy and rigidity intensified. Now a grace revolution exploded within him. It brought with it questions... Why had his parents not told him of God's indwelling

grace? Why had God not revealed it to him directly? Why had he spent his whole life straining to achieve God's ways using the Sisyphus system?⁷ When Frank shared his newfound freedom, his parents patronized him saying it was a "grace" phase he would soon get over. They worried and warned him to be careful of getting out of balance. Oddly, in midst of new life in grace, Frank's anger and sadness deepened to depression. Reflecting over many years in stifling legalism, he felt deceived by God and his parents.

Frank, like many of us diving into sacred flow, was faced with coming to terms with his past prison, pain and present persecution. Forgiveness ultimately freed Frank. Frank finally recognized the cost of freedom was forgiveness. When he released God, his parents, and himself, depression released him. Frank still wrestles with some residual anger and sadness, but he has been able to move more fully into the joy of freely flowing with God.

Never underestimate the power of forgiveness. Some of most amazing changes I have ever seen have resulted from forgiveness. With God's guidance people have courageously dug through the pain of their story and forgave those responsible for hurting them. For both nominal and horrific offenses they released moms, dads, brothers, sisters, grandmas, grandpas, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, foes, pastors, second grade teachers, Sunday school leaders, etc. Finally, they forgave themselves. They released the condemnation they had piled upon themselves over the years. They turned to love their enemy, themselves.

Healing our concepts of God and self, including the choice to continually forgive, allows us to establish healthy inner postures; to pose and re-pose. We must befriend our story in all its glory, trauma, or tragedy. Via the Spirit's guidance and illumination, we

⁷See the introduction regarding the Sisyphus system, page 3.

examine our beliefs about God, ourselves, and others, receive God's love, love in return, and forgive. I recognize that our belief matrix and forgiveness issues are complex. In the midst of our twisted complex issues, we trust God, the rhythm within and without, to expose and heal our belief matrixes as well as divinely empower our choice to forgive.

the good, the bad, and the ugly

Because sacred flow is God-centered as opposed to human-centered, we may freely flow through the good, the bad, and the ugly. Were it human-centered, sacred flow would be dependent upon our abilities in connection with the control of circumstances. In other words, if the circumstances are positive and we perform well, then we flow. This betrays the nature of God and flow.

In sacred flow, God serves as the focal point of our concentration and our love – both receiving and offering. He offers feedback through anything of His choosing. Our life in the here and now recognizes His presence in the here and now. Furthermore, the Spirit of God serves as flow's fuel. This being the case, we may live in flow's elements through life's good, bad and ugly. God has not promised circumstances free of pain, anguish, suffering, or want – see Job. He promises his acceptance, presence, and flow despite what occurs. As we navigate life's peaks and valleys we may be faced with maintaining a flow fertile soul posture under exceptionally difficult circumstances.

Difficult circumstances and life in general have a way of stirring intense emotions. Flowing through the good, the bad and the ugly will require handling emotions well. Being human means being emotional, but spiritual maturity and emotion haven't always had a positive correlation. Too much emotion communicates immaturity or instability. Our emotions and how we handle them refer us back to our belief matrix. Our

story (as well as our personality) has taught us how to express emotions, primarily whether it is safe or proper to do so or not. Despite what our story has taught us, embracing and expressing emotion is essential to our well being.

What we believe translates to our emotions. Emotions are responders, our soul's mouthpiece. Often we harshly criticize our emotions and the emotions of others. Realistically, emotions are not necessarily good or bad. They are reflective, indicative assets. The best illustration I have heard relates emotions as dashboard indicator lights...like *low fuel* or *check engine*. These lights aid and protect us, preventing real *internal* damage or breakdown. When these dash lights appear, it's ridiculous to be upset with the light itself. The real issue lies within the engine. We would be wise to be thankful for the light, pull over and deal with the deeper issue. I don't mean to make us, emotions, or dealing with emotions mechanical. We, nor our emotions, can or should be robotized. This illustration only means to help us feel and process emotions in a healthy fashion.

**Christ enters the poverty of our self-
enclosed selves, indwells us, and
makes his divine life to be our own.
- Miroslav Volf, *God's Life in Trinity***

If we are to flow through the good, bad, and ugly we will need to embrace our emotions no matter how dark, confusing, or embarrassing they may be. Peter Scazzero writes, "Emotional health powerfully anchors me in the love of God by affirming that I am worthy of feeling, worthy of being alive, and lovable even when I am brutally honest about the good, the bad, and the ugly deep beneath the surface of my iceberg."⁸ We need not fear our emotions despite their intensity. Living under *should* or *shouldn't* with regards to having certain emotions keeps our soul clogged and stunts our sacred flow. Many people are ill-equipped to handle emotions or coach others in how to handle them.

⁸Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 54.

Between our first and second child my wife had three miscarriages. It was a period packed with intense emotions. My wife had a *D & C* during this time, the procedure in which they physically scrape or clean out your womb after a miscarriage. This was intensely painful physically and emotionally. During part of that time we had an obstetrician who had no tact or understanding of emotions. She made several dispassionate remarks throughout the process. At one point she said something like, “Don’t you cry...be tough...be strong...There is no need to cry...move on with your life.” Needless to say, we changed doctors.

Emotions have the potential to serve as one of our most powerful allies in our sacred flow with God. They direct us to what we are believing or thinking in a given moment. They take us back to our belief matrix, reflecting what is going on under our hood. Subsequently, we are able to deal with the root issues. If we embrace our emotions and invite God to process them with us, we are able to maintain healthy postures and continue living in sacred flow’s elements. If we ignore our emotions, eventually we break down, flowless, with untold internal damage.

I get angry...mostly at myself. When I handle anger in a healthy manner, I pause and ask God where is this anger coming from? What am I believing right now? My anger didn’t magically appear. Usually, I am believing I have said or done something stupid or selfish (probably have), and I’m worried that I have lost the acceptance or respect of another person. Or I am angry because I feel hopeless in my ability to be perfect at *everything*. Emotions take me to the distorted beliefs I am embracing in the moment. Offering them to God, I ask him to bring me back to the truth, reposition my posture, and move me onward in his flow.

On February 28, 2008 I came home from work early. I noticed a police car in my neighbor's driveway. My neighbor's wife, Emma, was outside talking to the police and other neighbors. I thought maybe their house had been burglarized, so I walked over. To my dismay it was much worse, my neighbor's husband was missing. He had been since the evening before. This quickly became surreal. Ed was a good friend and a good man. He and I talked regularly. As a kindhearted neighbor and professional electrician, he was helping me with construction in my basement. A day or two earlier my wife and I had just been talking about Ed's care and compassion for others. Under a strange set of circumstances, Ed drowned in the lake behind his house. It took a week to find him. It was an awful week. The investigation proved it to be a freak tragic accident. Ed left behind a wife, a college age daughter and a teenage daughter and son.

Needless to say, this wrecked my flow. I was writing this book at the time...I stopped. I was numb. For weeks I couldn't even bring myself to go down in my basement where Ed and I had been working. Some of his tools were still there. My wife and I reeled for months. We felt angry, sad, confused, disappointed and numb. God felt distant and uncaring. We hurt for the loss of a friend and we hurt for his family. We couldn't imagine the intensity of the pain Emma must have been feeling. Questions flooded us. How could this happen? To him? Why? Why this way? Why now? What does this mean? In light of tragedy, does sacred flow even matter? Is it valid here? Now?

I processed a lot, time went by, and I realized that if sacred flow is not valid in this place then it is not valid anywhere. I came to realize that our sacred flow includes mourning. With great courage we stay aware, vulnerable, and focused on God in the midst of unrelenting pain. We process and flow into and through our pain and numbness.

Sure, we will be knocked around and have to find our way back to flow, but we can still live in the elements of flow during our pain or suffering. It's even beneficial to do so. The same pain that disrupts our sacred flow has the potential to deepen it.

soul poses

The section above spoke of the importance of healthy posture but more so about beliefs or interpretations, conceptions that lead to healthy or unhealthy postures. Now we turn to talk about specific postures that make possible a healthy belief matrix. When we bravely root out false assumptions and regularly lay ourselves open to God for *belief-tweaking* then our belief matrix is healthy...or at least moving in the right direction. We have created a flow fertile foundation from which our soul can properly pose.

Three soul poses allow for a full range of the Spirit's motion. We easily slip into them as our way of life. Holistic awareness, mind-setting and rhythmic engagement fuse Christianity and flow, theology and practice, stability and fluidity. Holistic awareness wakens our spirit, soul, and body to God each moment, and God in each moment. Setting our mind establishes, maintains, and recovers our attention so that holistic awareness and rhythmic engagement are consistent realities. Rhythmic engagement allows us to move freely, fully engaging or disengaging as the Spirit leads.

Jesus Christ does not want to be our helper. He wants to be our life. He does not want us to work for Him. He wants us to let Him do His work through us.

**- Charles G. Trumball
*The Life That Wins***

Let's briefly review the elements that incubate sacred flow in order to relate them to the postures. The Trinity serves as the subject of our deep concentration while the will of the Father – love, is our goal. The Holy Spirit, our rhythm within, leads us in love to love. The Spirit initiates challenges, increases our capacity, empowers us, provides us

with feedback, and brings our attention into the here and now. To faithfully focus and fully engage summarizes the elements.

holistic awareness

Wake up from your sleep, Climb out of your coffins; Christ will show you the light!
Ephesians 5:14, The Message

We Christians suffer an ongoing hypnotism by our surrounding culture. We stumble around in denial about our spiritual vertigo. Zombie-like numbness results along with a mechanical, methodical, mummified spiritual lifestyle. Awareness is primarily limited to our physical and materialistic appetites. Our spiritual hunger or curiosity often plays itself out in programmatic church, is misdirected, or altogether repressed. Unfortunately for most, our church attendance barely jolts our eyelids or unclogs the ears of our souls. Meanwhile, for many living outside of a spiritual community, their spiritual fender-benders occurring while navigating life's highways and byways do little to significantly shake and wake their souls.

Holistic awareness entails fully waking up and paying attention. Holistic awareness is what Tony Campolo calls, "hyperawareness."⁹ In the words of Brother Lawrence it is a turning and keeping of the "soul's eyes" upon God.¹⁰ It steadies us, settling our vertigo. Being aware means being open, vulnerable, teachable, and focused. To be so, we must be woken from any fanciful illusions that soften or deflect reality. Indifference or driftage serving as our soul's protective moat must be bridged. This illusory or protective spirituality lies in opposition to Jesus' spirituality. Jesus brings what

⁹Anthony Campolo and Mary Darling, *The God of Intimacy and Action; Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 6.

¹⁰Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 69.

Thomas Merton describes as “death to unreality.”¹¹ As Jesus approached the cross he called on his friends to be aware – to watch and pray. Be alert, your humanity is easily duped.

*Watch and pray, that you do not enter into temptation,
the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.
Matthew 26:41*

A predominant theme in Jesus’ life and ministry was living awake, holistically aware. He was fully aware of the presence of the Father, his own belovedness, and everyone around him. He calls on his people to stay alert, listen, hear, see, and understand so that they will continually return to him and live from him.

We certainly need awareness of our belovedness. Remember our core need? God’s presence and love is made available to us each and every moment if only we are available for him to disclose it. God smothers us with his presence. Holistic awareness wakes us to sense God’s loving presence. Henri Nouwen implored people to radically identify themselves as God’s beloved...and live in this awareness daily.¹² Holistic awareness benefits us, the awakened, by opening us to receive regular affirmations of our belovedness. God’s unitive presence and our belovedness are the substance of holistic awareness. The rhetoric of trying to get closer to God must be thrown out with the rest of our religious rubbish. God is ever-present, lovingly pressing in on his beloved from within and without.

Wake up. God is here.

¹¹Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (1993, Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993), 3.

¹²Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000), 26. See also Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*, ed. M.J. Christensen and R.J. Laird (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 29.

Are you dissatisfied...spiritually or otherwise? When you become aware you may recognize a certain spiritual dissatisfaction. Steve McVey contends that dissatisfaction is God's work leading us to deeper awareness.¹³ Dissatisfaction sparks curiosity and quest. Divine or spiritual curiosity leads us on a quest for holistic awareness and holistic awareness perpetuates our curiosity. Divine curiosity is a God-prompted quest for *more*. More God. More life. More understanding. More mystery, etc.

This quest reaffirms that holistic awareness requires openness. In fact, awareness and openness can practically be interchanged in this context. A natural authentic response to curiosity is awareness or openness in the form of teachability. Awareness reawakens us as spiritual learners. Our heart stirs as a willing learner. Learning the way of sacred flow often requires the unlearning of former rhythms. We must practice what Reggie McNeal calls *lifelong unlearning*.¹⁴ As our journey continues, lifelong unlearning connected with awareness may call on us to give up plenty of preconceived ideas and rhythms of life.

To engage curiosity, be aware, and learn, we lay ourselves bare. To be fully open is to be fully surrendered. As addressed earlier, surrender requires brokenness, humility, and vulnerability. Holistic awareness necessitates a 'wholly' offering.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.
Romans 12:1

¹³Steve McVey, *The Godward Gaze* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 25.

¹⁴Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness; 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. 2006 (San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass, 2006), 63.

Surrender is the work of awareness and moreover, Christian spirituality. Jean-Pierre de Caussade writes, “We have to do nothing except allow his will to work within us and surrender ourselves to it blindly with absolute trust.”¹⁵

Awareness leads us to remember ourselves. Holistic awareness both prepares and maintains our ability to receive and respond to the Holy Spirit moment by moment. We become much more cognizant of God’s all-permeating presence, love, and guidance and are therefore postured for response. This awareness or mindfulness facilitates a waking to internal and external happenings not noticed earlier or at least not engaged. We move from simply acknowledging (or not) the existence of our own spirit, soul, and body to being reflectively conscious of our desires, needs, pains, and pleasures in these residencies.

We open up and listen up from the inside outward as well as outside inward. God’s spirit speaks through practically anything. Holistic awareness deepens our internal and external acuity. Holistic awareness orients us for open-focused, mindful, grace-filled, rhythmic activity. It opens us to God’s informing and forming of our spirit, soul, and body.

Turning to Csikszentmihalyi’s flow, holistic awareness easily merges with all of its elements. Being fully aware and open moves us toward deep concentration. Holistic awareness makes us astutely aware of love, along with where and how love might next be expressed. Awareness also allows us to reflect upon the challenges we face versus the skills we possess. Being receptive and surrendered, God guides us to and through these challenges according to his will and enabled by his strength. Additionally, our awareness

¹⁵Jean-Pierre De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Image Books, 1975), 28.

protects us from walking in flowless directions and taking on fruitless challenges.

Holistic awareness sniffs out fleshly flow and redirects us. Lastly, the only way to fully engage in an activity *here and now* is to be wholly aware in that moment. Awareness is presence.

Practically and personally, this presence tunes us into our spirit, soul, and body needs. As we become more aware in our relationship with God, we learn to distinguish and respond to needs in a healthy fashion. Our response may necessitate specific spiritual practices, a nap, intense exercise, walking in nature, better food choices, retreat, intentional community, or wholesale lifestyle changes – i.e. quitting substance abuse, an abusive relationship, or an ill-fitted career.

The only ultimate source of divine activity in all spiritual life is God Himself – “Christ in you, the hope of Glory.”
- Major Ian Thomas
The Saving Life of Christ

Sacred flow cannot be experienced without holistic awareness. Holistic awareness serves as the trailhead leading to more intimately knowing, experiencing, and loving God, ourselves, and others. It blazes the way for mind-setting and rhythmic engagement. Walking beyond awareness into deeper intimacy with God, self and others occurs as we set our minds and fluidly engage as God leads.

mind-setting

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.
Colossians 3:2

Staying the mind on anything for any considerable length of time is difficult to do, particularly in today’s frenetic culture. Tragically, more often than not, if we are not paralyzed we are distracted. Our distractions are boisterous and overwhelming while the divine voice often whispers quietly within. Truly benefiting from holistic awareness

necessitates sustained focus. Once awake and open to God within and without, setting our mind not only aids in keeping us aware but it moves us deeper into concentration.

To effectively speak of mind-setting, providing basic definitions for the terms *set* and *mind* will be helpful. The term *mind* has numerous definitions and contexts. In our context here, we will consider the mind, “The totality of conscious and unconscious mental processes and activities.”¹⁶ Related specifically to the spiritual practice, we will be speaking of the conscious mind. The verb *set* in this context means to, “direct or settle resolutely.”¹⁷ So, to set our mind means to intentionally direct or completely settle our consciousness in a particular place on a particular thought or thoughts.

Mind-setting easily relates to flow. Essentially, mind-setting is deep concentration or focus. Focus prevents what Csikszentmihalyi calls psychic entropy, a wandering unfocused mind. Instead, mind-setting is *negentropic* – leading to order and depth in our consciousness.¹⁸ Mind-setting moves us from awareness to concentration and onward toward absorption. Setting the mind keeps clear goal(s) clear and within our reach. It allows us to process and respond to feedback while still flowing.

As possessors of God’s Spirit, we have the capacity to set our minds. Paul explains to the Corinthians that they possess the mind of Christ.¹⁹ The Greek word for mind here, *nous*, breaks down the consciousness mentioned above to intellect, will, understanding, thought or feeling.²⁰ Our mind has been forever enmeshed with Christ’s. Our mutual indwelling allows us access to God’s perspective – his intellect, will, understanding, thought, or feeling. I have met few people who have truly believed or

¹⁶Mind, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mind> (accessed 4/16/2008).

¹⁷Set, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mind> (accessed 4/16/2008).

¹⁸Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow; The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990), 240.

¹⁹1 Corinthians 2:16.

²⁰Meyers, *e-Sword*, mind.

appropriated this miraculous reality. The Spirit teaches us regarding how and when to wield our mind *of* Christ.

Becoming holistically aware brings a flood of new thoughts. We have opened our senses to more fully take in our surroundings each moment. Mind-setting processes this new onslaught of information and moves us toward a sense of order in our consciousness. We set our consciousness while our unconscious or subconscious mind remains subject to the Holy Spirit's setting and resetting. Speaking to the significance of mind-setting, Csikszentmihalyi writes, "Because optimal experience depends on the ability to control what happens in the consciousness moment by moment, each person has to achieve it on the basis of his own individual efforts and creativity."²¹ Subject to and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we sift and direct our consciousness, reigning in thoughts and thought patterns turning them over to God.²²

The *clear goal* of Christian spirituality, love, is the sweet spot for our mind-setting. The mind set on love is set on God and vice versa. Within the context of love, our minds can be set on a variety of thoughts. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul relates that our mind is to be set upon heavenly ideals. Paul tells the Philippians to set their minds on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and anything else that proves excellent or praiseworthy.²³ The Spirit-wind sends our mind in countless directions within the context of God's love.

For the mind set on flesh is death, but the mind set on Spirit is life and peace.
Romans 8:6

²¹Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 5.

²²Corinthians 10:5.

²³Philippians 4:8.

Culture's rhythms certainly influence our mental grooves or thought patterns. They wreck the mental rhythm we experience having the mind of Christ. Christian spirituality calls us to the renewing of our minds, or in the context of sacred flow, the transformation of our mental rhythms. This transformation of the mind serves to set the stage for sacred flow returning our minds to God and his love. Paul stresses, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."²⁴ God transforms us as we surrender, focus, and cooperate with his grace. This renewal brings us into his rhythm allowing us to know and flow into his will, his goals. Most certainly, renewing our mind and continually setting it is an organic ongoing process, one the ever-present Holy Spirit guides and empowers. The resultant activism born of holistic awareness and mind-setting is love. Hyperaware and focused love finds healthy expression in the rhythmic flow of the Holy Spirit.

rhythmic engagement

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:5

Most of us have a stress addiction. We engage for long periods of time without substantive breaks. We have lived this way for so long that we are addicted to the associated stress. We are out of touch with any healthy fluid pattern of work and rest. Research has shown that it takes the typical American an average of 72 hours of rest to break their stress addiction. So, if we actually take a legitimate week's vacation, the first three full days of the vacation are subconsciously spent winding down...just in time to

²⁴Romans 12:2.

start stressing about packing up. We are stress addicts. We need to better regulate our diving in and pulling back...at least the pulling back. We need much more ebb and flow, rhythmic engagement.

Rhythmic engagement consists of remaining within God's rhythm as he leads us into and out of activities. This is the only way for us to live sane lives. Remaining or abiding in him leads us to a regular flow-through of

the Spirit and flow's fruits. The Vine's sap flows with divine rhythm. Jesus exemplified this rhythm, illustrating to us how to be human. Mentioned

earlier in chapter three, Jesus' life and ministry was

rhythmic. Even his relationships had rhythm. He

was guided by the rhythm of the Father. With regularity he ministered among the crowds, he walked with his friends, he attended parties, he visited with individuals, and he pulled away into solitude. In doing so, Jesus never hurried. He rhythmically engaged in activity and rest, labor and leisure – all of which were a significant part of his ministry. He was fully present on each of these occasions, engaging them rhythmically rather than religiously.

For God is creating us in the present moment, loving us into being, such that our very presence in the present moment is the manifested presence of God.

**- James Finley
*Christian Meditation***

Rhythmic engagement nurtures flow. Rhythmic engagement postures us for absorption despite our activity. As God guides and regulates, we flow with him during intense challenges and as we sink back into quiet restful rhythms. We gracefully volley between *peak* and *plateau-experiences*.²⁵ Rhythmic engagement postures us to embrace a full range of activities or non-activities while remaining attuned to God.

²⁵Hakan Thorsen, *Peak-Experience, Religion, and Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into some Main Themes in the Writings of Abraham H. Maslow* (Stockholm, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1983), 88, 89.

Our lives, spiritual or otherwise, are more often than not characterized by going and doing, and more going and doing. Before long our going and doing becomes gone and done. In *Rhythms of Grace: Finding Intimacy with God in a Busy Life*, Tony Horsfall introduces a Christian spirituality characterized by rhythm and grace. Horsfall explains that unless a quieter more reflective strand of Christian spirituality is embraced, burnout and breakdown will increase exponentially.²⁶ Unfortunately, there is a popular notion, though unspoken, that any slowing, resting, or periodic stopping is unacceptable, even spiritually wimpy. A spiritual lifestyle of ebb and flow equates to whimsical softness or even heresy. So, Christian spirituality remains diseased with the “never enough” Sisyphus syndrome.

Rhythmic engagement finds its foundation in *rest*. Centered dependent rest is the hallmark of spiritual maturity. Matthew records Jesus inviting all to rest and live freely and lightly under an easy, comfortable yoke. The *doing* could be done in his divine strength. Rest in the context of sacred flow does not refer to idleness or passive spirituality. Rather, it reflects a quiet genuine proactive trust. Rest in terms of spiritual maturity relates to the New Covenant Sabbath rest divulged in the letter to the Hebrews.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it...There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their [Israelites] example of disobedience.
Hebrews 4:1, 9-11

This is not a typical Sunday rest. The New Covenant is a covenant of rest in which rest is our birthright. This is an all day, everyday rest. Rest becomes a faith-filled way of being and doing. The writer to the Hebrews entreats the readers to work diligently

²⁶Tony Horsfall, *Rhythms of Grace: Finding Intimacy with God in a Busy Life* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2004), 16.

to take advantage of this rest. Don't miss it. Anything short of rest is short of faith and anything short of faith is *sin*.²⁷ Don't roam the wilderness of unfaithfulness and self-sufficiency like the Israelites, instead enter his rest. Drop any related shame, guilt, self-sufficiency, and enter his rest.

All of our doing may be done from rest, with a restful heart acknowledging Christ as one's life, strength, or peace. Horsfall writes that the believer is to work *from* a place of rest not *toward* a place of rest.²⁸ Not entering the rest of Christ is an arrogant self-centered denial of God's grace and a declaration of independence.

A restful approach allows us to be aware, set our mind, and engage rhythmically. With a rest-oriented soul, we more easily move into the rhythm of the Holy Spirit. The rest doesn't restrict the challenges we face, it centers us internally so that we are better prepared to face challenges. Restfully, we courageously engage here, there, and everywhere as led. When praying, we pray with peace, when eating, we eat mindfully, when in conversation, we listen well and speak thoughtfully. In essence, rhythmic engagement has us trade restless religiosity for restful rhythm.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Matthew 7:24, 25

Jesus is the word and acting in him, with him, through him leads us to a solid storm resistant life. The postures open us to hear and position us to act. Holistic awareness, mind-setting, and rhythmic engagement uniquely and pragmatically express

²⁷Romans 14:23.

²⁸Horsfall, *Rhythms of Grace*, 101.

and catalyze Christian spirituality as sacred flow. The postures promote the elements and vice versa. Holistic awareness promotes *concentration* and the *here and now* lifestyle. Awareness opens us to set and pursue *goals* as well as respond to whatever counsel or *feedback* God offers. Mind-setting initiates and maintains our *deep focus* on our *goals*, *feedback*, and the *present*. It narrows our focus making sacred flow not only possible but intense. Rhythmic engagement allows us to freely and restfully approach our *goals* creatively in various contexts while remaining *concentrated* upon God. We are postured to *love* unreservedly and rhythmically according to God's *feedback* and enabling.

The spiritual postures above can be summarized in three words: ***wake***, ***focus***, and ***engage***. *Wake* up to God, being ever conscious of his presence. As he guides your focus, *focus*. Fully *engage*, whether it is in rest or intense wrestling.

So, let's lean into these practical soul poses as we go about our daily life.

Being aware and responsive to our belief matrix; particularly our concepts of God and self, our coping rhythms, and our emotions we are equipped to experience sacred flow through whatever life brings. Being aware of what prevents our soul postures and therefore our living in the elements allows us to be proactive in posturing and re-posturing ourselves for sacred flow. The postures allow us to flow through the good, the bad and the ugly we regularly encounter in life.

Holistic awareness, mind-setting, and rhythmic engagement keep us vitally connected with sacred flow's elements. These soul postures have us *lay back* into God's flow trusting his rhythm in our everyday lives. They are dependent dispositions nurturing our faith and flow.

Finally, we turn to consider spiritual practices that enhance and fine tune the postures and our life in the elements. The practices round out the trinity of practical aspects for our faith that flows. Daily we live into the *elements*, the *postures* and the *practices* in order to establish and maintain our sacred flowing faith.

being formed by God's flow

1. As you go through your day *be aware* of what is negatively affecting your awareness, focus, and rhythmic engagement.
2. Take some time to work through deeper issues by reflecting over the questions asked in this chapter regarding your concept of God, concept of self, emotions, and coping rhythms.
3. Be conscious of your posture towards God, with yourself, and toward others. Expect God to guide and empower your awareness, focus, and rhythm. When life gets tangled, take a moment to stop, breath, and surrender your self to God again...and again.

9

Practices

CrossRhythms That Deepen our Groove

The soul of the spiritual man is an instrument played by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates harmonies and a melody of which reason and the will of man alone could never dream.
- Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*

I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.
- Psalm 32:8

I have spent plenty of hours writing this book while Miles Davis, John Coltrane, or Ornette Coleman soulfully played in the background. I love jazz. Some of my closest Czech friends were a part of a jazz band. They were talented players, even performing American jazz standards...sung in English. In tiny pub or café venues their piano player would bang away without restraint while my friend Pavel meticulously thumbed away on the base and their drummer blistered the snare drum. Out in front, Magda would belt out reputable versions of international jazz favorites. I loved being in the room taking it all in, moving with the beat, and watching others get lost in the rhythm.

Given this, Donald Miller's integration of jazz with Christian spirituality in his book *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* naturally connected

with me. Miller admits jazz is the closest thing he knows to Christian spirituality. Like God, jazz doesn't resolve.¹ By nature Jazz, like authentic Christian spirituality is free-form expression of the heart and soul. Neither can they be graphed, charted, formulated, or mapped. Nonetheless, both are profound, real, evocative expressions of true humanity. Miller writes, "Everybody sings their song the way they feel it, everybody closes their eyes and lifts up their hands."²

Agreeing with Miller and taking these ideals deeper into jazz, there are several specific things I love about jazz and its connection with Christian spirituality. More inroads can be cut when we consider jazz's loose structure, its narrative depth, and its cross-rhythmic and polyphonic harmony. At its best, jazz is a melodic train wreck, a beautiful mess. Jazz has inherently flexible un-inhibiting understructure; open for creativity, innovation, and flow. Jazz artists use anything written as a diving board toward their unique riffs and improvisations. They take what's in the box and build upon it out of the box. God releases us to live this way in sacred flow. Sacred flow's elements represent the "box" - be ever God-conscious, love, boldly risk, listen for God's feedback, and be present. How these elements actually flow into our lives is our improvisation, riff – a creative fusion between our uniqueness and God's leading.

Jazz has a larger narrative embedded with infinite mini-narratives. As Miller notes, jazz was born through African Americans, the first generation out of slavery.³ Freedom supplied its inspiration and essence. Like Christian spirituality, this free-form has significantly moved people and transformed lives despite its unwillingness to *resolve*.

¹Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), ix, x.

²Ibid, 239.

³Ibid.

In some sense, jazz's story reflects Christianity's, encompassing; freedom, vast diversity, innovation, community, creativity, suffering, triumph, joy, failure, loss, tolerance, intolerance, racism and grace. Like God's story, jazz's big story fruitfully continues today and will continue indefinitely.

Phenomenal musicians along with their stories litter jazz's history with more piling on in this generation. Within every performance each performer brings his individual story, his rhythm and flow. No two jazz bands sound exactly the same (even if they play the same jazz standards) because the bands are comprised of different musicians possessing the same but different skills and instruments. My saxophone is a saxophone but it's not the same exact saxophone as yours. Moreover, when the music opens up into solos each musician expresses himself freely and uniquely in that moment. Every performance is a mini-narrative adding to jazz's meta-narrative. In like manner, we bring our unique rhythm, our mini-narrative, into God's continuing rhythm. We are a part of the big story. As a valued member of God's ensemble, we are invited to wildly riff and improvise within God's rhythm.

Altogether jazz is polyrhythmic or cross-rhythmic and polyphonic. The prefix *poly* means *many* or *much*. Polyrhythm occurs when at least two rhythms are played simultaneously. The rhythms cross, overlap, often contrasting one another while creating a more textured overall

sound. Each performer follows the base rhythm

There is but one music in the world: and to it you contribute perpetually whether you will or no, your one little ditty of no tone.

- Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*

while submitting his. Likewise, polyphonically, jazz produces more than one tone or voice, each with independent melody but all harmonizing. Jazz has diversity and unity,

independent melody and harmony. Each player in the community adds unique voice and movement creating the depth of the music. Living in the sacred flow we lend our individual voice and movement to God's and our brothers and sisters'. We create a free-form expression of God's love that comforts and inspires all those who cross our rhythm.

Jazz's structure, story, cross-rhythm, and polyphonic melody help us relate to specific spiritual practices that enliven sacred flow. Spiritual practices have the potential to invigorate our postures and facilitate our life in sacred flow's elements. We recognize the practices as sub-rhythms that deepen our experience with God's rhythm. Beyond isolated practices they can be fluidly integrated in our lifestyle. Our approach will mirror jazz's structure, story, and cross-rhythm. We acknowledge and submit to a certain amount of structure within the practices, but give ourselves the freedom to improvise, innovate, and riff. Secondly, we engage the spiritual practices in light of God's story, ours, and others. We approach the practices holistically. We open ourselves and our story to anything God would like to integrate. God may use the practices to reach into our back-story and heal us. He may use them to facilitate our connection with the story of others and the future.

Lastly, spiritual practices serve as polyphonic cross rhythms. Spiritual practices are more often called disciplines. The term *discipline* refers to training. In keeping with this, cross-rhythms train us to better harmonize with God's rhythm and develop our riff, our unique expression. Spiritual practices have us take on different tones and movements in order to deepen our connection with God's existent rhythm. Ultimately, they alter our daily voice and motion so that both resonate more deeply with God's. They are mini-

rhythms in our life that deepen our experience of God, move us toward our authentic selves and into deeper relationships with others.

I have started and stopped different spiritual practices hundreds of times in my lifetime. My consistency lasts a week or a month, at most a few months. I taper off, feel guilty, taper more, feel more guilty...and finally drop the practice or practices altogether. As I have learned to live in God's rhythm I changed my approach to the practices. I recognize the spiritual practices as just that, practice. They are practices rather than expressions of spiritual *perfection*. They are meant to happen rhythmically being gracefully led by the Holy Spirit. Perfect spirituality is not our goal because spirituality is not about being perfect. Actually, spirituality and more specifically the spiritual practices, provide a safe haven to regularly embrace and process our imperfection. Kurtz and Ketcham share, "Spirituality, which is rooted in and revealed by uncertainties, inadequacies, helplessness, the lack and the failure of control, supplies a context and suggests a way of living in which our imperfections can be endured."⁴ The spiritual practices, and more broadly sacred flow, are not about being perfect, but about being fully available, focused, and engaged with God moment by moment.

Spiritual postures and practices provide a trellis for us to work out our salvation, to grow in sacred flow. Offering another image, the postures hoist our sails and set them in order to harness the Spirit. The practices then serve to trim the sails, fine tuning our collection of the most powerful energy available – God's. The postures and practices ebb and flow with each other. The postures lead to and strengthen the practices while the practices tweak our soul poses promoting better flow. Both readily lead us into the

⁴Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection; Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 43.

elements that catalyze sacred flow. All of the practices double as ways of being. We may approach them as distinct practices and simply ways of being within sacred flow.

Regarding the explanation of spiritual practices below, my intention is not be comprehensive in scope or depth. I want to (re)introduce these spiritual practices and their relationship with sacred flow. Certainly, other viable spiritual practices exist that are not mentioned in this chapter. You will notice that I have not included *service* as one of the practices. I believe service and love are inseparable. Our spiritual DNA naturally manifests service. Minimalizing this to a practice in any sense perpetuates a flowless way of thinking.

I have included a spiritual practices bibliography as appendix A in the back of the book to encourage more comprehensive delving into the meaning and instruction of spiritual practices. These resources are old and new, abstract and specific, but all are valuable resources for your sacred flow journey.

prayer

Commonly, we refer to prayer as conversation with God. Henri Nouwen calls this conversation, “the hub of life, the center of all life and all love.”⁵ Holistic awareness, mind-setting, and rhythmic engagement require far more listening than talking. Prayer happens in many different forms. The most notable and useful practices in the context of sacred flow are described below. They range from distinct somewhat structured practices to an unceasing or flowing lifestyle of prayer. Prayer begets sacred flow and sacred flow begets prayer.

⁵Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 23.

sacred word

The *sacred word* or *prayer word* is a word or a short sentence that helps us center our attention to gain, and/or regain focus. Thomas Keating asserts, “The sacred word enables you to sink into your Source.”⁶ It can be the words or short phrases like any of the following; *God, Jesus, Spirit, peace, grace, love, cease striving, be still, My Jesus, Thank you Jesus*, etc. Trappist monk, Gerard, encourages us to “fasten the prayer word to your heart so that it never fades away.”⁷ The word is spoken internally or quietly aloud in rhythm with our breathing. Some version of the ancient Jesus Prayer, also called the Prayer of the Heart, born out of the Eastern Orthodox Church may also be used, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”⁸ The sacred word may be our whole prayer, or it may be used to support or supplement any of the prayer forms below. Any time distraction occurs during silent meditation or in everyday life, the sacred word leads us back to God in our center. The sacred word serves as our centering resource in the midst of the mundane or madness in our workplace or at home...or anywhere else.

simple prayer

I borrowed this terminology, *simple prayer*, from Richard Foster.⁹ This is the form of prayer with which most of us are accustomed. We speak to God internally or aloud making requests or offering thanksgiving, praise, etc. Simple prayer can also be a time of confession and repentance during which we agree with God about our shortcomings – fleshly flow, and intentionally re-turn our soul to God. In simple prayer,

⁶Thomas Keating, Thomas *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1997), 43.

⁷Fr. Gerard, *Contemplative Prayer* (Conyers, GA: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2008).

⁸Bernadette Dieker and Jonathan Montaldo, eds. *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart* (Fons Vitae: Louisville, KY, 2003), 11.

⁹Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 9.

we simply pour out our heart and soul to God and wait for his peace to pour over us. We have come to our senses, returned to the land of the living and sacred flow. Simple prayer may also happen naturally as a part of other practices.

silence

Silence de-fragments our soul. Silence allows us to stop in the midst of life's hustle and bustle and regain internal unity, *re-collect*. We regain or reorient our interiority. All forms of silence can be helpful. We may be prayerfully silent by simply

not talking while alone or

among people. We may

choose to shut off the car

radio during our commute or

Cease from your own words, but in Power live. It breaks down rocks, mountains, old and sandy foundations... and makes up the Breach between God and man and breaks down that which made the breach.

- George Fox, *Pastoral Letters*

turn off the television in the evening. Or we may intentionally choose to pull away to a silent place. In silence, our minds can be empty or occupied with supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, etc. Silence leads to slowing and inner stillness – a sorely needed calming of our spirit, soul, and body.

Occasionally, I attend silent retreats at a local monastery. When I first arrive I feel restless. I am genuinely happy to be there but fidgety. It takes a few hours to settle down. Soon, the silence becomes deafening. I never knew chewing food or even breathing could be so loud. Over time my mind finally unwinds and releases the sprinting hamster from the wheel in my head. When this happens, I find that I am much more tired than I first thought. Soon, I begin to better sense God's presence and his hushed voice speaking into my story; past, present, and future. I may journal some thoughts, but mostly just *be*...in silence. As my time at the monastery draws to a close I have become comfortable with

the silence and I'm hesitant to leave. I always go away with the desire to speak much less and listen much more, wanting my speech to be intentional, born from sacred silence.

Silence is a potent practice that teaches us to speak and live powerfully.¹⁰ It opens us to hear what God would have us do or say. Silence helps us to work through our thoughts and emotions so that we respond meaningfully and rhythmically rather than react irresponsibly.

solitude

Solitude is a partner of silence. Solitude takes us further into silence as we extract ourselves from others. Solitude has been called the furnace of transformation. Without ample time there we suffer as victims of our culture, our false self, and fleshly flow.¹¹ All alone in lonely places we are stripped of our self-protective weapons, left to wrestle God and our false self...surely to come away with a holy limp. We need to regularly pull away to a lonesome place for spirit, soul, or body restoration. Moreover, Richard Foster contends that solitude is not only the occasional event of withdrawing to lonely places; it is an ongoing disposition of inner stillness.¹² Even in the midst of others, we may remain inwardly still or withdrawn, allowing God to continue his work. Whether alone or in company, solitude serves as a useful practice to reawaken awareness and regain our rhythm.

meditation

Meditation is prayerful pondering. We intentionally invite God into whatever we are thinking. Beyond raw introspection, we trust God to enter and clear or at least settle

¹⁰Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981), 40.

¹¹Ibid, 13.

¹²Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSan Francisco, 1988), 96.

our muddy mind. During meditation, we may mull over scriptures, other reading, images, life's circumstances, nature, etc. with sensitivity to the presence of God and more specifically his voice. Meditation is a balancing act between attention and relaxation.¹³

Meditation moves us from a superficial consciousness to a meditative or interior consciousness.¹⁴ With this

open-focus our perspective

begins to change. Our soul's

**Meditation means eating the word, digesting it,
and incorporating it concretely into our lives.**

- Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*

movement toward experiencing union and rhythm with God provides the primary intent and content of our meditation. Living a meditative life means living an intentional reflective, mindful, contemplative life, a life that flows.

contemplation

Meditation may lead deeper to contemplation or centering prayer.¹⁵

Contemplation is a wide-souled waiting for a wordless resonant hum with God. It has been described as two lovers electrified in the presence of one another without the need to say a word.¹⁶ The contemplative norm is not phenomenological or ecstatic experience, but profound simple attention. Thomas Merton's simple definition of contemplation is, "vital awareness of our being and that of our Source."¹⁷ Contemplation is the utmost expression of a person's integrated life. It postures us to experience God. It is both a pathway and a destination of deeper focus and hyper-consciousness of God.

¹³Alan Wallace, *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 32.

¹⁴James Finley, *Christian Meditation; Experiencing the Presence of God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 7.

¹⁵Tom Francis explains that the term *centering prayer* was birthed as a way to de-mystify and de-clergify contemplation. Tom Francis, *Contemplative Prayer* (Conyers, GA: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2008).

¹⁶Fr. Michael, *Lectio Divina* (Conyers, GA: Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2008).

¹⁷*Ibid.*

Contemplation opens us to experience the inflow of God's love.¹⁸ It ranges from a prayer pathway to a lifestyle reflective of sacred flow.

In practicing contemplation we sit silently, receptively, clear of the mind's usual clutter, trusting in God's presence, simply being with God in love.¹⁹ Christian mystics throughout history have loosely or specifically distinguished pathways to experience union with God through contemplation. Two of the most prominent are John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*) and Teresa of Avila (*The Interior Castle*). Two more recent and western offerings are from Thomas Merton (*The Ascent to Truth* and *New Seeds of Contemplation*) and Evelyn Underhill (*Practical Mysticism*). All describe a similar path. Moving from meditation to contemplation one walks through *recollection, detachment, surrender/dark night, and finally, union*.

Underhill explains *recollection* as the disciplining and simplifying of the attention as well as an unfolding of the spiritual consciousness.²⁰ It starts with an awareness of our environment, self, and our self within our environment. With this awareness, we 'stand still' and recognize our scattered-ness including our assorted internal and external distractions. John MacQuarrie describes recollection as a re-gathering of our humanity around our God-given core.²¹ It could be said that we are turning to re-collect God. Teresa of Avila asserts that recollection realigns us pilgrims with the will of God.²²

¹⁸William Johnston, William. *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 3.

¹⁹Fr. Gerard, *Contemplative Prayer*, April, 2008.

²⁰Evelyn Underhill, Evelyn, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986), 31.

²¹John Macquarrie, *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.

²²Judy Dwight, *Embracing God: Praying with Teresa of Avila* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 61.

Detaching does not necessarily mean desert dwelling. Meister Eckhart writes, “True detachment is nothing else than for the spirit to stand immovable against whatever may chance to it, of joy or sorrow, honour, shame or disgrace, as a mountain of lead stands against a little breath of wind.”²³ Deep concentration upon God requires a new perception and vision that detachment offers. Detachment means our perception of self is lost, and in turn our perspective, as much as humanly possible, becomes united with God’s.²⁴ We detach from self-interest and world-interest turning instead to God-interest. As we become fully God-conscious, we are indifferent to the unnecessary. Frances de Sales called this ‘holy indifference’ and counseled people to focus only upon God, not on the mission of ridding oneself of distraction lest the ridding of distractions becomes one’s focus.²⁵ Holy indifference is healthy indifference, a balanced God-oriented view of all things.

Surrender is a pregnant term in Christian mysticism. It can take varying forms. *Purgation* is another term often used to describe the portion of the path relating to surrender. It is as it sounds...a purging. Purgation is surrender to God’s painful molding. It has been called a remodeling of the character preparing it to intimately experience God. This renovation hones one’s values and motives of the will.²⁶ The primary goal of surrender is to become more of oneself by peeling away everything false, and then trusting God to then bring revelation, identity, and inspiration.

Christian mystics most often convey surrender as self-emptying or abandonment following the model of Jesus. Andrew Murray explains how Christ’s humility was

²³Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence*, (London: SPCK, 1981), 77, 78.

²⁴Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 21.

²⁵Frances De Sales, *On the Love of God* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1963), 107, 122.

²⁶Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 38, 41.

reflected in his simple and absolute surrender to the will of God.²⁷ Jesus fully depended upon love and guidance from the Father. Frances de Sales calls surrender ‘holy resignation.’²⁸ By self-emptying we clean house offering God generous soul space to orchestrate what he wills. Maximus the Confessor says the fully emptied soul ‘has no song to sing’ therefore becoming fertile for revelation and the dwelling place of the infinite God.²⁹ Self-emptying rids us of pride as our fleshly flow gives way to God’s. We recognize that we are not our own. Surrender acknowledges our place in the hand of God under his control. Abandoning all that we have self-created internally leaves us ripe for union.

The recollected, detached, surrendered person experiences a *merge* with the Almighty. This final stage of contemplation, often called *mystical union*, is the ultimate fruit and peak experience of Christian mysticism and sacred flow. In this phase of the practice we better grasp Paul’s statement, “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him”³⁰ and Jesus’ comment, “In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”³¹

We have nothing to do, then, but to surrender ourselves to God each day, without looking further; he will carry us in his arms as a tender mother bears her child. Let us believe, hope, and love with all simplicity of babes; in every necessity turning a loving and trusting look towards our Heavenly Father.
- Francois Fenelon, *Christian Counsel*

In describing mystical union, many mystics assert that we become divinized or deified. This language may make us uncomfortable, but is it logical when considered in a particular context. Broadly, it simply conveys our mutual indwelling in uncommon terms.

²⁷ Andrew Murray, *Humility* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 23.

²⁸ Frances De Sales, *On the Love of God*, 104.

²⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy; The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 63.

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:17.

³¹ John 14:20.

The divine or Deity lives within us, therefore we are divinized or deified. More specifically, divinization does not make us God, it expresses what it means to be absorbed in God and vice versa. It correlates with Peter's saying that we believers are partakers of the divine nature.³²

Keating asserts that beyond contemplative prayer as a practice there exists a graceful contemplative state of union in which one is resonating with God continually in daily life.³³ Likewise, Merton regularly spoke and wrote of contemplation as a way of life.³⁴ This daily resonance or divinization mirrors sacred flow. Sacred flow leads us to daily and deeply resonate with God throughout the mundane and the melee. Lifestyle contemplation and sacred flow are essentially interchangeable.³⁵

daily examen

The daily examen is a meditative reflection. It has us take stock at the end of each day or week. We take time to reflect, considering when and how God was present or seemed absent. This might also be a time in which we ask God to examine our soul. Where is God meeting us and molding us? What coping rhythms have we been employing to get our needs met apart from God? What is keeping us from experiencing the full extent of his flow? The examen nurtures our attentiveness to the presence and movement of God in our daily life.

³²Peter 1:4.

³³Keating, *Open Mind Open Heart*, 107.

³⁴Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), 19.

³⁵Lifestyle contemplation touches upon an issue that has persisted at different points in the history of Christianity regarding whether or not a true contemplative can be active. One party states that we must choose to be truly contemplative or be active. The other camp says both are possible. I believe that the contemplative not only can be both but must be both. Christians must be able to deeply discover, experience and express God in their every day activities as well as when they pull away eradicating all physical, emotional, and mental distraction. Otherwise, God withholds the reality of himself from the whole of active humanity. Needless to say, this integrated contemplative position does not devalue the contemplation of those in monasteries.

lectio divina

Sometimes called sacred reading, prayer reading, or meditative reading, *lectio divina* is the reading of the Scriptures very slowly with sensitive awareness. While reading we stop anytime God seems to be highlighting a word or phrase. We then meditate or chew upon this word or phrase until God releases us to continue reading. We may use this practice for months on a single verse wringing from it anything and everything God would like to reveal. Taking the practice beyond Scriptures, *lectio divina* may be creatively practiced using images, nature, film, music, circumstances, etc. *Lectio* forces us to slow down our perception allowing God to invade it, open it, mold it and surprise us with new revelation. *Lectio* opens our understanding and experience of God's mysterious flow lying beneath the surface of the Scriptures, images, nature, film, music, etc.

unceasing prayer

Unceasing prayer is extemporaneous prayer called for by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "pray without ceasing." As we go about our daily life, we pray - conversing with God about anything and everything. We bear others' burdens and bless them as we go about our business. Unceasing prayer is a normative practice in sacred flow. As the Spirit flows, with open-focus, we carry on an endless sacred conversation...with or without audible words. We widen our perception to collect anything God would have us pray while we continually focus our consciousness on him, his love, and his love being manifested through us. Our life becomes a spontaneous flowing prayer.

study

Study is another significant spiritual practice. It leads us into deeper reality and therefore into God's sacred flow. Fittingly, Richard Foster relates biblical study as "an analytical search for the perception of reality in a given context."³⁶ This perception translated, offers wisdom for our journey. Studying the scriptures, commentaries, books, etc. creates diverse opportunities for God to bring us more revelation, wisdom, and awareness. Broad study introduces us to a wide portfolio of information through which God speaks.

If you wish to attain to true knowledge of the Scriptures, hasten to acquire first an unshakable humility of heart. That alone will lead you, not to the knowledge that puffs up, but to that which enlightens, by the perfecting of love.
- John Cassian, *Conferences*

Certainly, spiritual study is anchored in the Scriptures but intentionally and boldly it benefits us to venture into art, culture, history, media, and other fields. As noted in an earlier chapter, sacred flow inspires spiritual learning and unlearning. As we flow with God, we study as a spiritual practice and way of life.

worship

John records Jesus saying the time has come for God's people to worship in spirit and in truth. The word worship in Greek, *proskuneo*, means *to bend, fawn or crouch and to kiss*...as a dog kisses or laps his master's hand. We kneel to kiss, adore, and reverence God in *spirit*, from deep within.³⁷ As our inward disposition (spirit) continually kisses God, it profoundly affects our outward disposition. Lastly, we aim to worship in *truth*. We open ourselves to kiss the God of reality, not one we may have falsely manufactured

³⁶Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline; the Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), 65.

³⁷John 4:24.

or idolize. Authentic worship means laying aside our preconceived notions and worshipping freely, kissing the ever-present, ever-revealing God. Inwardly and outwardly, bending and standing upright, we gratefully acknowledge God's presence, goodness, and sovereignty.

Given this description, worship may encompass widely varied content and take place in innumerable contexts. Unfortunately, worship gets officially relegated to one to two hours on Sunday. Even worse, worship becomes limited to the few songs that open the gathering. Often it feels contrived and forced into a particular format. Thankfully, worship does not have to be squelched and squished into a weekly performance. Worship happens anytime anywhere as we flow. In a sense, sacred flow leads us into unceasing worship. While flowing, we continually reverence God with our attention, acknowledging the Source of everything. We sacredly *re-pose* to kiss God continually with our whole life. The *practice* of worship inspires awareness and facilitates the mind being set on God and divine love. Worship, as a practice or a lifestyle, entails being absorbed in the Almighty, getting attuned to God's flow.

simplicity

The practice of simplicity betrays the distraction and compulsion embedded in our environment. Practically anything can distract us. We easily accumulate potentially distracting possessions and habits. Simplicity allows us to freely and fully engage God without over-concern for a million superficial possessions, habits or affairs of little consequence. It removes the burdensome pile burying our soul. Thus, the practice of simplicity, like surrender, is a practice of peeling. With the Spirit's guidance we peel

away those things that hinder or prevent our sacred flow. Simplicity resets our priorities releasing the mind to be set on more significant matters, like our rhythm with God.

journaling

Writing affords us the opportunity to download our soul. Journaling unloads our jammed hard drive. Expressing ourselves through writing creates disc space for God to *refill*. It allows us to untangle our emotions, coping rhythms, and underlying beliefs as well as invite God to speak into them. Journaling provides space for us to unpack our flow experiences – sacred and fleshly. It can be used for prayer, in silence, meditation, *lectio divina*, daily examen, etc. It can be used for study, fasting, or simply as a daily diary. Journaling captures our soul postures in ink serving as a reflective tool to keep us sacred flowing.

Journaling easily integrates into our daily lifestyle if we carry a small pocket notebook, paper or electronic. When thoughts, emotions, words, or impressions worthy of journaling surface within us, we stop and jot them down. If you don't have time in that moment to unpack our impressions, use shorthand that can be expanded later. Lifestyle journaling extends the journaling practice into each moment providing yet another avenue that leads us into sacred flow.

fasting

In 2001, we moved to Prague, Czech Republic in January. It was bone-chilling cold and snowing for the first week or so, which was frightening for me as a Georgia native. I felt trapped. We had no car or television, barely knew a word of Czech language, and we knew very few people. Also, for the first couple months, internet access was twenty minutes away by public transport. I thought to myself, "What have I done? How

am I, an extrovert addicted to American pop culture, going to survive like this?" I did. It was a God-arranged fast of personal transportation and western popular culture. It was just under a year before we purchased a car and satellite service. By that time, my addictions had subsided since I had been living within a different rhythm for so long.

Fasting teaches us about dependence, gratitude, and provision. God may inspire this cross-rhythm to teach us about our capacity to go on without *it*, whatever *it* happens to be. Fasting like simplicity resets our priorities. God calls us to fast as a way to reinstate our Source. By no means is fasting limited to food. We may be led to fast television, recreation, our blackberry, sex, beer, gaming, internet usage, etc. As odd as it may seem, fasting may become a lifestyle. We may rhythmically fast certain things as a way of life. In every case, fasting awakens and establishes priorities. It sets our spirit's union with God's as priority with our soul and body in subjection. Fasting (re)affirms our flow with God.

community

Many of us have bounced in and out of spiritual community, myself included. We may be out of touch with it, but we long for community when we don't have it. Community is a spiritual practice because truly engaging with people requires *practice*. Community necessitates devoted intention. Living in a spiritual community is messy, but just as the rhythm of the Spirit leads us to solitude, it leads us community. David Benner insists that Christian spirituality must include a faith community to aid us in working out a healthy existence in Christ.³⁸ I agree. Rhythmic engagement leads us into communal relationships that provide the potential to significantly enhance our sacred flow. In

³⁸David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 15.

community, our rhythm within, uses us as instruments of influence as much as God uses others to influence us. Authentic Christian community promotes sacred flow.

celebration

I have never really been a good partier. Even in college, parties bored me. Of course, my religiosity sharply limited any flagrant celebration. In general, I could not allow myself to truly celebrate or be joyful. As I look back, it saddens me. So, I am a recovering curmudgeon, still learning the art of celebration.

Holy parties are spiritual practices. Celebration is sacred. For example, God commanded the Feast of the Tabernacles as a mandated seven day party celebrating Israel's exodus from Egypt. Jews still celebrate this feast today.

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. Celebrate a festival to the LORD for seven days.
Numbers 29:12

Celebration is serious business according to God. Celebration can be considered a cross-rhythm of gratitude and worship. It provides an outlet for us to express our joy related to being united with God, in his flow. This practice needs prayerful priority since it so easily gets trivialized or neglected. We need to plan some parties.

Celebration comes when the common ventures of life are redeemed.

- Richard Foster
Celebration of Discipline

Lastly, celebration may merge into our way of life as joy engulfs all of life. Foster believes that "celebration comes when the common ventures of life are redeemed."³⁹ This de-categorizes celebration releasing our whole life to be an artful celebration of our union with God and freedom to flow.

³⁹Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 193.

giving

Religion has crippled giving. Meager giving in the Christian community is unfortunate and *unGod*-like. Oddly, I believe the *tithe-law* plays into this problem. Many of us have a difficult time measuring up to the tithe and are equally frustrated when we feel spiritual leaders manipulatively push it. Those of us who give 10% of our finances often feel our *giving* obligation is met.

Entering the New Covenant we graduated to a new system of giving – by the Spirit. Now we are meant to give according to what God puts in our heart, cheerfully or *hilariously* as directed.⁴⁰ We continually recognize all of our possessions as God's and at the kingdom's disposal. Our grace covenant relationship with God calls us to give 100%. This trumps 10% by a long shot. Like service, giving is innately tied to our identity as God's people. The New Covenant calls us to holistic giving. This entails finances, time, use of our homes, cars, our relational network, as well as giving or lending practically anything else we possess.

All of the spiritual practices serve as avenues of engagement, tools to be used rhythmically to nurture sacred flow. Additionally, they are life patterns. The practices widen out to seamlessly integrate into our daily way of life. As specific cross-rhythms and life patterns they supplement one another and give tangible expression to the soul postures and the elements of sacred flow.

sabbath

As a legalistic teen I got upset with my dad for mowing the grass on Sunday afternoons after church. Finally, one day I asked him why he mowed instead of resting.

⁴⁰2 Corinthians 9:7.

He responded without hesitation, “This is resting. It is not a burden for me, it’s a release.” Many years later I finally understood what he meant. My dad spent his weekdays cooped up in a small office wearing a tie. It was restful and even enlivening for him to do something outside on the weekends. It was a practical form of Sabbath for him. He needed time alone and rest from physical *inactivity*.

In our culture, Sabbath may look different than it did over two thousand years ago. Like worship, our experience of Sabbath has become restricted. As we flow with the Father we will creatively observe rest. Our rhythmic engagement leads us to regularly engage in release, recovery, and rest. Performance psychologists Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, support the Sabbath ideal in saying, “Performance, health, and happiness are grounded in the skillful management of energy.”⁴¹ Rhythmically spending and restoring energy is the key to healthy and optimal performance. God leads us rhythmically to pull aside to rest and recover spirit, soul, and body. Slowing down, we re-collect God’s loving presence and energy needed to continue flowing.

As addressed in chapter seven, Sabbath becomes our way of life within God’s flow. We live in a *Sabbath paradigm*. Living in a Sabbath paradigm means we trust in the sufficiency and divine energy of Christ to accomplish all things in and through us. We work to enter and remain in a promised rest.

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Hebrews 4: 9-11

⁴¹Loehr, Jim, and Tony Schwartz. *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal* (New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks, 2003), 5.

Doing anything in and of our own strength, to meet our needs apart from God is *anti-sabbath*, disobedient, fleshly flow. Our doing has become much less about what we do or not do and much more about who is the source motion. God is not lazy, God *will* move us. We have the remarkable privilege and calling to live in a state of Sabbath rest as we flow with the Father. Is your movement restful and life-giving, sourced by the life-giving Spirit of flow?

it's time for us to flow

Returning to sacred flow's foundation we find our mutual indwelling, God's pervasive permeating presence in our spirit, soul, and body. There is no escaping God's presence. Giving of ourselves into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus lands us in the strong current of his living water. We find ourselves resting in him and him in us. From this foundation, we pay close attention to God and his love in each moment. We receive whatever challenge he puts before us as well as chart out after whatever he calls us to undertake.

Sacred flow consists of a continual awakening to our flow in God's infusive love.

The elements, postures and practices catalyze sacred flow, sustain it, and re-establish it when we ourselves or life's circumstances wreck our rhythm. The postures lead us to the practices and the practices, in turn, hone our postures. Within the postures and practices lies the impetus for living in the elements. Holistic awareness awakens us to God, his feedback, ourselves, others and our purpose therein – love. Mind-setting narrows our focus to God and his love in each moment. Lastly, rhythmic engagement facilitates how and when we approach anything and everything in God's flow.

Since the postures and practices consistently lead to the elements of flow, flow's fruit naturally manifests itself. The interflow of the elements, postures, and practices in the midst of our daily life creates ample opportunity for fruit, the Spirit and flow's, to be experienced and offered to others.

It's time for our faith to flow. With a firm foundation and elements, postures, and practices at our disposal, we are sent out in the Spirit-walking way of Jesus. Typically we think of being sent out for a

specific task or mission. In

another sense, being sent out in

the way of Jesus is being sent out

to live in the model of Jesus –

sacred flowing with God. As

The Christians life may be summed as the consciousness that He lives within us, and we draw upon His infinite life in every situation we find ourselves in. This means that as we grow in Christ and become mature, we will have an increasing sense of our own weakness that we might no longer trust in ourselves and so proportionately life from His strength.

- Malcolm Smith

The Power of the Blood Covenant

Jesus approaches death on the cross he prays for his followers. He asks the Father to set them apart in the truth and he sends them out as he was sent out. "As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."⁴² Jesus mandates a life of total abandonment to the will of the Father through the inner rhythm of the Holy Spirit. We have been ushered into Jesus' relationship with the Father, listening to and living through the inner voice of love, as well as mediating his love to others.

We are sent out as sacred flowing *athletes, artists, and ambassadors.*

As *athletes* we are pushed to our potential and beyond by life's circumstances and challenges we willingly engage. We passionately and intuitively play life, our victory being found in a resurrected Christ who already resides in us. God calls us to play nimbly with *spiritual agility* remaining in him and keeping our temple fit, attentive, flexible, and

⁴²John 17:18.

responsive. This athletic call requires us to employ divine energy, joining the interflow the Trinity via sacred flow's elements, postures, and practices.

We are God's *art*. Paul writes that we are God's workmanship, his poem and personal masterpiece being created in Christ.⁴³ More specifically, we are his kinetic artistry. Kinetic art is art in motion, fluidity, and flux. It depends on movement for its full effect....so do we. Sound, electricity, water, or air typically causes motion in kinetic art. We liken God's energy to sound, electricity, water flow, and particularly the *wind*. As God's kinetic sculptures, we freely undulate, oscillate, flicker, float, or twirl reflecting the shape, direction, and speed of his sacred wind. We ourselves are art and as we move in response to the Spirit-wind, displaying our glory and God's.

Not only are we art, we are apprentices for the most sublime Artist. As *artist*-apprentices we harness, interpret, and express divine innovation and creativity. Affirming this, Sweet stresses that we are called to "conceive in every culture and context."⁴⁴ By nature we are expressions of *God's* creativity and embedded with *God's* imaginative spiritual *DNA*. As we interflow with the persons of the Trinity this creativity emanates, pouring out of us in every field or expression known to humankind.

Our times require divine artistry. It takes something special to inspire, influence, motivate, or move our over-marketed desensitized culture. In addition, contemporary culture's ever increasing disdain for all things *Christian* will require ever increasing imaginative creativity to effectively share God's redemptive narrative. Flowless Christianity offering second rate copying of others' storytelling methods will no longer

⁴³Ephesians 2:10.

⁴⁴Leonard Sweet, "Distilling a Dream for Leadership in the Emerging Culture" (lecture/chat, online 3/3/08).

do...it never really has. The world hungers for true artisans of the Spirit to articulate the truth, beauty, and goodness of God through appealing, accessible mediums.

We serve as *ambassadors* representing the kingdom of God and the covenant-agreement offered to every human. In our representation we embody God's royalty, loyalty, and passion, personifying and echoing *Logos*-life wherever we find ourselves. We carry God's *Logos*-life with the intention of allowing him to fully flow through, flooding our parched surroundings. We have a lifelong opportunity to represent and re-represent God to those who regularly surround us and those whom we randomly brush by in daily life.

Allow nothing to prevent you from diving into God's sacred flow. Don't let dogma, institution, latent legalism, pain from your past or present, the fear of the future, your fallen flesh, or *oblivio Dei* stunt your awareness, focus, or engagement. In any way and every way possible open yourself to the *Logos*-life and light that abounds from within you and pressures you from without. Absorb God and be absorbed in him so that you know restful rhythm despite what life brings. You are freely flowing in a love so deep you couldn't reach the bottom if you tried. So, fearlessly risk and riff trusting God to provide you with more than enough compulsion, courage, and capability to do so.

In the 2000 Robert Redford film, *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, golf serves as metaphor for life and actor Will Smith, as Bagger Vance, characterizes God. Vagabond Bagger becomes a sage-like caddy for the main character Rannulph Junuh (Matt Damon). Throughout the movie Bagger clubs Junuh with healing nuggets of philosophical truth. Junuh, once a golf protégé and champion, now years later suffers from severe

psychological wounds related to his participation in World War I. He is given an opportunity to play golf again, but his game reflects his miserable soul.

During their first meeting Bagger tells Junuh that he has *lost his swing* and they will have to go find it. His swing is out there somewhere in the harmony of all that was, is, and will be. Later, Bagger expounds to his young assistant Hardy,

Yep, inside each and every one of us is one true, authentic swing. Something we was born with, that's ours...and ours alone. Something can't be taught to you or learned. Something that got to be remembered. Over time, the world can rob us of that swing...and get buried inside us under...all our woulda's and coulda's, and shoulda's. Some folk even forget what their swing was like...⁴⁵

Junuh lost his way...his flow...his swing. He was stuck in the past, without hope for the future. Life had robbed him of rhythm, his authentic swing. Many of us can relate...

Bagger explains that we have a swing that is our and ours alone, *a way of being* and flowing that is uniquely us. Our rhythm and flow is both innate and grace-given by God. Few of us have acknowledged our life in God's flow and our flow in God's life. Sacred flow wakes us to both. We realize a flowing God and our place in that flow. Then, as we flow we discover our authentic swing. It is our resonant rhythm within God's flow.

In a poignant scene Bagger speaks to Junuh about finally releasing his burden, and remembering his authentic swing.

Bagger: Time to go on, lay it down.
Junuh: I don't know how.
Bagger: You got a choice. You can stop...or you could start.
Junuh: Start?
Bagger: Walking.
Junuh: Where?
Bagger: Back to where you've been and then stand there.
Still.
Real still, and remember.
Junuh: It was too long ago.
Bagger: No, sir, it was just a moment ago. Time to come on out the shadows, Junuh.

⁴⁵*The Legend of Bagger Vance*, directed by Robert Redford, Dreamworks, 2000.

Time for you to choose.

Junuh: I can't.

Bagger: You can. *You ain't alone. I'm right here with you. I've been here all along.*⁴⁶

Like Junuh, to get our swing or flow (back)...and keep it we have to deal with both the past and the future. We must enter stillness, awareness, and focus in order to remember our swing within God's. God longs for us recognize his presence as we enter or re-enter and remain in his sacred flow, living our authentic swing.

As a prayer and benediction for us *being formed by God's flow*, I want to close with some words of encouragement paraphrased from St. Bagger.

Now play the game. Your game... The one that God meant only you to play.

The one given to you when you were born.

Come on, take your stance... Don't hold anything back.

You're ready... Now's the time.

Come out of the shadows and let yourself remember.

Remember your swing.

It's time for your faith to flow.

⁴⁶*The Legend of Bagger Vance*, directed by Robert Redford, Dreamworks, 2000.

Appendix A: Spiritual Practices Bibliography

- Augsburger, David. *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Christian Meditation*. Translated by Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.
- Batterson, Mark. *Wild Goose Chase: Reclaim the Adventure of Pursuing God*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 2008.
- Benner, David G. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call of Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004.
- Benner, David G. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. New York, NY: Cowley Publications, 2004.
- Briggs, Helen. *Darkest Ever Material Created*.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7190107.stm> January 16, 2008 (accessed 12/13/08).
- Boykin, Kim. *Zen for Christians*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- Campolo, Anthony and Mary Darling. *The God of Intimacy and Action; Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Casey, Michael. *Sacred Reading*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1996.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- De Caussade, Jean-Pierre. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. New York: Image Books, 1975.
- Dieker, Bernadette, and Jonathan Montaldo, eds. *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart*. The Fons Vitae Thomas Merton Series. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003.

- Elsheimer, Janice. *The Creative Call; An Artist's Response to the Way of the Spirit*. Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2001.
- Finley, James. *Christian Meditation; Experiencing the Presence of God*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.
- Foster, Richard. *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life; Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.
- _____. *Celebration of Discipline; the Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- _____. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Geoffrion, Timothy. *The Spirit-Led Leader; Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005.
- Horsfall, Tony. *Rhythms of Grace: Finding Intimacy with God in a Busy Life*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2004.
- Huston, Paula. *The Holy Way: Practices for a Simple Life*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2003.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way; Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1997.
- Kelley, Thomas. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1992.
- Laubach, Frank. *Letters by a Modern Mystic*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007.
- Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- Lopez, Ignacio. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: St. Ignatius' Profound Precepts of Mystical Theology*. Translated by Anthony Mottola. New York, NY: Image Books, 1989.
- Lord, Peter. *Hearing God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Maloney, George. *Abiding in the Indwelling Presence*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.

- May, Gerald, M.D. *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982.
- McLaren, Brian. *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- McNeal, Reggie. *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- McVey, Steve. *The Godward Gaze*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.
- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation*. New York, NY: Image Books, 1996.
- _____. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York, NY: New Directions Books, 1972.
- _____. *Thoughts in Solitude*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.
- _____. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. ed. Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- _____. *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1999.
- _____. *The Way of the Heart*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981.
- _____. *With Open Hands*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1972.
- Ortberg, John. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Palmer, Jim. *Wide Open Spaces; Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Pennington, Basil M. *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form*. New York: NY: Image Books, 2001.
- Rhodes, Tricia McCary. *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004.

Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006.

Sweet, Leonard. *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Do Without*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008.

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Bibliography

- Augsburger, David. *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Badcock, Gary D. *Light of Truth & Fire of Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Christian Meditation*. Translated by Sister Mary Theresilde Skerry. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.
- _____. *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*. Translated by Brian I. Daley S. J. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Bangle, Bernard, ed. *Radiance: A Spiritual Memoir of Evelyn Underhill*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004.
- Barna, George. *Revolution; Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005.
- Bartlett, Alan. *Humane Christianity; Arguing with the Classic Christian Spiritual Disciplines in the Light of Jesus of Nazareth*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2005.
- Bassler, Jouette, ed. *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*. Vol. 1, Pauline Theology. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.
- Belitz, Charlene, and Meg Lundstrom. *The Power of Flow; Practical Ways to Transform Your Life with Meaningful Coincidence*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998.
- Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Benner, David G. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Bloesch, Donald. *Spirituality Old & New; Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007.
- Blum, Richard. *The Sacred Athlete: On the Mystical Experience and Dionysius, It's Westernworld Fountainhead*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991.
- Blythe, Teresa, and Daniel Wolpert. *Meeting God in Virtual Reality; Using Spiritual Practices with Media*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004.

- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963.
- Bouyer, Louis. *The Christian Mystery; from Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*. Translated by Iltyd Trethowan. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990.
- Brafman, Ori, and Rod A. Beckstrom. *The Starfish and the Spider*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2006.
- Bro, Bernard. *St. Therese of Lisieux: Her Family, Her God, Her Message*. Translated by Anne England Nash. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983.
- _____. *Romans* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Canon Leon Morris. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.
- Burke, Spencer. *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations about God, Community, and Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Busch, Roger J. Vanden. "The Value of Silence in Quaker Spirituality." *Spirituality Today: A Dominican Internet Journal of Spirituality* 37 (1985): 326-335.
- Campbell, James M. *Paul the Mystic*. New York: Andrew Melrose, 1907.
- Campolo, Anthony. *The God of Intimacy and Action; Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism, and Justice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.
- Chamberlin, Jamie. "Reaching Flow to Optimize Work and Play." *American Psychological Association Monitor* 29, no. 7 (1998).
- Clark, James Midgley. *The Great German Mystics: Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1949.
- Clarkson, George E. *The Mysticism of William Law*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1992.
- Clasper, Paul. *Eastern Paths and the Christian Way*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980.
- Clement, Olivier. *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*. London, UK: New City, 1995.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *How People Grow; What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Coakley, Sarah, ed. *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

- Collins, Gary, David G. Myers, David Powlison, and Robert C. Roberts. *Psychology & Christianity*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Conti-Entin, Carol. *Improvisation & Spiritual Disciplines; Continuing the Divine-Human Duet*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1989.
- Cooper, Andrew. *Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publication, Inc, 1998.
- Coslet, Dorothy Gawne. *Madame Guyon, Child of Another World*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1984.
- Cox, Harvey G. Jr. "Make Way for the Spirit." In *God's Life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, 93-100. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Craine, Renate. *Hildegard*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997.
- Creps, Earl. *Off-Road Disciplines; Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1990.
- _____. *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993.
- _____. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.
- _____. *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1997.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, Sami Abuhamdeh, and Jeanne Nakamura. "Flow." <http://academic.udayton.edu/jackbauer/Readings%20251/CsikFlow%20copy.pdf>. (accessed May 4, 2008).
- Cullen, Christopher M. *Bonaventure*. Oxford, UK: University Press, 2006.
- Cunningham, Lawrence. *Francis of Assisi*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Das, Andrew. *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001.
- Debold, Elizabeth. "Flow with Soul." <http://www.wie.org/DE/j9/csiksz.asp>. (accessed July 20, 2008).1-9.

- De Caussade, Jean-Pierre. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. New York: Image Books, 1975.
- De Sales, Francis. *On the Love of God*. New York, NY: Image Books, 1963.
- Deen, Edith. *Great Women of the Christian Faith*. 1st ed. New York: Harper, 1959.
- Delio, Ilia. *Simply Bonaventure*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001.
- Dennis, Jay. *The Jesus Habits*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005.
- Dieker, Bernadette, and Jonathan Montaldo, eds. *Merton & Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart*. In The Fons Vitae Thomas Merton Series. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003.
- Drilling, Peter. *Premodern Faith in a Postmodern Culture*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.
- Dumm, Demetrius. *A Mystical Portrait of Jesus: New Perspectives on John's Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001.
- Dunn, James D. G. "Judaism in the Land of Israel in the First Century." In *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner. New York: Koln, 1995.
- _____, ed. *Paul and the Mosaic Law*. Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- _____. *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.
- Dupré, Louis. *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981.
- Dupré, Louis, and O.S.B. James A. Wiseman. *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Eastman, Brad. *The Significance of Grace in the Letters of Paul*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Eckhart, Meister. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence*. London: SPCK, 1981.
- Edman, Raymond V. *They Found the Secret; 20 Transformed Lives That Reveal a Touch of Eternity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

- Edwards, Tilden. *Living in the Presence; Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Egan, Harvey S.J. *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991.
- Elwell, Walter, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984.
- Enomiya-Lasalle, Hugo M. *Zen Meditation for Christians*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974.
- Fanning, Steven. *Mystics of the Christian Tradition*. London, UK: Routledge, 2001.
- Farina, John, ed. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Fee, Gordon. *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- _____. *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.
- Feldman, Christina. *The Buddhist Path to Simplicity; Spiritual Practice for Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Metro Books, 2001.
- Fenelon, Francois. *Christian Counsel*. Translated by J.W. Metcalf. New York, NY: Edward Jones, 1810.
- _____. *The Seeking Heart*. Sargent, GA: The Seedsowers, 1962.
- _____. *Let Go*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1973.
- Ferguson, John. *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*. Cambridge, UK: W. Heffer & Sons, 1956.
- Finley, James. *Christian Meditation; Experiencing the Presence of God*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.
- Fontana, David. *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*. Oxford, UK: BPS Blackwell, 2003.
- Forman, Robert K. C. *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.

- Foster, Richard. *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life; Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.
- _____. *Celebration of Discipline; the Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- _____. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- Fox, George. *The Journal of George Fox*, ed. John Nickalls, Cambridge: University Press, 1952.
- _____. *The Power of the Lord Is over All; the Pastoral Letters of George Fox*, ed. Canby Jones. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.
- Francis, Thomas. "Contemplative Prayer." Lecture, weekend retreat at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.
- Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shape of Things to Come*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.
- Frohlich, Mary, ed. *St. Therese of Lisieux: Essential Writings*. Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Galbreath, Paul Harold. *The Christology of the Gospels and Abraham Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualization*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984.
- Gallwey, Timothy W. *The Inner Game of Tennis*. New York, NY: Random House, 1974.
- _____. *The Inner Game of Work*. New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2001.
- Gatta, Julia. *A Pastoral Art: Spiritual Guidance in the English Mystics*. London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987.
- Gemelli, Agostino. *The Message of St. Francis*. Translated by Paul J. Olin. Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963.
- Geoffrion, Timothy. *The Spirit-Led Leader; Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005.
- Gerard. "Contemplative Prayer." Lecture, weekend retreat at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.

- Gilson, Etienne. *The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*. Translated by A.H.C. Downs. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990.
- Gonzalez, Justo. *A History of Christian Thought; from Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*. Vol. 2. Rev. ed. A History of Christian Thought Series. Nashville, TN: Abigdon Press, 1987.
- _____. *A History of Christian Thought; from the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*. Vol. 1. Revised Edition. A History of Christian Thought Series. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.
- Gorman, Michael J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Gorsuch, Richard. *Integrating Psychology and Spirituality?* Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.
- Greene, Dana. *Fragments from an Inner Life*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing Company, 1993.
- Gregory of Nyssa. *On the Soul and the Resurrection*. Translated by Catharine P. Roth. Crestwood. New York, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993.
- Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Griffin, Emilie, ed. *Evelyn Underhill: Essential Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series. Maryknoll, NY Orbis Books, 2003.
- Griffith-Dickson, Gwen. *Human and Divine: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religious Experience*. London, UK: Duckworth, 2000.
- Gross, Rita, and Terry Muck, eds. *Christians Talk About Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk About Christian Prayer*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2003.
- Gunton, Colin E. *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Guyon, Jeanne. *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. Sargent, GA: SeedSowers, 1975.
- Harpur, James. *Love Burning in the Soul: The Story of the Christian Mystics, from Saint Paul to Thomas Merton*. Boston, MA: New Seeds, 2005.
- Hay, David and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds. "Romans." Vol. 3, *Pauline Theology*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002.

- Hengeveld, Nick. "The Bible Gateway." (accessed March 2007).
- Hildegard and Matthew Fox. *Illumination of Hildegard of Bingen*. Sante Fe, NM: Bear And Company, 1985.
- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways; Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Holmen, Tom. *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2001.
- Horsfall, Tony. *Rhythms of Grace: Finding Intimacy with God in a Busy Life*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 2004.
- Huston, Paula. *The Holy Way: Practices for a Simple Life*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2003.
- Ignatius. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: St. Ignatius' Profound Precepts of Mystical Theology*. Translated by Anthony Mottola. New York, NY: Image Books, 1989.
- Israel, Martin, and Neil Broadbent. *The Devout Life: William Law's Understanding of Divine Love*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2001.
- Jackson, Susan, A. and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow in Sports: The Keys to Optimal Experiences and Performances*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999.
- Jantzen, Grace. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000.
- Jardine, William, ed. *Shepherd of Hermas; the Gentle Apocalypse*. Redwood City, CA: Proteus Publishing, 1992.
- Jeeves, Malcolm. *Human Nature: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006.
- Johnston, William. *Christian Mysticism Today*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.
- _____. *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.
- _____. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2000.

- Jonas, Robert. *Becoming the True Self: Spiritual and Psychological Perspectives for the 21st Century*. www.emptybell.org/articles/Becoming%20the%20True%20Self.pdf (accessed October 24, 2006).
- Jones, Canby, ed. *The Power of the Lord Is over All*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989.
- Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way; Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Judy, Dwight H. *Embracing God: Praying with Teresa of Avila*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Kang, Kun Ki. "Thomas Merton and Buddhism: A Comparative Study of the Spiritual Thought of Thomas Merton and That of National Teacher Bojo." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1979.
- Kanh, David. "Finding the Flow in Montessori." *M: The Magazine for Montessori Families* (Fall 2006): 20-22.
- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1997.
- Keel, Tim. *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor, and Chaos*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
- Kelley, Anthony J. C.S.S.R., and S.D.B. Francis J. Maloney. *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2003.
- Kelly, Thomas. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1992.
- Kennedy, Robert E. *Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit; the Place of Zen in Christian Life*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1995.
- Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- _____. *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights From Emerging Generations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.
- King, Thomas M. *Merton: Mystic at the Center of America*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- King, Ursula. *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Editions, 1998.

- _____. *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2001.
- Kurtz, Ernest, and Katherine Ketcham. *The Spirituality of Imperfection; Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992.
- Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Laforest, Ann. *Therese of Lisieux: The Way of Love*. Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 2000.
- Laubach, Frank. *Letters by a Modern Mystic*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007.
- Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- Lawson, James G. *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *The Gospel According to Saint John*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. ed. Morna D. Hooker. New York, NY: Continuum, 2005.
- Loehr, Jim, and Tony Schwartz. *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. New York, NY: Free Press Paperbacks, 2003.
- Lord, Peter. *Hearing God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.
- Macquarrie, John. *Two Worlds Are Ours: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Magill, Kevin J. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?* New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.
- Mair, George. *A Life with Purpose: Reverend Rick Warren, the Most Inspiring Pastor of Our Time*. New York, NY: Berkley Books, 2005.
- Maloney, George. *The Mystery of Christ in You: The Mystical Vision of Saint Paul*. New York: Alba House, 1998.
- _____. *Abiding in the Indwelling Trinity*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.

- Marceau, William C. *Optimism in the Works of St. Frances De Sales*. Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.
- Maslow, Abraham H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50, no. 1 (1943): 370-396.
- _____. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1968.
- _____. *The Further Reaches of Human Nature*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976.
- _____. *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. New York, NY: Penguin Compass, 1994.
- May, Gerald, M.D. *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982.
- _____. *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001.
- _____. *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2006.
- McGinn, Bernard, and Patricia Ferris McGinn. *Early Christian Mystics: The Divine Vision of the Spiritual Masters*. New York, New York: Crossroad, 2003.
- McGrath, Alister. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- _____. *Historical Theology; an Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- McIntosh, Mark. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.
- McKim, Donald. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- McLaren, Brian. "Emerging Hope and the Mainline; Paths and Obstacles." Lecture, in *Mainline Emergent/s: Conversations in Theology, Hope, and Practice* Decatur, GA, 2007.

- _____. *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- McNeal, Reggie. *Practicing Greatness; 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass, 2006.
- McVey, Steve. *Grace Land*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001.
- _____. *The Godward Gaze*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003.
- Merton, Thomas. *The New Man*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Cudahy, 1961.
- _____. *Mystics and Zen Masters*. New York: Noonday Press, 1967.
- _____. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, 1972.
- _____. *The Ascent to Truth*. New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1981.
- _____. *Thoughts in Solitude*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 1993.
- _____. *The Inner Experience*, ed. William H. Shannon. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003.
- Mezmer Dr. *The Flow Experience: The Summa Cum Lousy of Bad Psychology*. <http://flowstate.homestead.com/files/zflowlousy.htm> (accessed 3/20/2008 2008).
- Michael, Fr. "Lectio Divina." Lecture, weekend retreat at The Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA April, 2008.
- Milavec, Aaron. *The Didache; Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- Miller, Paul Allen. *Postmodern Spiritual Practices; the Construction of the Subject and the Reception of Plato in Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2007.
- Mommaers, Paul, and Jan Bragt Bragt. *Mysticism: Buddhist and Christian*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1995.
- Moon, Gary W. and David G. Benner, eds. *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Morris, Leon. *Jesus Is the Christ; Studies in the Theology of John*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.

- Mulry, Ray. *In the Zone: Making Winning Moments Your Way of Life*. Arlington, VA: Great Ocean Publishers, 1995.
- Murphy, Michael. *Golf in the Kingdom*. New York, NY: Arkana Books, 1992.
- _____. *In the Zone: Transcendent Experience in Sports*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995.
- Murphy, Shane. *The Achievement Zone: An 8 Step Guide to Peak Performance in All Arenas of Life*. New York: Berkley Books, 1996.
- Murray, Andrew. *Absolute Surrender*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981.
- _____. *Humility*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- _____. *Experiencing the Holy Spirit*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985.
- _____. *Abiding in Christ*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1997.
- Myers, David G. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Nee, Watchman. *The Release of the Spirit*. Indianapolis, IN: Sure Foundation Publishers, 1965.
- _____. *Christ the Sum of All Spiritual Things*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1973.
- _____. *The Spiritual Man*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1977.
- _____. *Grace for Grace*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1983.
- _____. *The Life That Wins*. New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1986.
- _____. *Secrets to Spiritual Power*, ed. Sentinel Kulp. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1988.
- Newman, Barclay, and Eugene A. Nida. *A Handbook on the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981.
- _____. *The Way of the Heart*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981.

- _____. *Here and Now; Living in the Spirit*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.
- _____. *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1999.
- _____. *Life of the Beloved*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000.
- _____. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. ed. Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.
- Oord, Thomas Jay, and Michael E. Lodahl. *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2005.
- Ortberg, John. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Palmer, Jim. *Wide Open Spaces; Beyond Paint-by-Number Christianity*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Palmer, G.E.H., Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds. *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Vol. 2. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1984.
- Paroschi, Wilson. *Incarnation and Covenant in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:18)*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006.
- Peterson, Michael, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger. *Philosophy of Religion*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Pond, Kathleen. *The Spirit of the Spanish Mystics: an Anthology of Spanish Religious Prose from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century*. London, UK: Burns & Oates, 1958.
- Price, Charles. *Christ in You: How to Find Renewed Spiritual Power*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway Publications, 1995.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Rabb, Theodore K. *The Last Days of the Renaissance and the March to Modernity*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.

- Ravizza, Ken. "Qualities of the Peak Experience in Sport." In *Psychological Foundations of Sport*, ed. J.M Silva and R.S. Weinberg, 452-462. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1984.
- Ravizza, Ken, and Tom Hanson. *Heads-up Baseball*. Chicago, IL: Masters Press, 1995.
- Rees, B. R. *Pelagius; a Reluctant Heretic*. Wolfeboro, NH: The Boydell Press, 1988.
- Reisinger, Ernest C. *The Law and the Gospel*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishers, 1997.
- Richmond, Lewis. *A Whole Life's Work; Living Passionately, Growing Spiritually*. New York, NY: Atria Books, 2004.
- Rieff, Philip. *Charisma; the Gift of Grace, and How It Has Been Taken Away from Us*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2007.
- Rhodes, Tricia McCary. *Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Rogers, Joyce. "Mysticism as a Way of Spirituality." *Spirituality Today* Vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 1988). 100-108.
- Rollins, Peter. *How (Not) to Speak of God*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006.
- Rowe, William. *Philosophy of Religion*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001.
- de Sales, Frances. *On the Love of God*. Translated by John K. Ryan. Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1963.
- Sandford, John. *Mystical Christianity: A Psychological Commentary on the Gospel of John*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Restless Souls; the Making of American Spirituality from Emerson to Oprah*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co., 1931.
- Sebba, Anne. *Mother Teresa: Beyond the Image*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1997.
- Shults, LeRon F. and Steven J. Sandage. *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

- Simpkins, C. Alexander, and Annellen Simpkins. *Simple Zen; a Guide to Living Moment by Moment*. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing, 1999.
- Smith, Huston. *The Soul of Christianity; Restoring the Great Tradition*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005.
- Smith, Hannah Whitall. *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1952.
- Smith, Jr., Chuck. *The End of the World...As We Know It*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001.
- Smith, John Holland. *Francis of Assisi*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972.
- Smith, Karen E. *Christian Spirituality*. London, UK: SMC Press, 2006.
- Smith, Malcolm. *The Power of the Blood Covenant: Uncover the Secret Strength in God's Eternal Oath*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2002.
- Smyth, Bernard T. *Paul: Mystic and Missionary*. New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1980.
- St. Cyres, Stafford Harry Northecote. *Francios De Fenelon*. Port Washington, NY Kennikat Press, 1970.
- Stone, Dan, and Greg Smith. *The Rest of the Gospel: When the Partial Gospel Has Worn You Out*. Dallas, TX: One Press, 2000.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. 1st ed. World Perspectives. New York: Harper, 1957.
- Sweet, Leonard. "Distilling a Dream for Leadership in the Emerging Culture." Lecture/chat, online, Hampton, GA, March 3, 2008.
- _____. *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic*. Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1994.
- _____. *Postmodern Pilgrims; First Century Passion for the 21st Century World*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holdman Publishers, 2000.
- _____. "Dreams Gone Wild; a New Kind of Human, Pure Human." Unpublished article. Orkas Island, OR, 2007.
- _____. *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Do Without*. Colorado Springs, CO David C. Cook, 2008.
- Tamburello, Dennis. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Essential Writings*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

- Teahan, John Frances. "The Mysticism of Thomas Merton: Contemplation as a Way of Life." PhD diss., Princeton University, 1976.
- The Rutba House, ed. *School(S) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishers, 2005.
- Thomas, John Christopher. *The Spirit of the New Testament*. Scholeksterstraat, Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005.
- Thomas, Major Ian. *The Saving Life of Christ and The Mystery of Godliness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.
- Thorsen, Hakan. *Peak-Experience, Religion, and Knowledge: A Philosophical Inquiry into Some Main Themes in the Writings of Abraham H. Maslow*. Stockholm, Sweden: CWK Gleerup, 1983.
- Thrangu, Rinpoche. *Everyday Consciousness and Buddha-Awakening*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2002.
- Thurston, Bonnie B., ed. *Merton & Buddhism; Wisdom, Emptiness, & Everyday Mind*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2007.
- Tillich, Paul. *A History of Christian Thought*, ed. Carl Braaten. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968.
- Tobin, Frank. *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.
- Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God; One Being Three Persons*. Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1996.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Pursuit of God*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993.
- Trigg, John Wilson. *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. New York, NY: E. P. Dutton, 1912.
- _____. *The Mystic Way: A Psychological Study in Christian Origins*. New York, NY: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD., 1913.
- _____. *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People*. Columbus, OH: Ariel Press, 1986.

- Verdeyen, Paul. *Ruusbroec and His Mysticism*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994.
- Volf, Miroslav and Michael Welker, eds. *God's Life in the Trinity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Ward, Karen. "New Monasticism." Lecture, Mainline Emergent/s: Conversations in Theology, Hope, and Practice Decatur, GA, 2007.
- Warren, Rick. *God's Power to Change Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- _____. *The Purpose Driven Life; What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Way, Robert E. *The Wisdom of the English Mystics*. London, UK: Sheldon Press, 1978.
- Wheatley, Margaret J. *Finding Our Way; Leadership for an Uncertain Time*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005.
- Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1991.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines; Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.
- Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan. *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.
- Wiseman, James A. *Spirituality and Mysticism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006.
- Wright, N. T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. New York, NY: Harper One, 2006.
- Wright, Wendy M. *Frances De Sales: Introduction to the Devout Life and Treatise on the Love of God*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993.