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Intentional Discipleship: Spiritual Formation as Trinitarian Immersion for the 21st Century

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP:
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS TRINITARIAN IMMERSION
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE

BY
CRAIG W. HENNINGFIELD

PORTLAND, OREGON

APRIL 2006

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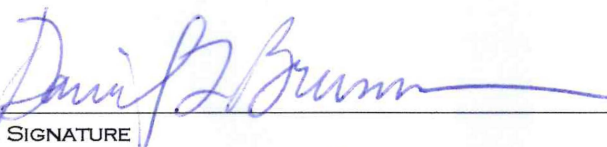
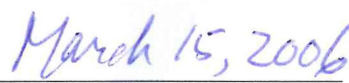
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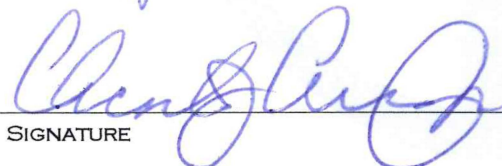
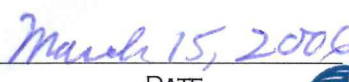
CRAIG HENNINGFIELD

PRESENTED: MARCH 15, 2006

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INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP:
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS TRINITARIAN IMMERSION
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

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In gratitude for the Reverend Doctor Eric H. Kiehl,
friend and mentor who taught me the joy of exploring the life of Jesus
for the benefit of the Christian community.

+ Sola Deo Gloria +

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Abstract

The local Christian congregation is remarkably active. Pastors serve the congregation in a variety of roles. Church leaders meet to plan so that tasks, funds and activities are properly ordered. Church members participate in the various ministries and opportunities offered. Citizens of the local community take advantage of programs designed for them. Christian congregations, sometimes called “religious malls,” are busy.

Yet, with all the activity, church members still come and go, complain about the decisions being made, resist changes in their “religious tradition,” struggle with various addictions, expect more than is being provided, and wonder how Christianity relates to their everyday world. The list could go on. Apparently, all of the activity is not producing the kind of people who celebrate Life in Christ and who live his life in their personal and communal lives.

The problem comes from the failure to focus congregational efforts on the goals and processes that develop people so that the “image of Christ” is reflected in their lives. Much effort is poured into running the activities of the local church, but little focus is on mentoring the personal and communal transformation Jesus anticipated for his people.

What is needed is for local congregations to invest their resources in the processes of intentional discipleship, pursuing the “preferred future” of “making disciples” in keeping with the practice of Jesus – immersion into the Trinitarian Presence and Reality.

To address this problem, we propose a process to immerse Christians into the Trinitarian Presence within, throughout and beyond local congregations. As part of the process, the “goal” of Christian spiritual formation will be carefully established and clearly communicated. Then, with a renewed understanding of the goal, the appropriate processes of achieving the goal will be properly identified and practically implemented.

In chapter two, we present biblical materials that show the practices of Jesus as he intentionally developed disciples. He will be the Teacher providing practical insight into the “Trinitarian immersion” intended for his followers.

In chapter three, we will search for spiritually formative insights gleaned from various strands within the Lutheran tradition.

In chapter four, we will explore the disciple-making goal and processes of a chosen mentor to this project: Dr. Dallas Willard.

In chapter five, we will explore the goal and processes for learning relationships in the emerging culture from another selected mentor: Dr. Leonard Sweet.

Finally, we present our solution, which is a practical, reproducible pattern for the spiritual formation – Trinitarian immersion – of the people within and beyond the Christian communities of the future.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Story

“God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son” (Romans 8:29, *The Message*). I sat and stared at the words on the page. I had read them many times before, but this caught me. “I want this to happen in me,” I thought. “Can this happen in me – in us?” I prayed. “If so, how?”

Two questions combined became the first journal entry. For yet another time of personal evaluation, usually taken in the fall, I had gotten away to reflect upon my journey with Jesus, my life, my relationships and my work. I take the time to ponder the future. I set aside a few days, bring some books, my Bible, hiking shoes, and an empty notebook. During this special time, I read, I write, I walk, I dream, I talk, I pray, I listen and I rest. These times are refreshing, brutal, uplifting and humbling.

Over the years, each time I have done this, two passions remain certain: I long to be more like Jesus as I live my life, and I love to learn/teach in order to help others do the same. I have a true desire to have my life “shaped along the same lines as the life of his Son,” and I love to see people’s lives “shaped along the same lines.” Nearly two decades ago, even before leaving the seminary, I had drafted my reason for existence, my purpose for living: “I am here to lead, teach and nurture a growing group of Christians into

Christlikeness.” I love being with people, engaging them with the Word through the Spirit, and observing them discover, mature and participate in their life with Jesus.

“How am I, Father?” is a common question during my prayer walks. “Am I becoming a man, husband, father and pastor/teacher after your own heart? Am I hearing your song for my life? Why do I insist on singing my own song at times? What is the next verse of my song?” As I walk, my reflections are regularly interrupted as I remember conversations with those whom I serve. People consider me to be the one to ask when they need an answer to a question about God, the church, the Bylaws or what we had decided to do a year ago. I have become an “answer man.” Congregational members know that I read as much as I can, and share what I learn in various classes, counseling sessions, and in guiding the ministries and leaders of the white, upper middle class, education-oriented, Lutheran congregation I served.

But, “is my life being shaped along the same lines as the Son?” I am drawn back to this question as I continue journaling, and listening. “Maybe not...” as I pour over recent job evaluations. I sense that all of my reading has not led to much change. My job evaluations have highlighted a regular list of strengths while exposing consistent areas of weaknesses. I read in these areas for help; I attend conferences searching for help; I work on the various issues that highlight my weaknesses. I try to improve in the areas of my strengths. Still, I am not that much different; I am who I am. I ponder, “Can I make a difference in my own life?”

And, “am I leading others to be more like the Son?” During this annual, personal evaluation, I realized those around me are not much changed either. I have taught Bible classes on various books and topics of the Bible; led various half-day and weekend

retreats for folks; developed sermon series on various topics of need for the congregational members. Through large groups, small groups and individual times with people, I have tried what I knew and everything I could. Yet, after years of effort, old thoughts and habits dominate the personality and practice of the traditional, Lutheran congregation I serve.

I was confronted with an unsettling truth: after fourteen years of ministry effort little had changed. True, one could argue much had changed: facilities had expanded, ministries had grown, the school had multiplied, mission funding had quadrupled, budgets had increased, staff had developed, and the congregation had apparently prospered. In our suburban community, we were a congregation with a good reputation. The results of my efforts seemed good, but were not satisfying. Why? Because, I reasoned, in the one area where I wanted to see meaningful “shaping” – in the lives of the people – little seems to have changed. Life long Lutherans – having attended literally hundreds of Bible class opportunities – continue to reflect anger and disgust for those who do not think like they do. There is little tolerance for those who prefer a different worship style. Visitors are nearly ignored. The “grape vine” slithers across the congregation in mean and discouraging ways, many willing to speak with anyone except the one being talked about. Priorities in personal and congregational life seem stuck in some “dream past.”

“What is wrong, Father?” was my prayer, my cry, and my journal entry: “Why do I feel ineffective after doing what I know how to do, what I was trained to do? Where is the joy in being who you made me to be? Where is the contentment in doing what you want me to do?” This stage of the evaluation process was an especially tough time.

“What if I am the problem, or at least part of the problem? What if I just do not know how to shape people’s lives? Are these people becoming more like me, more like Jesus, or just staying the same?” As usually happens, I hit bottom in my evaluation. “What happened to living my life’s purpose?” I was guided into pastoral ministry to help people learn so they could live. Learning and living the Scriptures had changed my life, and I wanted other lives to change as well. “What happened to my life’s purpose of nurturing emerging leaders who work in partnership with the Lord in the vocation(s) of their lives?”

Considering the Problem

Congregational life demands much of pastoral leadership to insure the quality and quantity of programs designed and implemented for the “good” of the membership and the community. Any pastor who desires to increase effectiveness within the local congregation seeking to shape the lives of others has, as one basic option, the opportunity to change the “shape” of the organization. Along with the leaders of the congregation I served, as we planned and managed the ministries of the congregation, we concluded that our work and effort was not properly focused. We needed to refocus our reason for existence on what matters most as the future unfolded before us. Though we were doing many “good” ministries, we wanted to sense a greater effectiveness, a greater “return on investment” of our time, energy and resources. Our first effort at shaping the lives of the people was to change the “shape” of the organization. What our leadership team needed was direction and the plan to get there.

Planning for a Solution

Any congregational leadership team seeking to increase their overall effectiveness does not have to go far to find help. Local Christian bookstores offer a variety of books

on congregational work and ministry, organizational guidance and leadership training. For that matter, any bookstore with a section on “Management” or “Leadership” also provides ample resources for increasing organizational effectiveness. A survey of the multiple resources reveals two basic categories for understanding how a particular resource is helpful. The first category is written to provide general understanding of congregational effectiveness based upon the general principles practiced by successful churches. The second category includes books written to provide insight and application vital to a congregation’s success in specific ministry areas. Reading in both areas, we believed, would give our organization the effectiveness that seemed necessary.

Resources written to provide a general understanding for increasing congregational effectiveness based upon successful congregations provide a stream of “this is what worked” insights. For instance, George Barna’s *User Friendly Churches*¹ summarizes his comprehensive research of congregations that grew rapidly throughout the 1980’s, especially Willow Creek Community Church. This book encourages leadership teams to study what makes other congregations successful, and, to his credit, cautions against imitation and duplication.² Rick Warren’s popular *The Purpose Driven Church*,³ the story behind the success at Saddleback Community Church, places an intentional emphasis on congregational health, not growth. Warren outlines the five

¹ George Barna, *User Friendly Churches* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1991).

² Ibid, 15-26.

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

purposes he believes lead to a healthy church,⁴ also advocated by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod as vital to overall congregational ministry. Dan Southerland’s *Transitioning*⁵ discusses his congregation’s ultimately successful implementation of Warren’s five purposes, helping others consider the various issues that are involved in leading a congregation forward in a purpose-driven model. Bob Russell’s *When God Builds a Church*⁶ describes the successful rise of a mega-church that maintained focus on church health that leads to effective church ministry and growth. Christian Schwarz also emphasizes church “health” over church “growth” in his *Natural Church Development*.⁷ This resource outlines eight “quality characteristics” that must be measured so that ministry weaknesses receive effective, organized energy in order for a congregation to grow healthy more “naturally.”⁸

Resources written to provide a specific ministry insight and application intended to increase congregational effectiveness provide many how-you-do-it insights. For instance, George Barna’s *The Power of Vision*⁹ guides church leaders in the process for developing the “vision” of the church. Then, as a way to implement the “vision,” John

⁴ Ibid, 103-09.

⁵ Dan Southerland, *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999).

⁶ Bob Russell, *When God Builds a Church* (West Monroe: Howard Publishing Company, Inc., 2000).

⁷ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996).

⁸ Ibid, 22-37.

⁹ George Barna, *The Power of Vision* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1992).

Carver's *Boards that Make a Difference*¹⁰ offers a practical path to redesign governance structures as a means of increasing effectiveness. This quite naturally leads to the need for greater effectiveness in the leaders of the congregation. John Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*¹¹ and *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*,¹² seeks to increase effectiveness among the individuals and ministry teams of a congregation. Sally Morgenthaler's *Worship Evangelism*¹³ challenges the practice of this important aspect of congregational life. She asks if both church and unchurched unbelievers "detect something supernatural and life-changing going on? Can they sense God's presence and work among us? Are they experiencing something in our midst they have never seen before?"¹⁴ Mark Mittelberg's *Building a Contagious Church*¹⁵ provides an abundance of strategic thinking and practical ideas for the congregation effectively seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. And, for the congregation seeking to increase their effectiveness in reaching the unchurched, Thom Rainer's *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and*

¹⁰ John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

¹¹ John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

¹² John Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

¹³ Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

¹⁴ Ibid, 9.

¹⁵ Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000).

*Proven Ways to Reach Them*¹⁶ offers insights into the lives and attitudes of those who have recently joined a church.

Unfortunately, even after making the changes in the “shape” of the organization, the lives of the congregational members remained much the same as before.

The Story Continues

Organizational change had brought greater effectiveness to our work, but had not “shaped” many lives “along the same lines as the Son.” Even as the leadership team read and worked to increase our overall effectiveness, I continued reading and working in the areas of my personal passion. I was not going to give up on my life’s purpose of nurturing people working in partnership with the Lord in the vocation(s) of their lives. Through both reading processes, I remain convinced that “life change” – understood as being shaped to be more like Christ – is God’s desire for all people; his is truly a “Life-shaping Ministry.” He is, if you will, the ultimate Sculptor. I wrote in my journal: “Jesus did not live and die just to make our congregation more effective.” I felt like I had just declared war on everything we had been doing. I suppose, in effect, I had. But, as I pondered this insight on a sunny, bright afternoon in the mountains of Colorado, I could not help but thank God for his mercy in our efforts, and beg for his guidance for the future. If we were going to “shape the lives of people along the same lines as that of his Son,” then we were going to have to change the “shape” of ministry.

¹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001).

Later that day, I continued pondering two questions of growing importance for this particular personal evaluation: How can my life be shaped along the same lines as that of God's Son? And, as that happens, how can I be a help to others being shaped along the same lines? "Explore the life of Jesus," I sensed. I wrote that in my journal. After a time of quiet reflection, I then wrote: "Jesus lived and died so my life can be shaped to be like his." The Gospels returned me to Jesus – being with him, following him, hearing him, and observing his life. "Meet me, again," was the whisper. I had to face the truth: Jesus had been reduced to a doctrine, a professional need to satisfy the local "church customers." My training had dissected him, analyzed him, and organized him into precisely worded doctrinal affirmations.¹⁷ I needed him to be a whole person again, to be real to me. I know him to be alive – I wanted him among us now. My friendship with Jesus needed a makeover – an extreme makeover.¹⁸

Where could I get such a makeover? Who could help me? In obedience, I opened the Bible on the table and began reading, watching, listening, and wondering with Jesus through his life. Once again, I was introduced to Jesus through my friends Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – refreshing indeed! Professional ministry had stolen away my best Friend. I confessed again my need for a maturing relationship with Jesus, a relationship that would deepen by being with him, by following him, by listening to him, by immersing myself in his thoughts and living. This time, however, not for the work of the

¹⁷ I must make clear that I am not condemning doctrinal statements; I am confessing the struggle I was experiencing at the time.

¹⁸ It was at this point that I was introduced to Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), which confirmed my sense that the congregation now needed to move beyond "ministry effectiveness" to Jesus.

ministry, but for the joy of being together. Planning for greater effectiveness in congregational organization, effort and focus was not the solution we needed.¹⁹ We needed more of Jesus!

Statement of the Problem

Congregational life demands much of pastoral leadership to insure the quality, quantity and overall effectiveness of the programs designed and implemented for the membership and the community. Pastoral leadership necessary for the future, however, is the intentional work of spiritual formation – of being involved in the lives of those who love God as they are being “shaped along the same lines as that of his Son.” Jesus’ own command (Luke 6:36) and comment (Matthew 5:48) on the Divine intention of Christian life are unmistakable: we are here to become like our heavenly Father. Thus, I conclude, taking note of Jesus’ own teaching and practice, the work of pastoral leadership leading toward spiritual formation is engaging God’s People in the definitive “shaping” of Christian life: “Trinitarian Immersion.” In addition, the work of pastoral leadership in spiritual formation is mentoring the learning relationships that will sustain such an “immersion” for a lifetime.

Preparing for a Solution

The phrase “Trinitarian Immersion” was the final entry in my journal. I knew enough to write the phrase, but was not yet fully sure what it means. I knew I needed help and support in the journey ahead; I needed other friends, mentors who could give me

¹⁹ Quite frankly, all of our planning really meant we continued doing the same activities as before, just with more, or less, effectiveness than before.

guidance and counsel based upon their own “immersion” with Jesus. “Who could guide me further into the relationship of being immersed with Jesus?”

The work of authors seeking to replace the psychological/sociological/managerial foundations of pastoral leadership with a return to spiritual formation grounded in the Word and Will of God takes many forms.²⁰ For instance, long before “postmodern” and “emerging culture” were popular terms, Eugene Peterson was wrestling with the rising influence of the “sociologists, psychologists, management consultants, and community organizers” of the twentieth century upon the work of pastoral ministry.²¹ His *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* acknowledges the insights and instruction gained from such humanism and technology, but advocates the work of pastoral leadership combines two unique aspects: first, representing the eternal word and will of God and, second, representing His Word and Will “among the idiosyncrasies of the local and the personal.”²² As such, this resource examines the ministry relevance of five scrolls that have come to be known as the “Megilloth”: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther:

Learning how to love and pray in the context of salvation (Song of Songs); developing an identity as a person of faith in the context of God’s covenant (Ruth); dealing with suffering in the context of redemptive suffering (Lamentations); unmasking religious illusion and pious fraud in the context of providential blessing (Ecclesiastes); and becoming a

²⁰ Interestingly, many of the resources we thought helpful as guides for increasing congregational effectiveness did speak of spiritual formation, but as something on the side, more an addendum rather than the center of pastoral leadership.

²¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 4.

²² *Ibid*, 5.

celebrative community of faith in the environment of the world's hostility (Esther).²³

Read and studied in the context of community's life and worship, and applied in the context of the individual's daily life, the Megilloth are useful for building the "wholeness that God intends for his creation."²⁴ Pastoral leadership in the arena of spiritual formation is challenged to return to the Fount and Source of our God through the Scriptures.

Richard Foster is another early author who offers meaningful counsel for the believer interested in pursuing the spiritual life. His *Celebration of Discipline* identifies two fundamental reasons Christians do not enter into the disciplines of the spiritual life: pervasive materialism and pervasive ignorance.²⁵ The pervasive materialism is influenced by the philosophies of popular science, which are prejudiced against the nonmaterial world. Like Peterson, Foster suggests that believers of earlier times did not need instruction on "how to do" the Disciplines – our ignorance is our own. "The Bible called people to such Disciplines as fasting, prayer, worship, and celebration but gave almost no instruction about how to do them."²⁶ Why is there such little instruction in "how to do" the Disciplines? Foster believes in "ancient" times the Disciplines were so frequently practiced and such a part of the general culture that the "how to" was common

²³ Ibid, 17.

²⁴ Ibid, 20.

²⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 2-3.

²⁶ Ibid, 3.

knowledge. This resource provides much needed instruction concerning the practice of the Disciplines in the Christian life, noting, “Jesus Christ has promised to be our ever-present Teacher and Guide.”²⁷ In addition, Foster’s *Prayer* both broadens and deepens the Christian’s understanding of this vital entrance into the life of God.²⁸ And, his *Streams of Living Water* is an effort to consider the ancient spiritual formation emphasis and their practice across the centuries.²⁹ Pastoral leadership in the arena of mentoring believers into the image of Christ must teach the Disciplines that lead into the life of God.

Howard Baker’s *Soul Keeping* emphasizes the role of “pastor” and “spiritual director” as a “shepherd of souls” – someone competent in the art and practice of guiding us safely back to the “greater care of God.”³⁰ Going beyond mere emotional comfort or healing, the goal of “soul keeping” is to “reunite the individual with a clear sense of God’s presence, work, care and direction,”³¹ what the apostle Paul calls a “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). Baker laments the reality that few Christian leaders are trained in this old and necessary art, yet provides an important resource for men and women “who can open our eyes to how God Himself uses conditions of the soul to shape

²⁷ Ibid, 10.

²⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

²⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998).

³⁰ Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 24.

³¹ Ibid, 24.

us for His purposes.”³² Pastoral leadership is called back to the ancient paths of caring for the spiritual dimensions of human living.

Dr. Bruce Demarest has provided a solid overview of spiritual formation in his *Satisfy Your Soul*.³³ He also believes that spiritual formation is an ancient ministry of the church, concerned with the “forming” or “shaping” of a believer’s character and actions into the likeness of Christ.³⁴ “Christians of the past looked upon repentance and regeneration as just the beginning” of a continuing process, during which

The Spirit gradually restored and renewed the Christian’s entire life through deepening relationship with his or her altogether lovely Lord Jesus. The church’s role in the individual life was very active one, in which the believer was taught not only orthodox doctrine, but many practices that opened him or her to the presence and direction of God, and nurtured the character traits of Christ into fruition – traits such as humility, fortitude, and obedience.³⁵

The church’s “role” assumes the work and practice of spiritual formation as pastors taught the doctrine and the practices that “nurtured the character traits of Christ.”

Spiritual formation is vital for every Christian, and Demarest provides a comprehensive resource for the work of Christian ministry in the local congregation.³⁶ Pastoral

³² Ibid, 26.

³³ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999).

³⁴ Ibid, 23.

³⁵ Ibid, 24.

³⁶ Both *Satisfy Your Soul* and *Soul Keeping* are resources provided to the spiritual formation practitioner through the NavPress’ “Spiritual Formation Line.” Other books in this Line include Jeff Imbach’s *The River Within*; Gary Thomas’ *The Glorious Pursuit*; J.P. Moreland’s *Love Your God With All Your Mind*; James Houston’s *The Transforming Power of Prayer*; Michael Wilkin’s *In His Image*; and Jan David Hettinga’s *Follow Me*.

leadership for spiritual formation mentors both doctrine and practice in keeping with the “lovely Lord Jesus.”

John W. Frye writes to challenge organizational effectiveness as the primary work of pastoral leadership. His *Jesus the Pastor* responds to a profound question: “How seriously do pastors look to Jesus Christ as the one who shapes their vision and expression of pastoral ministry?”³⁷ His answer is also profoundly simple for pastors bombarded with the psychological/sociological/managerial approaches to pastoral ministry: “I want to encourage my fellow shepherds to return to the Lord Jesus Christ as our number one pastoral mentor,” writes Frye, advocating that Jesus’ undershepherds – pastors – “are to be like their Chief Shepherd both in character and in ministry.”³⁸ He concludes by stating what should be obvious: “Every pastor must be pastored by Jesus himself.”³⁹ Jesus must be the mentor of pastoral leadership for the future.

Don Milam approaches the need for pastoral leadership in the work of spiritual formation in a unique way. His *The Lost Passions of Jesus* claims “passion is the fire of life and the energy of the soul,”⁴⁰ and goes on to ask, “What was the compelling passion in the life of the Lord Jesus?”⁴¹ This is a popular survey of the Gospels searching for the

³⁷ John W. Frye, *Jesus the Pastor: Leading Others in the Character and Power of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 17.

³⁸ Ibid, 21-22.

³⁹ Ibid, 163.

⁴⁰ Donald L. Milam, Jr., *The Lost Passions of Jesus* (Shippensburg: Mercy Place, 1999), 1.

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

“veritable realities spoken from the mouth of Jesus and the zealous actions demonstrated by the hand of our Lord”⁴² in search of a “new source of fuel to ignite us in this generation.”⁴³ Here, pastoral leadership finds much to inspire a renewed interest, investigation and implementation of the life of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the two reading processes outlined above (reading to increase congregational effectiveness and reading to grasp the practicalities of spiritual formation), two authors intrigued me. After much reflection, I came to realize that both authors seemed adept at uniting both “principles” and “specifics” in their writings. Both authors were, so to speak, describing the waterfront and teaching me how to swim. Both, based upon my understanding, were writing in response to their own “immersion” experiences into the life of Jesus. Both authors, based upon the breadth and depth of their works, offer instruction, application and challenge to the work of pastoral leadership in the arena of spiritual formation. And, both were wrestling with the same issues facing the congregation I served: greater effectiveness in the organization does not necessarily lead to greater transformation in the lives of the people. In fact, as will be pointed out, both lament the reality that a greater focus on congregational leadership and management has not translated into a greater witness for Christ in the emerging culture of our country. For these reasons, among others, I have chosen Dallas Willard and Leonard Sweet as significant mentors for this dissertation because they have, in their own way, thoughtfully

⁴² Ibid, 3.

⁴³ Ibid, 5.

reflected upon and imaginatively approached the Christian life as “Trinitarian Immersion.”

Proposal

I propose a practical, reproducible process for guiding the spiritual formation – understood as “Trinitarian Immersion” – of any local community of Christ-followers or spiritual seekers. As part of this process, I believe the hopes and dreams of the people are to be revealed and respected. At the same time, I believe the misguided ideas of “our life in God,” along with the behaviors that flow from these ideas, are to be exposed.

Concurrently, based upon “knowing” the people of the congregation, I believe the appropriate ideas and patterns for the “Immersed Life” as the Word reveals them are to be encouraged, developed and implemented. Both the goal of their spiritual transformation, and the processes guiding the entire “immersion journey,” must be embedded within each community through the life of Jesus. The process must be imagined in the people so that their whole life immerses into the desire of God who *“decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.”*

Scope of the Dissertation

The “ministry story” that establishes the problem to be studied is my actual story. The insights from my time of personal evaluation, and the process of spiritual formation I desire to develop and implement, are primary reasons for entering into this doctoral program. I believe that Jesus said what he meant and meant what he said. I also believe that the life he lived and his spiritual formation insights have application in the emerging culture of the western world. I can learn from him, and others close to him, of the life immersed in the Trinitarian Presence.

The second chapter explores the practical work of spiritual formation practiced by the primary Teacher and Mentor of the project: Jesus. This chapter will be divided into four sections where each Gospel will be introduced as a unique story relative to Trinitarian Immersion, then examined for insight and application of Jesus' spiritual formation of his followers.

The third chapter explores various writers and texts significant from my Lutheran heritage. A survey of insights based upon the writings of Luther, the Lutheran Confessions and more recent authors will lead to a series of intentional commitments when developing my solution.

My work continues by establishing the purpose and processes of Trinitarian Immersion as advocated by the first of two selected mentors: Dallas Willard. The fourth chapter explores the following writings to identify his understanding of the practical work of spiritual formation in the emerging culture: *Hearing God*, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, *The Divine Conspiracy*, and *Renovation of the Heart*.

My effort to understand the work of Trinitarian Immersion in the emerging culture continues by considering the other selected mentor: Leonard Sweet. The fifth chapter explores the following writings to understand the practical work of spiritual formation in the emerging culture: *AquaChurch*, *Carpe Mañana*, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, and *Summoned to Lead*.

In order to support the practical work of pastoral leadership applicable to the emerging culture of the 21st century, the final chapter offers my solution for establishing the work of spiritual formation – understood as “Trinitarian Immersion” – in local Christian communities.

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

JESUS FORMS HIS FOLLOWERS

The ministry story that establishes this dissertation acknowledges four “friends” who provide personal encouragement and guidance: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are, of course, the four Gospels, the Spirit-breathed (2 Timothy 3:15) stories of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. From four unique vantage points, our Lord’s teachings are recorded, his spiritual formation practices revealed, and his personal life-pattern observed. My search to understand and implement the “preferred future” desired by Jesus for his followers begins with his “friends.” This chapter is an exploration of the spiritual formation goals and practices of Jesus revealed through the Gospels.

Two unique characteristics of each Gospel will be explored in order to highlight the key pathways of the spiritual formation ministry of Jesus. The first characteristic is the author’s unique purpose in writing his Gospel. Holding that a real person wrote each Gospel to a unique people for a specific purpose, this chapter examines the purpose of each Gospel in order to highlight its spiritual formation emphasis. The second characteristic is each Gospel’s unique preference for the future. The future preferred by each Gospel is recorded in very specific commands to those who follow Jesus. The “preferred future” engages the reader of each Gospel in the actual ministry practiced by Jesus, and gives direction to the reader for his or her own ongoing spiritual formation. Each Gospel will be explored in turn beginning with St. Matthew.

Spiritual Formation: The Gospel According To Matthew

The author of this Gospel reflects a teacher's giftedness linked to concern for the spiritual formation of those in the local church. Michael Green, in his *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, says the intentional organization of the incorporated material shows a teacher "concerned to produce educated Christians who knew what they believed and why, and would be able to defend the faith in controversy with hostile opponents and ignorant Gentiles."¹ By design, Matthew's Gospel was written to encourage the spiritual formation of the reader with the goal of establishing a pattern of life consistent with Jesus and distinct from the synagogue and local pagan lifestyles.² Michael Wilkins also acknowledges the significance of spiritual formation as vital to Matthew's purpose. His *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* comments, "Jesus' objective was to make disciples from among the crowds" with the key sign of faith, or readiness to follow Jesus, being when one came out of the crowd to call Jesus "Lord."³ Then, once a person made this "confession," the work of Jesus, as presented by Matthew, was to help the disciple to "understand" the essence of true discipleship (Matthew 13:51, 16:12 and 17:13). Matthew's Gospel was written for the purpose of teaching disciples how to apply the teaching of Jesus in their daily lives.

¹ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 26.

² Ibid, 27.

³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 180.

Next, what is Matthew's "preferred future" for the reader? Matthew records Jesus' intention for the spiritual formation of those who would follow him regardless of context or culture:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."⁴

The actual command of this commission for the future is "make disciples." This phrase translates *mathateusate* from *mathateuo*, which means, "to make a disciple or a learner."⁵ The word implies an intellectual process that directly affects the lifestyle of the student.⁶ In fact, based upon its purpose, the entire Gospel is designed to serve as an intellectual process that directly affects the lifestyle of the student as Jesus teachings are studied and applied in everyday life

In support of the commanded intellectual and formational process, Matthew records three vital actions: go, baptizing and teaching. Frederick Bruner suggests the actual translation of "go" is difficult. The same verb is used in its imperative form three times in the Gospel (Matthew 2:8; 11:4; 28:7) mandating that people physically go somewhere. He comments that the verb here is also a dynamic command to be "on the move ... keep making extensive decisions, be reaching out, be seeking ways to get in

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20. All Scripture references quoted in this chapter are from the New International Version.

⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 552.

⁶ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984), 10.

touch with people.”⁷ The “go” suggests the place and pace of “making learners” – during the travels and relationships of living daily life. Jesus intended for his followers to proceed with their daily work doing what he had taught them to do, practicing what he had taught them for their own spiritual formation, and moving into the lives of others in order to further develop learners.

The second action is detailed in “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Frederick Bruner comments that “in the name of” comes from the world of banking and means “to the account of” and “into the possession of.” Thus, “being baptized into the name of” brings believers under new management, where they are transferred to a new “company” – into the fellowship of those who worship God the Father through listening to the teaching of His Son by the drawing power of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Warren Carter agrees, indicating that in baptism, the disciple has a new commitment to, ownership by and protection from Father, Son, and Spirit.⁹ William Hendriksen understands “baptized into the name of” as meaning “being brought into vital relationship with” that One such that the baptized is brought into “union with the Triune God, to whom he intends to devote his life.”¹⁰ The spiritual formation activity of “baptizing them in the name of,” concludes Bruner is “immersing them – into the

⁷ Frederick Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 815.

⁸ Ibid, 821.

⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 552.

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 1000-1001.

companionship of the Father, the education of the Son and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

The third action supporting the “preferred future” in Matthew’s Gospel is “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Both “teaching” and “to obey” are important to the spiritual formation future of the disciple. “Teaching” translates *didaskontes* from *didasko*, which has the ancient meaning of “imparting theoretical and practical knowledge with the highest possible development of the pupil as the goal.”¹² “To obey” translates the infinitive *tapeiv* from *tareo*, which has the basic meaning of “to keep in view,” and “to watch over” for the purpose of “observing or keeping” what is commanded.¹³ Combined, the spiritual formation of the disciple continues before/after baptism as Jesus’ “commands” for faith and living are taught to the community so that active obedience and participation occurs. The actual commands of Jesus recorded by Matthew are important for the work of spiritual formation, and useful for further study and application in any spiritual formation curriculum. But, what is it that Jesus fundamentally “teaches” throughout Matthew’s Gospel? Jesus’ fundamental teaching in Matthew’s Gospel “reveals the Father” to the disciple so that the disciple can “become like his or her Father.” Both Matthew’s “purpose” and “preferred future” are fulfilled as the disciples are introduced to the Father and his Life.

¹¹ Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook*, 822.

¹² Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 161.

¹³ *Ibid*, 1174-75.

Jesus speaks repeatedly of the Father throughout the Gospel.¹⁴ For our purpose here, because the Sermon on the Mount is considered “the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus’ teaching,”¹⁵ and because the Sermon sets the tone for Jesus’ introduction of the Father throughout the Gospel, the Sermon will serve as the focus for the following discussion.

Jesus Introduces the Father to the Disciple

The Sermon on the Mount uses “Father” seventeen times. Two initial comments begin to develop the desired understanding for today. First, fifteen of the seventeen references use the pronoun “your” when speaking to the disciples of the Father (Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6 [2], 8, 14, 15, 18 [2], 26, 32; 7:11). In this phrase, Jesus emphasizes the unique, personal relationship of the Father to the disciples, helping them to understand Him as “your Father.” Jesus draws the Father and the disciple together as being of the same family. One of the remaining two references is qualified with “our Father” (Matthew 6:9). Through “our,” Jesus connects himself to the Father with the disciples, teaching companionship and togetherness. Through both pronouns – “your” and “our” – Jesus teaches the reality of being a son/daughter of the Father on the part of both Jesus and the disciples. The final reference is qualified with “my Father” (Matthew

¹⁴ Based upon the NIV text of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew refers to “God the Father” forty two times; Mark three times; and Luke sixteen times.

¹⁵ Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, “The Christian life, as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, is coherent and all embracing. The citizens of the kingdom are called to put God first in their motives and their actions, in their business and their language, in their thought life and their priorities. All life comes under his royal control,” 88-89.

7:21). Through his use of “my,” Jesus reveals his unique relationship with the Father. Given the repeated, personal use of “Father” in the Sermon, spiritual formation involves the proper awareness of and life-response to the “parent/child” relationship established between the Father and the disciple.

Second, ten of the seventeen references to “Father” are qualified by the word “heaven” in one of two different forms. The first form – “your Father in heaven” – teaches the disciple of the place from which the Father relates to the disciple. The disciples’ Father is “in heaven, which is better translated “in the heavens.” The second form – “your heavenly Father” – teaches the disciple of the position from which the Father relates to the disciple. The disciple’s Father relates to them from the highest, and holiest, position. Combined, these two forms guide the disciples’ understanding of the unique closeness of the Father in their daily lives while supporting the special position of the Father for guiding their daily living. The remaining seven references use the name “Father,” which suggests authority and care, provision and guidance – like a father. Relative to spiritual formation, the growing conviction on the part of the disciple that “the Father” is also “my Father” suggests the very source of the disciple’s being and life, and that with Jesus “the Father” is also “our Father” encourages the Teacher-disciple relationship.

How can a disciple know a Father he or she cannot see? There are two specific verbs relative to the Father’s basic nature that are significant for the spiritual formation of the disciple: see and know. In the context of the Sermon, the “secret” approach to “giving” on the part of the disciples that Jesus teaches will, in turn, bring the response of the Father “who sees what is done in secret.” Here, Jesus teaches of the “seeing” Father

who “knows” what is done in the secret, private, prayerful, personal, devotional places of life – even in the heart. Further, Jesus counsels care for the words used while praying since the Father “knows” what is needed even prior to the request. The Father “knows” is a perfect tense verb, teaching the Father’s previous and currently effective understanding and knowledge of the disciple’s condition and need. Again, Jesus teaches that the “Father knows that you need them” – referencing the material things necessary for daily living – repeating the truth of Father’s “knowing” in the perfect tense.

A third verb involves Jesus’ teaching of the Father as “unseen.” This unique description of the Father – “who is unseen” – helps the disciple understand the nature of his or her Father as One who is himself “private.” Spiritual formation, as undertaken by Jesus in his teaching of the Father, occurs as the disciple comes to fully “know” the Father. This “knowing,” however, is more than mere understanding or intellectual assent. Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by connecting “hearing” and “doing,” stating plainly “everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man” (Matthew 7:24). The “words” Jesus has spoken relate specifically to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus Introduces the Disciples to the Father

Having introduced the Father’s presence with and position toward the disciple, Jesus also introduces the disciples to the Father. He does this by revealing various characteristics of the Father through the verbs used in his teaching about the Father. Jesus mentors the readers in the Father’s activity in the world and in their lives, enhancing spiritual formation as the disciple comes to know the Father through his

actions. As taught by Jesus, the actions of the Father can be organized in two basic categories:

The first category of verbs is specific to the Father who is the subject of the particular verb. For instance, it is the Father who “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Connected to this, Jesus introduces the Father as caring for, and sustaining all he has made: “your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matthew 6:26). He also teaches of the Father’s generosity towards His children: “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11)! One of these “good gifts” of which Jesus teaches is the Father’s forgiving nature: “your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14-15). The Father is also the One who “rewards” the disciple for the proper practice of personal and relational “acts of righteousness” (Matthew 6:4, 6).

Then, Jesus continues introducing the disciples to the Father with a second category of verbs. This category includes the verbs in the context of Jesus’ introduction of the Father, but where the disciples are the subjects of the verb. The most significant verb is the key teaching of Jesus describing the disciples’ relationship to the Father: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Two observations of this “perfect” teaching are noted: first, regarding the disciples being spiritually formed, Jesus simply teaches that they “will be perfect” (future tense) not “are perfect” (present tense). It is the Father who is described as “being perfect” – present tense – not the disciples. And, Jesus does not state a command (imperative), but announces a statement of fact (indicative). In doing so, Jesus is describing the disciple community of the future

as their spiritual formation matures them into the character and toward the activities of the Father. In other words, the community “will become perfect” like the Father “is already perfect” as a result of their ongoing spiritual formation.

A second observation identifies Jesus’ intended meaning of “perfect.” To further our understanding, various synonyms are helpful: to “be perfect” is to be “whole, full, mature, and perhaps dedicated.”¹⁶ William Hendriksen agrees, “Perfect means brought to completion, full-grown, lacking nothing.”¹⁷ He understands Jesus as saying that disciples should not be satisfied with halfway obedience to the law of love. It is the Father’s perfection that we should strive to imitate; that is, perfection here specifically in the love he shows to all. Warren Carter understands “whole” as denoting the undivided heart that truly knows and loyally does God’s will, and involves the whole person in every sphere doing love toward all.¹⁸ Thus, the intent of “perfect” is not absolute moral perfection, where nothing is ever again wrong, but a growing “spiritual maturity” – completeness – and an intentional development toward spiritual wholeness that reflects the Father through the community.

Jesus teaches a number of responsive behaviors describing the community’s “perfection.” For instance, Jesus instructs, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Significantly, the disciples as a community are commanded to shine as a singular light

¹⁶ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1164.

¹⁷ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 317.

¹⁸ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 157.

with this “light” being the “good deeds” of the community toward humanity in general. Two such deeds include Jesus’ command to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45). If the great honor and joy of a son, or daughter, is to “reproduce the character and behavior of their father in their life,”¹⁹ certainly Jesus is here describing the character and behavior of the Father.

Jesus next teaches on behaviors important to the disciple’s relationship with the Father where he warns, actually commands, against a public display or performance of “acts of righteousness” (Matthew 6:1-18): giving, praying and fasting. Jesus demands that such “acts” be done in “secret,” or private, apart from the awareness of other people and in response to the Father who “sees what is done in secret.” Jesus commands privacy – “go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father” – and counsels care for the words used while praying as there is no need for “babbling” with “many words.”²⁰ Of special note for our purpose here is Jesus emphasis on forgiveness. Once the disciples pray, “Forgive us our debts” according to the way “we also have forgiven our debtors,” Jesus comments further on the vital importance of this particular petition: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15). The practice of forgiveness as part of the “secret life” of the disciple is vital. A

¹⁹ This phrase is my own summary conclusion following a study of “being a son” in the life of Jesus and taught as part of the spiritual formation ministry of Jesus, and, so far as I know, has no other reference.

²⁰ To support the praying of the disciple, Jesus teaches appropriate “words,” or prayer topics, in what is commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13).

second petition of the Disciples' Prayer – "Give us this day our daily bread" – is also further developed by Jesus. He instructs his followers to "look" at the birds to observe our Father's care, applying this same care to our own lives (Matthew 6:25-32).

As a further development of a maturing, "perfect" response to the Father, Jesus teaches: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). This teaches a clear "knowing and doing" response in the life of the disciple to the "will of my Father," His "will" being what pleases Him and what He desires. Christian spiritual formation moves beyond the conversation into the practical activity of life consistent with Father's "will." Jesus' teaching here can be summarized by "spiritual formation is less about what one says, and more about what one does."

Summarizing Spiritual Formation in Matthew's Gospel

The Sermon on the Mount sets the tone of Matthew's Gospel by focusing largely on the Father. His place and position relative to the reader is established. His character is amply described through the meaningful announcement of His conduct relative to the disciples and the world around them. A strong behavioral foundation is established for the disciples as Jesus outlines their proper response to the Father's Person and Presence. The "goal" of spiritual formation is the becoming "perfect" like the Father, where the son/daughter resembles him in character and conduct.

As mentioned above, the "preferred future" of Jesus for his followers, according to Matthew's Gospel, is the formation of men and women into "day-by-day" disciples who are "baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," and are taught to observe "all that Jesus has commanded." Matthew instructs the reader toward

understanding such that the disciple deepens and broadens in his or her acknowledgement and acceptance of the disciple-life. As presented by Jesus through his friend Matthew, the goal of spiritual formation is taking on the character of the Father – the “perfect” Father. The Son mentors the reader in the proper and appropriate attitudes and actions that express his or her own maturing “perfecting” while living each and every day. And, as presented by Jesus through Matthew’s Gospel, the process practiced is embedding the words and ways, character and conduct of the Father into the thoughts and patterns of the disciple community. Jesus teaches of his Father and tells stories of the Father’s World. He uses “living images” to express the Father’s heart.

Spiritual Formation: The Gospel According To Mark

Mark’s Gospel was written to establish the identity of Jesus and to instruct the reader in the proper response to him. Donald English, in his *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith*, sees this double thrust woven throughout the Gospel as a response to two probable questions posed by the reader. The first question – “who is Jesus?” – is a question of identity; the second question – “how should I/we respond?” – is a question of response, or faith.²¹ Both themes present Jesus as the focus of the Gospel, and both are apparent from the beginning of the Gospel. For instance, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1) moves quickly to “You are My Son” (Mark 1:11) as an answer to the question of identity. Then, as Mark records the answer to the question of response, Jesus announces: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is

²¹ Donald English, *The Message of Mark: The Mystery of Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 16.

near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15)! Another example is Peter’s “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29) confession at Caesarea Philippi. His confession is quickly confirmed through the Voice at the Transfiguration “This is my Son, whom I love” (Mark 9:7) followed by the desired response of “Listen to him” (Mark 9:7).

Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus offers insight into the “identity-response” themes of the Gospel by exposing the conflict that arises between two opposing points of view in Mark’s Gospel: “thinking the things of God” and “thinking the things of humankind” (Mark 8:33). This conflict of focus is most obvious in Peter, who earns Jesus’ rebuke following his confused “response” in his growing understanding of Jesus’ “identity.” The “mystery of Jesus and the Cross” is difficult for all who would follow Jesus on their own personal terms.²² The “things of humankind” include the expectations and stereotypes of the disciples toward Jesus, which are basically shattered in the identity of a Suffering Messiah. On the other hand, Michael Wilkins argues, “thinking the things of God” makes possible both a proper identification of Jesus – the Suffering Messiah – and response to him – living in service among God’s people. Thinking from God’s perspective understands the essence of Jesus’ ministry in terms of servanthood since Jesus revealed his purpose for coming to earth was to go to the cross (Mark 8:31). Ultimately, the discipleship teaching of Mark’s Gospel reveals Jesus directing his followers to “think God’s way, the way of suffering and the Cross through servanthood.”²³ Servanthood “thinks the things of God.”

²² Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus*, 197.

²³ *Ibid*, 200.

According to Mark's Gospel, what is the "preferred future" of those seeking the proper response as a disciple of Jesus? The answer to this question depends on the actual conclusion of the Gospel that is accepted by the reader. If the Gospel concludes, "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8), then there is no specific commission at the end of the Gospel for the disciples' future following the Ascension. With this ending, which is likely the ending available to the original reader, the reader is forced to search the Gospel for some command that directs the disciple toward his or her "preferred future." If the Gospel concludes at this point, then the Voice that confirms the Jesus' identity becomes even more significant for the reader's spiritual formation. The Voice commands, "Listen to him" (Mark 9:7)! Given the context, the disciples are to listen only to Jesus as he speaks to them of the Passion of the Suffering Servant, effectively announcing the continuation of "power" through "service." Peter had proposed that Elijah and Moses be put on par terms with Jesus, failing to put Jesus on a different level above Elijah and Moses.²⁴

In Mark's Gospel, the "preferred future" for the community of disciples is the command of the Father to "listen" to the Son both now and in the future. "Listen" translates the command *akouete*, which means to "hear what is being revealed," and takes on significance as "the reception of grace and the call to repentance in response to salvation and its ethical demand."²⁵ John Paul Heil writes that God's urgent command to "listen to him!" reinforces Jesus' own appeals to really "hear" and understand his

²⁴ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 355.

²⁵ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 35.

teaching (Mark 4:3, 9, 23; 7:14), emphatically drawing special attention to his teaching that he must suffer, die and rise (Mark 8:31).²⁶ It also alerts the reader to pay attention to what Jesus is yet to teach. Thus, the reader is commanded to “listen to Jesus” such that faith (identity) and obedience (response) become the marks of real hearing.²⁷ The following exploration of Mark’s Gospel “listens to Jesus,” in keeping with the Voice’s command at the Transfiguration, in order to develop the appropriate response of “thinking God’s way” in daily life.

Spiritual Formation PRIOR to the Transfiguration

Mark’s Gospel presents Jesus as an active person throughout his public life and ministry. Through one of his favorite words – “immediately” – Mark shows Jesus as a man on the move, busy, active and involved in the spiritual formation of those who surround him. Two sets of reveal verbs Jesus as the “all-powerful conquering center of divine energy.” The first set of verbs reveals the activities of Jesus as a public figure involved in the public ministry of “preaching ... teaching ... healing.” The second set of verbs reveals his activities as a private person living his life according to a specific life-pattern. Both of these “activity sets” expose the reader to “thinking God’s way,” and are intended for the spiritual formation of the reader.

Mark’s Gospel shares Jesus’ invitation, and commitment, to four men: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). Literally, Jesus invites Peter and Andrew, James and John to “come after/behind me.” The key phrase of this

²⁶ John Paul Heil, *The Gospel of Mark as a Model for Action* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 187.

²⁷ Ibid.

invitation is *hopiso mou*, or “follow me,” which means, “To come after someone, follow someone,” and takes on the figurative sense of “being an adherent” of the one being followed.²⁸ Jesus’ commitment – “I will make you fishers of men” – is immediately engaged in a “preaching ... teaching ... healing” pattern of ministry. For instance, early in his ministry, Jesus was “preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (Mark 1:39). A short time later, facing a growing crowd, Jesus “preached the word to them” (Mark 2:2). Later that same day, with the multitudes gathered around him, Jesus “taught them” (Mark 2:13). Next, confronted with a “crushing crowd,” Jesus “healed many” (Mark 3:10). “And again he began to teach by the sea” (Mark 4:1). Later on, Jesus “began to teach in their synagogue” (Mark 6:2). Then, following a pre-determined strategy, Jesus “went about the villages in a circuit, teaching” (Mark 6:6). Soon afterwards, Jesus’ heart-felt compassion for the crowds moved him to “teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Mark offers a glimpse of the powerful effect on the people of this “preaching...teaching...healing” ministry pattern used by Jesus:

And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized him, ran through the whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard he was. Wherever he entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid their sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might just touch the hem of his garment. And as many as touched him were made well (Mark 6:54-56).

Mark also records that the disciples were thrust into the same ministry Jesus had been doing as they “went out and preached that people should repent,” and “they cast out

²⁸ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 575.

many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:12-13). They engaged in the key aspects of the “power ministry” pattern. Obviously, through his teaching and example, Jesus had effectively formed the disciples in the “preaching...teaching...healing” ministry pattern he had employed. Mark records with clarity that Jesus’ followers learned from him how to employ the same ministry pattern, even in terms of doing what he had done.

In conjunction with the “power ministry” pattern taught by Jesus, Mark also reveals the life-pattern that Jesus actually lives. Mark’s first chapter weaves teaching, preaching and healing alongside of various spiritually formative activities practiced of Jesus – synagogue, study, teaching, silence, solitude, and prayer – which his followers are to learn. For instance, Jesus went to quiet places to pray early in the morning (Mark 1:35), he practiced the Sabbath in keeping with the customs of his culture (Mark 2:22-28), he attended the local synagogue (Mark 3:1), he applied, based upon his studied understanding, the key topics of the Word (Mark 4:3-34), he counseled his followers to develop listening skills (Mark 4:24), he advocated rest and solitude (Mark 6:31) coupled with prayer (Mark 6:36). Announcing the significance of the practice of these spiritual disciplines, fasting in particular, Jesus teaches:

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins (Mark 2:21-22).

A new way of life was dawning upon those who followed Jesus – the “old ways” were no longer suitable for this “new life.” Jesus also acknowledges the importance of “doing the will of God” as evidence of spiritual formation (Mark 3:35).

Shortly before the Transfiguration, Jesus clarifies the issue of identity. The probing question of “Who do people say I am?” is followed up with the pointed question “Who do you say I am” (Mark 8:27, 29)? In answer to Jesus’ question, Peter responds, “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29). Then, in an unexpected shift of emphasis from “power” to “servanthood,” Jesus “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Being “Christ,” grounded as it was in the “power ministry,” now includes “suffering, rejection, death and resurrection.” Sadly, Peter’s remarkable identification of Jesus as the “Christ” collapses with his confusion of the true meaning of “Christ.” Peter rebukes Jesus for suggesting that being Christ includes the path of suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus identifies the source of his confusion responding, “Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Mark 8:33). Here, for the second time, Jesus commands “*hopiso mou*” – “get behind me.” Williamson points out that “behind me” (Mark 8:33) and “after me” (Mark 8:34) are identical in Greek. Disciples are not to guide, protect, or possess Jesus; they are to follow him.²⁹ Why does Jesus speak to “Satan”? R.T. France suggests that using “Satan” here implies that Peter’s protest, even though properly described as “human” thoughts, is so much at odds with the thoughts of

²⁹ Lamar Williamson, *Mark* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1983), 153.

God as to be attributed to a more supernatural source.³⁰ “You do not have in mind” translates *phroneis*, which communicates what the “mind is set upon,” and “what the person intentionally focuses their thoughts upon.”³¹ Spiritual formation, Jesus teaches, focuses the disciple’s thought-patterns upon the “things of God,” not upon the satanic thought patterns. Thus, Jesus gives clear indication of the true character of ministry – servanthood – and draws the contours for the appropriate response within the disciple community:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels (Mark 8:34-38).

This teaching continues Jesus’ commitment “I will make you fishers of men.” For the third time, Jesus commands “*hopiso mou*” to anyone and everyone who intends to follow him. Now, however, following Jesus is not into the ministry of power, but into the ministry of sacrifice and service. Key practices of the follower now include self-denial, readiness for death, and following Jesus at all costs alongside of preaching, teaching and healing.

Spiritual Formation FOLLOWING the Transfiguration

The training in the attitude and application of service begins immediately following the Transfiguration. First, in response to a question about Elijah, Jesus uses the

³⁰ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 338.

³¹ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 866.

famous prophet of Israel as an example of the treatment expected by the ruling authorities: “they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him” (Mark 9:13). Soon after this example, Jesus uses a small child as a living expression of appropriate attitudes regarding the life of a servant: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35-36). Jesus goes on to teach servanthood through his care and blessing for children being brought to him (Mark 10:13-16). Ultimately, Jesus uses himself as the prime expression of the servant lifestyle, commenting that the very purpose of his life is service:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

Even in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, Jesus’ servant-nature is expressed (Mark 11:1). Beyond the Transfiguration, Jesus’ ministry is characterized by obedience, suffering, and servanthood as the will of God is fulfilled.

And, as before, Jesus emphasizes the disciplines that sustain the “life of service.” He does this by teaching the evidence of a life lived by various disciplines of the spirit. For instance, he comments on a disciple’s mature speech and overall life (Mark 9:50) coupled with an attitude and practice of “peace.” He advocates approaching life along the lines of “faith” and in “prayer” (Mark 11:20ff). Jesus underscores the need for understanding the Scriptures and the power of God (Mark 12:24). He encourages the ability to hear the Spirit even amidst the persecutions of obedience to the will of God (Mark 13:11). Important for the ongoing practice of the spiritual life is Jesus’ instruction

for being ready, alert, aware and prepared to move into life along the lines established by God regardless of the circumstances (Mark 13:5, 9, 33-37). Thus, the spiritual preparations vital to “power ministry” mature through the attitudes and practices of servanthood.

At this point, one other important question must be considered: what if Mark’s Gospel does not end with “because they were afraid” (Mark 16:8), but actually ends “then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16:20)? When the longer ending to Mark’s Gospel is accepted, the “preferred future” of Jesus’ followers becomes:

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well (Mark 16:15-18).

If this is the “preferred future” intended by Mark’s Gospel, then the “servant ministry” lived by Jesus is set aside in favor of the “power ministry” practiced by Jesus. In fact, amidst language that plainly reflects the “power ministry” portion of the Gospel – preaching, signs, drive out, speak, get well – the commanded action for the spiritual formation of Jesus’ followers is “preach the good news.” The command “to preach” repeats one of the key elements of the “preaching, teaching, and healing” taught by Jesus. Fulfilling this command does indeed imitate Jesus who had come for the purpose of preaching (Mark 1:38). And, as Mark’s Gospel records that the disciples had already participated in what Jesus here commands: they “went out and preached everywhere” (Mark 10:27). In addition, the longer ending of Mark’s Gospel records that “the Lord

worked with them” (Mark 16:20) as the command is fulfilled. Key to this concept is the present tense of the verb *sunerguntos*, which means, “to work together with another.”³²

In reality, though he is no longer directly present with them in bodily form, Mark’s Gospel teaches the partnership the Lord has with those who have been spiritually formed under his tutelage. It seems reasonable to acknowledge that with Jesus working together with the disciples, both “power” and “service” would remain together as well. “Power ministry” may be the focus of the alternative ending to Mark’s Gospel, but the Lord is clearly present to insure the primary evidence of authentic spiritual formation: servanthood.

Summarizing Spiritual Formation in Mark’s Gospel

Regardless of which ending for Mark’s Gospel is accepted, Jesus is clearly the focus of this spiritual formation text. The examination presented above records Jesus’ tutelage of those who would “follow” him for the purpose of becoming “fishers of men.” The reader comes to understand that to “follow” Jesus is to take on his thought patterns, not the worldly patterns of thought that misunderstand and deny his rightful place in life. And, this tutelage is for the purpose of recognizing the Master and realizing the appropriate response to him, even if the disciple follows Jesus into servanthood ending in death. Mark’s Gospel also unites “power” ministry with “servant” ministry and draws both to full expression in Jesus. The proper response for the disciple community is to “follow” Jesus in both ministry and life patterns. Ultimately, for the spiritual formation of the disciple community, the readers are commanded to “listen to him” by the Voice

³² Ibid, 787.

that seeks to further their development irrespective of the power/servant portion of ministry. And, the community recognizes the partnership of the Lord as they “listen to him” and fulfill his command in the future.

What is the process Jesus used to enable those with him to “follow” him? Important in the command “listen to him” is the observation and imitation of the life that Jesus actually lives. The above examination has shown that both “power” and “servant” ministry are grounded in a uniquely patterned way of life. Jesus practiced what are commonly known as “disciplines for the spiritual life” that provided the life support for his entire ministry. “Following” Jesus also means to follow him into the actual life patterns that he lived. One of the key processes of spiritual formation as revealed through Mark’s Gospel is learning from Jesus to live daily life like Jesus.

Spiritual Formation: The Gospel According To Luke

Michael Wilcock begins his *The Message of Luke: The Savior of the World* stating that Luke’s Gospel is “thoroughly Gentile in its spirit and outlook,”³³ written as a “thorough, accurate and orderly” account of what Jesus did and taught, presenting him to the peoples, cultures and communities of the world.³⁴ He points out that “those who witnessed the original events found that when the story was preached, it changed men’s lives,” and then suggests that Luke “reckoned it would have a similar effect on those who

³³ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke: The Saviour of the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 17.

³⁴ Ibid, 27-29.

read it.”³⁵ Thus, Luke’s Gospel was written to proclaim the story of Jesus beyond Hebrew culture, and to encourage the spiritual formation of the “Gentile” reader.

The Introduction to the Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) announces Luke’s spiritual formation purpose. Writing to Gentiles being taught the life of the Christ, and based upon his own research (Luke 1:3), Luke presents the facts of Jesus’ life: of what had been “fulfilled among us” that was now being “handed down to us” (Luke 1:1-2). What is “handed down” is not a theory, or an idea, or a philosophy, or a religion, and is more than mere history.³⁶ Luke’s spiritual formation purpose is focused in “so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:4).

“Knowing” is significant:

“Know” means a deep, thorough knowledge. Luke wants his reader to know the certainty of the gospel not only in his mind but in his heart, so that it becomes part of the fiber of his being. Such knowledge may be yours, says Luke. How? By some mystical experience? By a deep study of philosophy? No: by reading and meditating on the plain facts of the story of Jesus, set out here in my Gospel. *That* is where you may come to know the basic certainties of life.³⁷

Luke confirms his spiritual formation purpose by boldly declaring the Gospel will offer *certainty*, which might be translated “infallibility.”³⁸ To the Gentile reader, it is as if Luke were challenging: “Read what I have written, and you will see the facts on which

³⁵ Ibid, 26.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 31.

³⁸ Ibid, 30-31.

Christianity is based; and you will find there something firm and solid and absolutely trustworthy, a sure foundation for faith.”³⁹

Michael Wilkins’ *Following the Master* deepens the spiritual formation purpose for Luke’s Gospel, concluding: “As the believer enters the narrow gate to salvation, he or she is introduced to the Way of discipleship, a pattern of life following Jesus.”⁴⁰ And, as “narrow gate” suggests, following in the footsteps of Jesus is costly: “to count the cost meant to recognize that love for God was at the center of faith”⁴¹ and this love was expressed in “undivided loyalty to Jesus”⁴² through “detachment from competing allegiances and through giving personal allegiance to Jesus as Master.”⁴³ Thus, Luke’s Gospel continually sets Jesus’ life before the disciple as the “example of the life that is given over to fulfilling the will of God.”⁴⁴ Again, the nature and purpose of “knowing” is given description:

The life of the disciple may be summed up in Luke’s perspective as a person who has given his or her allegiance to Jesus as Savior, who has been ushered into the Way of walking with Jesus as Master, and who is being transformed into the likeness of the Master through obedience to his Word.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁰ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 210.

⁴¹ Ibid, 211.

⁴² Ibid, 217.

⁴³ Ibid, 211.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 218.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 220.

Jesus calls for a radical commitment to him that will ultimately produce change in a person's life. This is what the Gentile reader is to certainly "know" as the story is read, discussed, meditated upon and applied to his or her life.

What is the "preferred future" announced by Luke's Gospel? As with Matthew's Gospel, Luke announces a "commission" of Jesus to his followers for the future: "I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you," commanding them to "stay put" until they were "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Both the "promise of My Father" and the "power from on high" reference the Holy Spirit. The metaphor "clothed" instructs the "follower of the Way" of the indispensable Presence that wraps around and supports the work and word of their witness.⁴⁶ The following examination explores the references to the Holy Spirit in Luke's Gospel; highlighting Jesus' "preferred future" for the reader as an intimate relationship with, or "knowing," the Holy Spirit. Specifically, what does Luke's Gospel teach of the Holy Spirit that gives guidance to the spiritual formation of the Gentile disciple?

The Holy Spirit Introduced to the Reader

Prior to reading Jesus' public ministry, the Gentile reader is introduced to the Holy Spirit. Three important concepts are introduced. First, various people are "filled" with the Holy Spirit. John (who would become the Baptist), Zechariah's son, will be "filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (Luke 1:15). Zechariah's wife Elizabeth is

⁴⁶ This is supported by a second version of Luke's "commission:" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

“filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41). Even Zechariah himself is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:67). The Gentile reader is introduced to the Holy Spirit as One who “fills” various, and specific, people. Exactly “how” this is so is not stated, though the “result” of such “filling” is provided. Second, the Holy Spirit is the vital “Power” relative to the conception of Jesus: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35).⁴⁷ Both actions of the Spirit – “come upon” and “overshadow” – are vital to the reader’s proper confession of the Spirit’s work relative to the Person of Jesus. The Gentile reader is introduced to the Holy Spirit as One who creates Life. Third, the Holy Spirit guides the life of Simeon, who was “upon” him (Luke 2:25), and had “imparted a revelation”⁴⁸ significant to Simeon: he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:26). With this knowledge, Simeon was “moved by the Spirit” into the temple courts (Luke 2:27). The Gentile reader would recognize the Spirit as vital to the Divine engagement in his or her daily activities, for personal life. The Gentile reader has come to “know” the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit as Vital to Jesus’ Ministry

Through the ministry of John the Baptist, Luke announces the vital relationship between Jesus’ ministry and the Holy Spirit: “I baptize you with water ... but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). John had been baptizing, or immersing, the people into water expecting “repentance” – a change in the way they were

⁴⁷ Compare the “power from on high” in Luke 24:49.

⁴⁸ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 885.

thinking – that became evident in the life-patterns of the people (Luke 3:7-9). This “repentance” was practical in the daily life of the people and beneficial to those around them, shaping both attitude and action (Luke 3:11-14). Jesus would do more, baptizing, or immersing, the people into the Holy Spirit, expecting similar, if not greater, results. He is able to do so based upon his own baptism when “The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:22). Luke records that the Spirit “descended” in connection with both the action of baptism and the praying of Jesus (Luke 3:21). The presence of the Spirit “upon” Jesus is described as being “full” (Luke 4:1), carrying the idea of “complete” and “lacking nothing.”⁴⁹ This is the same word describing the “filling” of the disciples by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.⁵⁰

Furthering Jesus’ preparation for ministry, he was “led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:1-2). Just as the Spirit had “led” Simeon into the Temple to meet the Christ Child, so the Spirit leads Jesus into a necessary confrontation, but a “confrontation” which is the “first occasion in history that a son of Adam has raised an effective defense against Satan.”⁵¹ Knowing that the Spirit was “upon” him, and after being “led by the Spirit” into the confrontation, Luke records that Jesus was also “in the power of the Spirit” as he returned to Galilee (Luke 4:14) following these first temptations. The temptation had not driven the Spirit from Jesus, discovers the reader, but had strengthened the relationship between the two. Jesus

⁴⁹ Ibid, 670.

⁵⁰ William Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 210.

⁵¹ Wilcock, *The Message of Luke: The Saviour of the World*, 60.

teaches: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus confesses that the Spirit is “upon” him for the purpose of ministry: bringing good news, proclaiming release, recovering sight, setting free and proclaiming the Lord’s favor. It is the Holy Spirit who has “anointed” Jesus and who has “sent” Jesus into his specific ministry.⁵² Luke references the Spirit in terms of the relationship he has with Jesus, concluding that the actual work of Jesus is a result of this relationship. The Gentile reader, seeking to develop a deeper appreciation for what he or she had been taught, longing for the life of Jesus to be initiated and continued in his or her own life, now knows for certain of the importance of the work of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit as Vital in Jesus’ Teaching

Jesus instructs the Gentile reader to make request for the Holy Spirit as he concludes his teaching on prayer: “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:13)! The disciple discovers that the Spirit is the “good gift” the Father is “eager to give” as the “best of answers” to prayer.⁵³ The reader is taught to ask for the Holy Spirit as the culmination of personal and communal prayer life. The importance of this prayer request is highlighted in that “to ask” takes on the

⁵² Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 252-54.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 126.

nuance of “to demand.”⁵⁴ The “gifted” relationship of the Holy Spirit to the disciple is a result of “demanding” such a “good gift,” which promptly brings about a spiritual “revolution” (Luke 11:14-32) and spiritual “transformation (Luke 11:33-12:12).⁵⁵ Soon after, however, Jesus further instructs the reader in the appropriate response and relationship with the Holy Spirit: “everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven” (Luke 12:10). The reader is warned against the inappropriate response to the Spirit – blasphemy – that is the “willful and wicked rejection of God’s saving power and grace.”⁵⁶

Hendricksen expands our understanding here:

The bitter opponents of Jesus have been ascribing to Satan what the Holy Spirit, through Christ, was achieving. Moreover, they were doing this willfully, deliberately. In spite of all the evidences to the contrary they were still affirming that Jesus was expelling demons by the power of Beelzebul. Now to be forgiven implies that the sinner be truly penitent. Among the opponents such genuine sorrow for sin was totally lacking. For penitence they substituted hardening; for confession, plotting. Thus, by means of their own criminal and completely inexcusable callousness, they were dooming themselves. Their sin was unpardonable because they were unwilling to tread the path that leads to pardon.⁵⁷

The context has Jesus warning against the “yeast of the Pharisees” (Luke 12:1), who had “blasphemed” the Spirit in their rejection of Jesus’ works and purpose. The reader taught to request the Spirit now learns to respect Him.

⁵⁴ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 25.

⁵⁵ First, the Spirit comes to revolutionize the lives of the disciples, offering salvation in the person of the Saviour Jesus; then comes to transform their lives into the image of Jesus, Wilcock, *The Message of Luke: The Saviour of the World*, 132.

⁵⁶ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 107.

⁵⁷ Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 656.

The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the disciple is deepened as Jesus teaches, “When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12). The spiritual formation of the Gentile reader is supported with two significant teachings. First, the reader relates to the Spirit as a learner. In times of personal or communal persecution, Jesus comforts by teaching that the Holy Spirit “will teach you.” The reader is promised the teaching work of the Spirit. Second, the reader learns of the intimate and immediate “teaching” of the Spirit in times of persecution. The Spirit will teach “at that very hour,” giving recognition that the Spirit knows, really knows to the point of wanting to help, of the hour-by-hour life of the disciple. Even in the worst of circumstances, from an earthly perspective, the Spirit is present to accomplish His purpose and work.⁵⁸ “At the very moment when you need to know what to say, then and not before, the Holy Spirit will work within you in such an effective manner, illumining the mind and sharpening the power of speech, that you will know exactly what to say.”⁵⁹

Summarizing Spiritual Formation in Luke’s Gospel

The “preferred future” of the Gentile reader of Luke’s Gospel focuses on the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation, what can be “known with certainty,” is supported, sustained, created and guided by the Holy Spirit. Luke records the endowment of the Spirit upon Jesus as his ministry was fulfilled on behalf of God’s people. Mark Turner writes that the

⁵⁸ This work of the Spirit, from Luke’s perspective, continues in Acts.

⁵⁹ Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 675.

Spirit “reveals the Father and the Son, brings their direction, and provides charismatic wisdom to understand the Gospel, God’s will, and how to walk in it.”⁶⁰ What can be known with “infallibility” is the story of Jesus’ life, teaching, death and resurrection all under the watchful guidance of the Holy Spirit. The reader would come to learn that Jesus relied upon the Spirit, mentoring the same relationship for the disciple seeking for the disciple a maturing relationship with the Spirit. Luke’s Gospel develops the reader by revealing the proper beliefs and the life that is lived consistent with such beliefs, and prepares the reader for the future under the influence of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

Spiritual Formation: The Gospel According To John

The Fourth Gospel is the fond remembering of “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20) as guided by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). John, the son of Zebedee, part of the “inner circle” of Jesus’ twelve disciples, a leading apostle of the early church, was a Palestinian familiar with his culture, history and the local topography. He was privileged to live with Jesus as an eyewitness and participant to the events recorded.⁶² John was a product of the spiritual formation ministry of Jesus, transformed through the love he experienced in his friendship with the Christ who writes his Gospel with an obvious purpose in mind: “these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the

⁶⁰ Mark Turner, *Power From On High* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 438.

⁶¹ Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 47.

⁶² Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here is Your King!* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15-16.

Messiah, the Son of God” (John 20:31). John writes to bring his readers nearer to faith in Jesus Christ, and the same love he experienced.

What does John mean by writing “to believe”? Bruce Milne’s *The Message of John: Here is Your King* reflects upon the alternative readings for “believe” in the ancient text. Is the verb “believe” in the Greek “aorist tense” or “present tense”?⁶³ If it is an “aorist tense” verb, expressing a decisive act of believing – “that you may come to believe” – then Bruce Milne suggests John’s purpose was evangelistic: he writes to produce decisive commitment to Christ. However, if the verb is in the “present tense,” expressing an ongoing act of believing – “that you may go on believing” – then John’s purpose in writing was discipling those who already believe so that they can hold on to their faith in Christ and grow in it. Admitting that the textual evidence supports the aorist tense rendering, Milne ultimately accepts the reality of both intentions: the primary purpose as an Evangelist seeking to bring the reader to faith in Christ linked to the secondary purpose as a Disciplemaker seeking to mature the reader in the same faith. Spiritual life and formation is at the heart of both textual readings.

Following the Master agrees, summarizing the core of spiritual formation in John’s Gospel with the single word “life.” When questioned, Jesus announces that he came to offer life: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Wilkins asserts: “We need to be very clear about this, because the life that Jesus offers is what brings meaning and purpose ... is what makes a difference in our day-to-day

⁶³ The following discussion summarizes Bruce Milne’s thoughts, 24-25.

existence.”⁶⁴ He summarizes the spiritual formation emphasis in the Gospel: “John allows us to see that inner belief will cause such a radical change that the external life will bear evidence of that belief.”⁶⁵ And, he highlights the importance of “abiding” in Jesus’ words: “the evidence of true belief is seen in disciples who cling to Jesus’ words as the truth for every area of life.”⁶⁶ Peter sharpens the readers’ focus on Jesus’ word saying, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

“Receiving the Holy Spirit” is the “preferred future” of John’s Gospel. With Luke, John’s Gospel reveals Jesus’ “commission” as taking place on the evening of the Resurrection: “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Clearly, the mission of God has two phases: the Son is sent in his incarnate life, and then sent in his risen life through his people. “The apostles were commissioned to carry on Christ’s work.”⁶⁷ The disciples’ “preferred future,” what Jesus commands for their future in support of their united mission, is to “receive,” or “take hold of” the Holy Spirit, a gift imparted through the “breathing” of Jesus upon the disciples (John 20:22).

What did Jesus intend in this “breathing” since the true coming of the outpoured Spirit took place at Pentecost (only then did the anticipated change of behavior take place as a reflection of the inner transformation that is the work of the Spirit)? *The Message of John* answers that this “expiration of the Spirit” was essentially didactic as Jesus is

⁶⁴ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 225.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 226.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 236.

⁶⁷ Milne, *The Message of John*, 299.

teaching the apostles that the Spirit is “the life-breath of the exalted Jesus!”⁶⁸ The two go together and cannot be separated in any way. Lenski adds that the “breathing of Jesus indicates that the Spirit comes from him. The Spirit who is ‘breath’ comes by the breath of Jesus.”⁶⁹ This “breathing” is for the purpose of “forgiving,” or not, “sins” (John 20:23). Leon Morris reflects on the plural “sins” and the plural “men” and concludes that Jesus is saying, “The Spirit-filled church has the right (and duty) to say that such-and-such sins are forgiven and such-and-such sins are not.”⁷⁰ Lenski reminds that God has not “abrogated this power” or turned it over to the disciples since Jesus empowers them, through the Spirit, to serve as “his agents – he acts through them.”⁷¹ In view of this “preferred future” intended by Jesus – receiving the Spirit – this examination of John’s Gospel explores the references to the Spirit in order to learn of his work and witness in our “forgiveness of sins” mission.

Observing the Spirit In The World

John the Baptist testifies to the presence of the Spirit in the world as he confirms the coming of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him” (John 1:32). Prior to this unique event, John had been told by the “one who sent me to baptize with water” that “the man on whom you see the Spirit

⁶⁸ Ibid, 301.

⁶⁹ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1942), 1372.

⁷⁰ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 712.

⁷¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 1377.

come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). The Spirit enters into the world in a visible way along with the public identification of Jesus. John’s Gospel confirms that Jesus is “will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”

Then, in response to the uncertainty and confusion of Nicodemus, Jesus announces: “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5).⁷² Birth into the kingdom of God must involve the Spirit because “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6). Here, Jesus comments on the principle of “source” by pointing out that one is what one comes from: either flesh or Spirit. Jesus clarifies the nature of the kingdom of God as a spiritual reality that is not under human control, even by the hyper-religious. Then, to reinforce his point, Jesus expresses the unpredictability, and persistence, of the work of the Spirit in increasing the kingdom of God: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:7-8). The reader discovers that “birth” into the kingdom of God is of the Holy Spirit first, foremost, fully and unpredictably. In order to further the reader’s respect for and response to the Holy Spirit, Jesus connects the words that he speaks with the work of the Holy Spirit: “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit” (John 3:34). John presents the Spirit as a gift of God, using “without limit” to describe the “fullness of the Spirit” that “one whom God has sent” experienced throughout his life. The reader is not only

⁷² Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, points out that Jesus does not mention two means of entrance – the water and the Spirit – since, in the original, there is only one preposition, 237.

encouraged to accept the words of Jesus, the reader is also invited to hear the Spirit as Jesus heard the Spirit, since he or she is also “sent” by God to speak “the words of God.” Later, Jesus connects the Spirit and his words, teaching both are for the purpose of Life (John 6:63). The reader discovers that listening closely to Jesus words, following his instruction, and applying his teachings provides the foundation for the Life – Spiritual formation – desired.

The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Disciple

The Holy Spirit is given a prominent role in the Life of the disciple. On the “last and greatest day of the Feast,” Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (John 7:37-38). Here, Jesus uses “streams of water” as the familiar earthly connection to the “streams of Living Water” that will flow from the one who believes “in me.” Importantly, Jesus connects this “flowing stream of Life” with the promise of the Scripture, giving the reader the encouragement to search the Scripture and to trust the Scripture as faithful and true. Following D.A. Carson, Milne offers the helpful insight that the key relationship here is between Jesus and the believer where Jesus is the “ultimate source of the Spirit.”⁷³ For the reader’s benefit, however, John adds the following point: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:39). Lenski reminds that Jesus does not equate the Spirit with the Living Water since, as John actually says, the Spirit is not poured out until after

⁷³ Milne, *The Message of John*, 121.

Jesus is “glorified.” The redemptive work of Jesus must be first completed prior to the coming of the Spirit, who “would make rivers of living water flow from the believers.”⁷⁴ And, as John writes to the reader, the Spirit is to be “received” by those who believe Jesus, who take him at his word.

The Holy Spirit for the Life of the Disciple

Spoken to the Twelve on the night he was betrayed John’s Gospel communicates the present work and significant presence of the Holy Spirit to the reader. Calling him the “Counselor,” or the one who comes alongside the disciple in order to strengthen and sustain, Jesus teaches, “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (John 14:15-17). Not only does the reader learn how to express appropriate love for Jesus – obedience, understood as paying attention to and following through on what he teaches – the reader also learns of the permanence of the Spirit’s presence that “counsels” the disciple as he or she expresses Life through obedient living of the “truth.” In addition, the reader discovers that the Spirit – the Paraclete – is being “called in to help” as the extension and completion of Jesus’ work of guiding the disciples into all truth: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).⁷⁵ Jesus expresses the “teaching ministry” of the Spirit who also “reminds” the disciple of all that he has taught for the Life of those who believe him. Important for the reader is

⁷⁴ Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*, 580.

⁷⁵ Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 782, 784.

the full knowledge that “The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.” Knowledge of the Holy Spirit must move beyond mere factual awareness to the intimacy of personal “knowing,” or relationship. Jesus encourages his followers “you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). Significantly, this “knowing” is real, present and communal. Jesus teaches that the Spirit, in relationship to the community of believers, “lives with” and is very present among the community, and, in fact, the Spirit “will be in you (plural),” alive, active, known and located among the community. The Christ-follower, along with his or her community, need not search far for the One who guides the journey of spiritual formation.

The Counselor is identified as the “Spirit of truth” in John’s Gospel (John 15:26). Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the “coming Spirit” throughout his teaching (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:8, 13). And, it is Jesus who will send the Spirit “from the Father.” The reader discovers the unity of relationship between Father and Spirit in Jesus’ description that the Spirit “goes out from” the Father. The reader also discovers the Spirit is coming to “testify about me,” that is Jesus. The Spirit is a witness to Jesus, confirming his words and deeds for the spiritual formation of the disciple.

The work of the Holy Spirit is also related to the world:

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:8-11).

While the NIV uses “convict” to translate *elegksei*, the word suggests that the Spirit is coming into the world to “show” or “convince” the world with “regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” Jesus leaves no doubt for the reader that the focus of sin is

failed belief, the life of righteousness acknowledges and applies the unity between the Father and Jesus, and the target of judgment is the condemnation of the “prince of this world.” The reader is given counsel as to observing the work of the Spirit in the world at large as the means of supporting the work of the disciple community to the world. Thus, the work of spiritual formation engages to local cultural context.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is identified again as the “Spirit of truth” who is also the One who guides, leads and develops the disciple into “all truth.” Jesus teaches:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 16:13-15).

Important for the reader is the way in which the Spirit serves as a “guide.” Jesus teaches that the Spirit will not “speak on his own,” an indication of the Spirit’s reliance upon another; and that the Spirit will speak “only what he hears.” It is the Spirit who will receive from Jesus and make it known to the disciple. And, holding to the unity between Father and Son, Jesus teaches that what is the Father’s is also his to reveal to the disciple through the Spirit. What the Spirit does to bring glory to Jesus is to inform the disciple of “all truth,” including “what is yet to come.”

Summarizing Spiritual Formation in John’s Gospel

The “preferred future” of John’s Gospel focuses the reader on his or her relationship with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation from John’s perspective is supported, sustained, created and guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the teacher, guide, reminder and convincer active among the disciple community and in the

world. The reader would come to learn that Jesus relied upon the Spirit as he lived each day, mentoring the same relationship for the disciple for the same purpose. And, this relationship would impact both what the reader believes and does given the maturing nature of the relationship held with the Spirit.

Drawing the Gospels Together

Drawing the teachings of the Gospels together means establishing several important foundations. Like caissons, which rest in the bedrock to support the overall structure, these ideas support the actual life to be constructed. The “life” itself may take a variety of shapes and forms, but the support structures remain the same. The first caisson of spiritual formation established by the Gospels is a lived Trinitarian immersion. Take note that Matthew focuses the reader/learner upon the Father; Mark focuses the reader/listener upon the Son; Luke and John focus the learner upon the Spirit. If a full commission is developed, spiritual formation – making disciples – is fellowship, relationship and impregnation of the Trinity into the community of disciples. This includes knowledge of the Trinity as well as responsive living to/with the Trinity’s will and desire.

The second caisson is that spiritual formation, practically speaking, occurs in a specific context and culture, in a unique time and place. This was true of Jesus’ spiritual formation (Luke 2:40, 51-52). This was true of his spiritual formation ministry to those following after him. And, this is true even today. The spiritual formation of each human being is influenced by the local context and culture, time and place of their lives. Alongside of this truth, the teachings and practices of spiritual formation as recorded in each Gospel were initially written for a specific context and culture. Each Gospel was

written for a unique purpose intended by the author in view of his readers, their circumstance and their need. Each Gospel expresses a unique flavor based upon the intended audience and expressed through each unique writer. The Gospel's establish a cultural immersion for the community of disciples as a vital aspect of their immersion into the Trinitarian Presence.

A third caisson that must be established understands that each Gospel has a “preferred future” for the reader. Three of the four Gospels – Matthew, Luke and John – record a specific command intended to direct the future of the Eleven as well as the future for the reader of every context and culture beyond each Gospel. Each command, spoken by Jesus, reveals the appropriate activity for the reader beyond Jesus’ own life and beyond the personal reading of the particular Gospel. Certainly, Jesus’ own pattern of living and ministry of spiritual formation was never intended to end upon his departure. These commands, or commissions, give clues of how Jesus intended the future to develop for the spiritual formation of his followers regardless of context and culture. The other Gospel, Mark, expresses a preferred future at a vital part of the overall organization. Ultimately, as each Gospel is read, the work of spiritual formation is given unique expression and exposure through the actual teachings and practices of Jesus. Jesus intended for the work of spiritual formation to “keep going” into the future.

In order to express the movement of the work of spiritual formation into the future, the next chapter considers various insights from the Lutheran heritage.

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING THE LUTHERAN HERITAGE

The processes of spiritual formation that have shaped my life are consistent with the contours of my personal heritage. From my early training in “table prayers” to my learning during Lutheran Confirmation; from my experiences as a child raised on the mission field of Taiwan to my own study of the Scriptures and pastoral training, I have been formed in keeping with my Lutheran heritage – as understood by those who were significant in my life. Now, as I explore Christian spiritual formation for future generations, what are the basic issues to be considered relative to the goal and process of spiritual formation that can be described as “Lutheran”? This chapter is a search for key issues that will need to be considered when establishing spiritual formation goals and practices in keeping with the “preferred future” of Lutheranism. This chapter considers the thoughts of Luther, the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the practical insights of recent Lutheran authors exploring the Christian life.

The Thoughts of Martin Luther

The young Martin Luther was educated in the medieval Roman Catholic theology of scholasticism and mysticism.¹ The writings of Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham were still dominant sources for “scholastic” learning in German universities with Johannes Eckhart, John Tauler and Henry Suso as major writers and

¹ Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 16.

practitioners of German “mysticism.”² In addition, Lohse points out that German humanism was reaching its highest development around the time of Luther’s theological education with writers such as Rudolf Agricola, Johannes Reuchlin and Erasmus coming to the forefront of what is considered a “very religious” humanistic teaching.³ Luther was trained in an educational/spiritual climate swirling with all three major influences.

Luther’s early theological formation was thoroughly dominated by “works righteousness” to the point that he entered a monastery, “where he sought to please God by self-denial, prayer, good works, and strict obedience to the law of God and the authority of the church.”⁴ While in the monastery he studied the Scriptures, earning his degree and credentials, and beginning his teaching career through lectures on the Psalms and Romans. Through his studies, Luther came to know Christ alone as the singular reason of his position before God. His “tower experience” brought the great discovery that “salvation is not a reward for our good works but a gift of God through faith in the atoning work of Christ.”⁵ Once he had been brought to Christ through the Word, as a theologian, Luther focused on the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin, and all else this fundamental doctrine implies – including the development of the Christian Life.

² Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 13.

³ Ibid, 14.

⁴ Preus, *A Theology to Live By*, 16.

⁵ Ibid.

The Lutheran emphasis on justification as the “cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith” is the first issue for our consideration. As Luther develops his thoughts on living a life consistent with the Scriptural teaching of justification by grace through faith, he consistently holds to what Ewald Plass identifies as a “justification first, then sanctification” order. As early as 1519, commenting on Genesis 4:4, Luther teaches: “Justification precedes good works, and works are performed by those who are justified.”⁶ This pattern serves as a common thread throughout his pastoral life, his teaching profession, and his many writings that challenged his detractors and comforted his parishioners. As a sample of this thread, Luther writes in 1531: “We are to ascribe our salvation to the Son alone and to give the honor to the Father, who speaks of the Son through the Son. My good works are not to give me eternal life; but before I do anything good, I am to have eternal life and the Holy Spirit, and be a child of God.”⁷ For Luther, justification remains in the primary position for the Christian learning to live by faith, a life Luther regularly refers to as “doing good works.” Thus, following the “life-creating” act of justification, the Christian necessarily enters into the “life-continuing” actions of sanctification:

Indeed, man was created to be the image of God, and to be His image for this very purpose: that God should and would be known through him. Therefore God should appear and shine in the entire life and conduct of man as in a mirror; and a Christian should have no higher and greater concern than to live as not to dishonor God’s name.⁸

⁶ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 721.

⁷ Ibid, Luther commenting on John 6:47.

⁸ Ibid, 212.

First, and foremost, any pattern of “spiritual formation” that intends to hold to Lutheran commitments must retain the proper order between Christian faith and Christian life – justification and sanctification.

Luther was brought to his understanding of Christian faith through his study of the Scriptures. Thus, throughout his life, he places a strong emphasis on the written Word as vital to both Christian faith and life. Early in his teaching career, his *Treatise on Christian Liberty* highlights the absolute necessity and importance of God’s Word for the Christian soul. Writing in 1520, Luther comments, “One thing and one only is necessary for Christian life,” that is:

The most holy Word of God, the Gospel of Christ (John 11:25; John 8:26; Matthew 4:4). Let us then consider it certain and conclusively established that the soul can do without all things except the Word of God, and that where this is not there is no help for the soul in anything else whatever. But if it has the Word it is rich and lacks nothing, since this Word is the Word of life.⁹

The “most holy Word of God, the Gospel of Christ,” when approached through faith, introduces the reader to God and to his promises. Through faith, the Word begins to work upon the believer, transforming him or her into its likeness: “As the Word is, so it makes the soul, as heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it.”¹⁰ God’s promises, too, transform the Christian’s basic experience of Christ. Once again, Luther retains the “justification then sanctification” order as he describes Christian experience:

⁹ Martin Luther, “Treatise on Christian Liberty,” trans. W.A. Lambert, in *Works of Martin Luther*, Volume Two (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1941), 314.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 318.

So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards Him as truthful and righteous, than which nothing more excellent can be ascribed to God. This is the very highest worship of God that we ascribe to Him truthfulness, righteousness and whatever else ought to be ascribed to one who is trusted. Then the soul consents to all His will, then it hallows His name, and suffers itself to be dealt with according to God's good pleasure, because, clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that He, Who is true, just and wise, will do, dispose and provide all things well.¹¹

Faith also unites the Christian with Christ. Luther uses marriage to metaphorically describe faith's connection to Christ: "Faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. And by this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Ephesians 5:31ff.). And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage ... it follows that all they have they have in common."¹² After keeping the focus on Christian faith before Christian life, any pattern established for Lutheran "spiritual formation" must also reflect an emphasis on God's Word – *sola Scriptura*.

Given the prominent position of preaching/teaching in Lutheran churches as a primary means of communicating the Word of God, the *Treatise* wonders, "How is Christ to be preached such that this marriage thrives?" Luther's response to his own question is an important insight into the process of developing Christian faith and life as understood in the Lutheran heritage. Luther believes that the marriage between Christ and the Christian thrives not by just preaching the "works, life and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life."¹³ This

¹¹ Ibid, 319.

¹² Ibid, 320.

¹³ Ibid, 326.

“marriage” is not sustained by casual acquaintance or historical knowledge. Luther did not believe the preacher can just preach “about Christ,” but must “preach Christ.” He continues:

Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in Him may be established, that He may not only be Christ, but be Christ for thee and for me, and that what is said of Him and of His Name. And such faith is produced and preserved in us by preaching why Christ came, what He brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept Him.¹⁴

What Christ “brought and bestowed “is not satisfied by merely introducing Christ to the Christian’s soul, but for the two – Christ and Christian – to become intimately known and knowing together: becoming one. And, this “marriage” is not just to benefit the believer as Christ invites his “bride” into a life of service to one’s neighbor: “that we should devote all our works to the welfare of others, since each has such abundant riches in his faith, that all his other works and his whole life are a surplus with which he can by voluntary benevolence serve and do good to his neighbor.”¹⁵ Luther then expresses the goal of living as a Christian:

Although the Christian is thus free from all works, he ought in this liberty to empty himself, to take upon himself the form of a servant, to be made in the likeness of men, to be found in fashion as a man and to serve, help and in every way deal with his neighbor as he sees that God through Christ has dealt with and still deals with himself. And this he should do freely, having regard to nothing except the divine approval.¹⁶

A third issue that must be acknowledged in any process of “Lutheran” spiritual formation is to responsibly proclaim the Word of God for a twofold purpose: the create and sustain

¹⁴ Ibid, 326-27.

¹⁵ Ibid, 336.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the “marriage,” one might say the “love,” between Christ and the Christian; and to instruct and mature the Christian in a life of service to those in the church and the world.

Objectively speaking, Luther was brought to Christian faith through the Word of God. And, he was nurtured in his faith through a “subjective experience” that fit his own circumstance. Thus, accepting Luther’s pastoral and professional focus upon the Word of God as the necessary objective means of developing the Christian life, how did his “experience” of the spiritual life influence his thoughts on spiritual formation? As mentioned above, during his formative years, and throughout his life, the “German mystics” influenced Luther. What drew Luther to *Theologia Germanica* and John Tauler? Agreeing with Hering, Hoffman writes, “They confirmed and supported Luther’s own discovery of the biblical message.”¹⁷ He continues:

They spoke of trust in Christ and not in one’s own work. Their “German mysticism” was crystallized in doctrines of piety, not theoretical speculation. It was anchored in life with God, in experience of life as forgiven and justified sinner. When they said “come to God” they meant it as personal invitation from a personal savior.¹⁸

Luther appreciated certain mystics in so far as they supported his own spiritual journey and did not contradict his understanding of justification. He liked the “simplicity” of the mystics when writing of the life with God. He believed that “verbose and artificial language” could not be a medium for encounter with God since “God is always ready to meet with us in the stillness of our hearts, his own chapel within us, unused because of

¹⁷ Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1976), 160.

¹⁸ Ibid.

our sin, available despite our sin.”¹⁹ In opposition to the “theoretical” approaches of the scholastics, the mystics emphasized the experiential element in faith as well as the inner transformation. To Luther, following justification, the believer began the pursuit of “conformation to Christ,” a process of change that is “intimately connected with Christ power.”²⁰ Hoffman describes this as a “tuning-in to the Savior,” a formation that comes about in “human relationships, through musings on the word, by prayer and in holy communion.”²¹ For Luther, the mystics deepened his appreciation of his own spiritual formation journey and broadened his application of the objective Word into the more subjective shaping of the Christian faith and life. Thus, as a fourth issue that must be acknowledged in any process of Lutheran “spiritual” formation, the relationship between the “expression and the experience,” the “means and the mysterious,” the “objective and the subjective,” and the practical, experiential way that Christian faith comes to bear upon a Christian’s life is to be encountered and engaged.

The Christian Life in the Lutheran Confessions

The Lutheran Confessions are brought together in one volume known as *The Book of Concord*,²² and serve as a summary of the orthodox understanding of the Augsburg

¹⁹ Ibid, 161.

²⁰ Ibid, 165-66.

²¹ Ibid, 165.

²² *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). Along with the “Three Chief Symbols” (Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed), *The Book of Concord* includes Luther’s Small and Large Catechism (1529), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531), the Smalcald Articles (1537), and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537), and the Formula of Concord (1577).

Confession (1530) in the face of various controversies among the “theological positions” established following Luther’s death in 1546. The following exploration of the Lutheran Confessions focuses upon *The Formula of Concord’s* “Solid Declaration” as it draws together the various strands of teaching and doctrine from all the previous Confessions.

Article IV of the *Solid Declaration* deals with “Good Works.” Here, the Lutheran theologians state their full agreement on three points relative to Christian life and good works:

That it is God’s will, ordinance, and command that believers walk in good works; that only those are truly good works which God himself prescribes and commands in his Word; that truly good works are not done by a person’s own natural powers but only after a person has been reconciled to God through faith and renewed through the Holy Spirit.²³

Thus, following the work of God through Christ, the Confessions teach God’s desire and intent for Christian life as “good works” practiced as the result of Holy Spirit’s work in the believer through the Word. Keeping the pattern properly ordered, the theologians confess “the person must first be pleasing to God – and that alone for Christ’s sake – before that person’s works are pleasing.”²⁴ Article IV then considers the “necessary or optional” performance of good works in Christian life. The theologians “reject and condemn as false the view that good works are free to believers in the sense that it lies within their free option if they may or want to do or not do them or to act in a contrary fashion and nonetheless still retain faith and God’s mercy and his grace.”²⁵ From these

²³ Ibid, 552.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 554.

teachings, a fifth issue for any “Lutheran” spiritually formative process must acknowledge and encourage the necessity of “good works” in the Christian life.

Article VI of the *Solid Declaration* – “The Third Function of the Law” – also deals with the subject of a Christian’s life following the work of God in Christ. At question is how a new believer begins to learn the “new obedience” that God intends and prepares for daily life. Does the Law of the Lord have any place in the “new life” of the Christian? For the Lutheran theologians, the answer is a resounding “yes,” and includes four aspects. First, Lutheran theologians hold that Christians “should daily exercise themselves in the law of the Lord ... for the law is a mirror in which the will of God and what is pleasing to him is correctly portrayed.”²⁶ The reason is simple: Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely even though the “Holy Spirit has begun the mortification of the Old Adam and the renewal in the spirit of their minds.”²⁷

Secondly, the theologians who drafted the *Formula of Concord* made clear the distinction between the work of the Gospel and the work of the law of the Lord as far as the good works of believers are concerned:

The law indeed tells us that it is God’s will and command that we should walk in the new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it. It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the Gospel (Galatians 3:2, 14), who renews the heart. Then he employs the law to instruct the regenerate out of it and to show and indicate to them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Romans 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Ephesians 2:10).²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, 564.

²⁷ Ibid, 565.

²⁸ Ibid, 565-66.

Strictly speaking, the works of the law in the regenerate from a cheerful heart are not works of the law but “works and fruits of the Spirit, or, as St. Paul calls them, the law of the mind and the law of Christ.”²⁹ Third, the theologians believe the teaching of the law is required for the Christian “so that they will not be thrown back on their own holiness and piety and under the pretext of the Holy Spirit’s guidance set up a self-elected service of God without his Word and command.”³⁰ The theologians are careful to remind and repeat the truth that in this life the Old Adam, “like an unmanageable and recalcitrant donkey,” must be properly accounted for and dealt with in terms of the Christian life.

Thus, fourthly, the theologians require the teaching of the law in connection with good works because Christians, under the influence of the Old Adam, can “easily imagine that their works and life are perfectly pure and holy.”³¹ Yet, with hope in Christ and utmost honesty in dealing with this life, the theologians both await and pursue the day when “through God’s indwelling Spirit they will do his will spontaneously, without coercion, unhindered, perfectly, completely, and with sheer joy.”³² Any development of a “Lutheran” spiritual formation pattern must account for these four understandings of the

²⁹ Ibid, 566-67. The theologians maintain a strict distinction between those living according to the works of the law and living by the law of the Lord. Those who “live according to the law” do so because they are commanded, from fear of punishment or in hope of reward. This is the life of those who are not reborn by the Spirit. But, in those born anew by the Spirit of God, life is lived according to the immutable will of God according to which man is to conduct himself in this life. The unregenerate live by compulsion while the reborn live from a free and merry spirit.

³⁰ Ibid, 567.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 568.

law of the Lord. In addition, two basic understandings are important – one positive and one negative. First, positively speaking, the law of the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, broadens and deepens the understanding of the “will of the Lord” so that Christian life through “good works” is pleasing to Him above all. Then, negatively speaking, the theologians teach that the law of the Lord curtails, or is intended to curtail, any vain and personally gratifying practice of “good works” not in keeping with God’s command. Thus, the theologians use the law of the Lord to “build up” the believer while at the same time to “limit” the believer in the daily practice of “good works.”

Were the Lutheran theologians able to foster such “good works” in the lives of those whom they taught? In reading the Confessions, the reader is struck with the limited effort to deal with any “spiritually formative processes” other than the various means of communicating the Word of God – preaching, teaching, and catechesis. While the appropriate orthodox doctrine is carefully spelled out by the theologians in the Confessions (an indication of the teaching/learning emphasis of the Lutheran Church), what about the practice of the life of “good works” that was being taught to the people? Based upon a survey of the historical record, Strauss contends that the people’s “detachment and indifference” toward the “sermonizing and catechizing on the individual’s Christian duties” had produced little effect.³³ He offers three reasons to explain the apparent failure to transmit a clear religious message that could be consciously received and adopted: a waning enthusiasm for the evangelical teachings due

³³ Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 223.

to what he calls a “confusing ambiguity;” the rigid methodologies of the teachers who were grounded in the higher education practices of their universities; and the general polemical nature of the writings designed to distinguish the Lutherans from the other sects growing out of the Reformation.³⁴ Aware of the deficiencies, the Lutheran theologians, claims Strauss, could think of only one way to overcome them: by increasing the already comprehensive exposure of the public to religious indoctrination.³⁵ Lutheran pastors, apparently, worked diligently to communicate an appropriate “external piety,” understood as the “life to be lived in the world and the responsibilities to be met there.”³⁶ How they did so provides insight into the spiritual formative processes deemed appropriate at the time, and is instructive for our purposes here.

Two formative processes, based on culture and context, can be identified. First, in the home, families were encouraged to read religious books and tracts on Christian conduct, discuss religious pictures, maintain their private devotional readings, use the available “prayer books,” and engage in the growing body of Lutheran hymnody through both study and singing.³⁷ In keeping with Luther’s hope for a trained laity – the very reason he wrote the Small Catechism – the theologians encouraged religious formation processes in the home. Second, unsure if the home sufficed as a training ground for Christian living, churches and communities established schools for religious education in

³⁴ Ibid, 224-25.

³⁵ Ibid, 225.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 225-36.

order to provide the greatest exposure to orthodox doctrinal teachings. Strauss' commentary on the motive for and method of such schools is not exactly encouraging as many of the same issues are relevant today.³⁸ Of special interest here is the apparent "non-evangelical application" of "evangelical doctrine" where, it was believed, outward piety could be gained only through "discipline" – a systematic, habit-shaping regime, part upbringing, instruction, and character formation, part surveillance, control, and punishment, a procedure expected to mold and tone the personality until obedience to established rules became automatic.³⁹ This methodology, widely used as it was, developed two distinct "classes" in the church: the teacher and the taught. Strauss summarizes the actual by-product of such Reformation pedagogy:

The "true Christian," the hoped-for product of Lutheran indoctrination, lay low and kept his place. Dutiful and industrious, content with his assigned role, trusting, docile, diffident in the knowledge of his mental and moral inadequacy, hoping for a better life to come – but not on earth, where things were what they were and wrongs must be endured because fallen men deserve no better – the "true Christian" gave no trouble and caused no alarm. No entrepreneur or initiator, he was the passive subject praised by magistrates and blessed by preachers: a quiet type becalmed by his sense of insufficiency, diligent but never self-reliant, deeply imbued with a sense of where he belonged in the patriarchal society he accepted for the peace his mind and the salvation of his soul.⁴⁰

Both this pedagogy and by-product, from the historical record, are instructive for our understanding of the issues surrounding the development of a Lutheran spiritual

³⁸ Ibid, 236-46.

³⁹ Ibid, 238.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 245-46.

“formation” process. Any such process developed must clarify the intended “goal” for the process, and must engage the Christian in a gracious and “evangelical” pattern.

Recent Lutheran Authors Exploring the Christian Life

Herbert J.A. Bouman translated Edmund Schlink’s *The Doctrine of Baptism* in order to provide the English reader an opportunity to review the growing body of European literature on Baptism in light of questions raised by the World Council of Churches and the Second Vatican Council.⁴¹ The section titled *Baptism by the Holy Spirit* is insightful for our purpose here.⁴² The first portion of this section deals with the relationship between “water baptism” and the Holy Spirit. Schlink states, “It is the common conviction of the primitive Christian church that Baptism takes place by the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit is imparted with Baptism.”⁴³ In terms of justification, then, “all human activity is expressly excluded” as the “act of salvation” is entirely God’s deed such that it is “by the one act of the washing and the activity of the Spirit through which regeneration and renewal take place.”⁴⁴ Water and Spirit belong together in the act of regeneration. Once a man or woman has been made a “child of God,” the Holy Spirit transfers the believer into the “eternal life with Christ in God.”⁴⁵ In terms of Christian life, then,

⁴¹ Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism*, trans. Herbert J.A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969).

⁴² Ibid, 58-72.

⁴³ Ibid, 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 59.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 62.

By giving man a part in the divine life, the Holy Spirit at the same time places him into the service of divine love which does not desire the death of sinners but their life. The same love by which God created all things and by which He delivered up His Son breaks into the world through the Holy Spirit so that it might be exhibited in the midst of the world by those who have been seized by the Spirit.⁴⁶

Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit creates a new fellowship of mutual service to God where the “Fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22) is made available through the Christian community to benefit the world.

While clearly discussing the “indicatives” of Baptism – the forgiveness of sin, the giving of the Holy Spirit – Dr. Schlink also considers the “imperatives” of Baptism. In an earlier section of the book, he comments that “the command to walk in newness of life does not abrogate the new life which God has created through Baptism, but it asks for the Yea of the baptized to this divine deed.”⁴⁷ Actually, because God has saved the baptized (indicative), he calls for the “activity of salvation” (imperative): striving for righteousness and holiness, dying with Christ, and facing the coming judgment and resurrection in a manner consistent with His Work.⁴⁸ Those who have received the Spirit are to live by the received Spirit and reach out for the charismatic gifts that are needed for service in the church and to the world.⁴⁹ In addition, the “imperatives” of Baptism demand that the baptized make room in his life for the activity of the Spirit to whom he has been

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 55.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 70.

committed.”⁵⁰ Interestingly, keeping the discussion doctrinal, Schlink offers no substantive means of “making room” for the activity of the Holy Spirit other than the study of the Word. However, for any spiritually formative process from a Lutheran perspective, both the doctrinal and practical aspects of Christian baptism must be taught.

Herman A. Preus wrote *A Theology to Live By* expose “students, pastors, and laymen to a Christ-centered theology which can serve as a dynamic for Christian living and thinking.”⁵¹ While Luther’s first task in the Reformation was to “straighten out the theology of the church,” the intent of this resource is to show that Luther “never ceased preaching that theology – doctrine – must show itself in a Christian life.”⁵² Preus reminds the reader that the Christian life is not determined by anthropology, cosmology or the immediate situation because Christian life is determined, first and foremost, by our “theology” – a *Theou Logos*, a Word of God, a Word from God, a Word about God, His person, His will for the life and salvation of the world, and His mighty acts in accomplishing His purpose.⁵³ Thus, the key to living the Christian life is “living with God, knowing God, knowing His will, and committing oneself in faith and obedience to His will as revealed to us in Scripture, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ Here,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Preus, *A Theology to Live By*, 9.

⁵² Ibid, 15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Preus identifies a meaningful “goal” for any Lutheran process intended to mature the Christian.

Chapter Eight, important for our purpose here, is titled “The Life We Live – Under the Cross.” It is here that the two purposes of the book are most lively considered: Lutheran theology and the Christian life. The chapter opens commenting on the daily tension of Christians as Luther’s *simul iustus et peccator* theology is realized in the daily, practical realities of life. This, writes Preus, calls for daily vigilance as the Christian wrestles against the “pricking of the Law, which keeps him sensitive to his sinfulness and need of forgiveness in Christ.”⁵⁵ Ultimately, Christians exercise their freedom of faith in two directions: “mortifying the flesh and contending with evil within and without” and “serving God and the neighbor in love.”⁵⁶ Preaching on Romans 13, Luther pours out a burning appeal to Christians to turn their faith loose in lives of love and service to those in need:

Love is the chief virtue, the fountain of all virtues. Love gives food and drink; it clothes, comforts, persuades, relieves and rescues. What shall we say of it, for behold he who loves gives himself body and soul, property and honor, all his powers inner and external, for his needy neighbor’s benefit, whether it be friend or enemy; he withholds nothing wherewith he may serve another. There is no virtue like love ... love does all things. It will suffer in life and in deaths, in every condition, and that even for its enemies.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid, 120.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 125.

“Love” is to serve as both the “evangelical pattern” and the “evangelical goal” for the Christian’s practice of “good works” taught through any formative process that is known to be Lutheran.⁵⁸

A third resource written recently is Nathan Jastram’s *Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God*.⁵⁹ Most helpful to our purpose here is Dr. Jastram’s goal of defining the “image of God” in a way that is faithful both to the biblical texts in which the phrase occurs and in light of the wealth of scholarship on the topic. He begins, “The simplest and most comprehensive definition of the image of God is that it means ‘to be like God.’”⁶⁰ While Lutherans are accustomed to thinking of the image of God as “being like God with respect to righteousness,” this does not exhaust the many ways in which people can be like God. For instance, the Small Catechism’s description of the image of God leads to a definition that includes intellect (knowledge of God); righteousness (holiness, doing God’s will); and will (happiness in God).⁶¹ “Pieper,” summarizes Dr.

⁵⁸ When considering the place of the Word and Sacraments in Christian life – the objective, visible means of grace – Preus boldly states that the way God saves sinners is “through the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments, and in no other way,” *Ibid*, 134. Throughout his discussion of the Word of God, however, he makes no mention of the *Theologia Germanica* or the German mystics who were also influential in Luther’s spirituality. He strongly emphasizes the “objective” realities of the “means of grace,” and, ultimately, does not offer any substantive suggestions for developing the Christian life beyond preaching, teaching and meditation upon the Word.

⁵⁹ Nathan Jastram, “Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 68, no. 1 (January 2004): 5-96.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 8-9. “Intellect” includes mind, reason, memory, knowledge, wisdom, and senses; “Righteousness” is also holiness, conscience, morality, justice, soul, spirit, and virtue; and “Will” is also free cooperation with God, happiness, and freedom of choice.

Jastram, “implies that in addition to wisdom, dominion, intellect, will, and personality, the components of the image of God include being cultured, endowed with speech, and having a grasp of natural sciences.”⁶² The author then summarizes the breadth of theological thought from many church fathers:

Many theologians also include other components in their definition of the image of God, such as the human body (upright body, great physical abilities, a balanced physical constitution, a pure and good body), immortality (incorruptibility, glorification), dignity (whatever distinguishes many as surpassing animals, excellence of human nature, worth, nobility), one’s relationship with God (faith, love, and trust in God), one’s relationship with people (equality, hierarchy, social nature, fraternity, compassion, love, sexual differentiation), and dominion (power, rulership, judgeship).⁶³

Dr. Jastram goes on to show how Luther and the Lutheran Confessions are in agreement with the basic definition of the image of God as “being like God.”⁶⁴ Thus, any process developed for a “Lutheran” approach to spiritual formation can use Jastram’s work to support the clarification of the “goal” as maturing into the “image of God.”

At the heart of *Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God* is a detailed analysis of biblical passages where the “image of God” is recorded.⁶⁵ The phrase is directly revealed in Genesis 1:26-28; 5:1-3; 9:6; James 3:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:7, and is indirectly related to in Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. Of unique significance for our purpose here is Dr. Jastram’s consideration of the Colossians passage

⁶² Ibid, 10.

⁶³ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 12-17.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 18-60.

– the actual phrase revealed is “in the image of its Creator” – which “does not describe how *man* was made, but it provides a goal or pattern for the *new man* who is being *renewed in knowledge* and thus is becoming more like the Creator.”⁶⁶ However, Jastram does not delve into *how* the new man is being renewed in knowledge other than through the Word of God: “to learn more about human beings as God intended them to be, it is instructive to study God, in whose image man has been made.”⁶⁷

Summarizing Observations

Helpful to our purpose here is summarizing the insights relative to the basic issues that must be acknowledged as any spiritually formative process is developed in keeping with Lutheran understandings:

1. Maintaining the proper distinction and relationship between justification and sanctification – Christian faith and Christian life.
2. Teaching the Word of God to establish doctrinal truth and practical life.⁶⁸
3. Sustaining the “marriage,” or “love,” between Christ and the Christian.
4. Maturing the Christian in a life of service to the church and the world.
5. Honoring and engaging the relationship between the “objective necessities” and “subjective realities” of Christian spirituality.
6. Encouraging the necessity of and training for “good works” in the Christian life.
7. Engaging the law of the Lord, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to develop the soul in the “will of the Lord.”

⁶⁶ Ibid, 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 60.

⁶⁸ I believe it is significant to point out that men who have earned the title “Doctor of Theology” have written the “approved” writings on the doctrine and practice of Christian life in Lutheran circles. This, I believe, suggests why Lutheran “spiritual formation” centers almost exclusively on teaching the Word.

8. Engaging the law of the Lord to curtail any self-gratifying practices of “good works.”
9. Carefully clarifying the intended “goal” for the process in terms of both “love” and the “image of God.”
10. Carefully establishing the intended “process” in keeping with “evangelical” teaching in the practice of “love.”
11. Providing teaching and practice in both the doctrinal and daily application of the Sacraments.

Based upon the above summary, I believe a Lutheran understanding and practice of any formative process developed to mature a Christian into the “image of Christ” can be meaningful and significant. Instructive, in my view, is Strauss’ historical summary of the “product” that was formed when “less-than-evangelical” motives and practices are used to train Lutherans in “good works.” His summary, coupled with the frustrations shared in my ministry story’s experience, provides appropriate caution, and encouragement, when developing any spiritual formation process for the future. Each of the above insights must be acknowledged in both attitude and action by the mentor/pastor developing a spiritually formative process that retains distinctive “evangelical Lutheran” understandings. In order to gain practical counsel on the goal and process of spiritual formation in the emerging culture of the 21st century, the next chapter learns from the first of two mentors guiding this project: Dr. Dallas Willard.

CHAPTER 4
SPIRITUAL FORMATION:
THE VOICE OF DALLAS WILLARD

I have chosen two mentors to provide guidance in applying the spiritual formation practices of Jesus in the real-time ministry context of the people I serve. The first mentor to be considered is Dallas Willard. I chose him after reading and reflecting on the following comment, evaluating its significance for my ministry:

The basic goal of western churches today is to get as many people as possible ready to die and go to heaven. It aims to get people into heaven rather than to get heaven into people. This is self-defeating. It implodes upon itself because it creates groups of people who may be ready to die, but clearly are not ready to live.¹

Given my understanding of the basic framework for the training I received prior to entering pastoral ministry – which leaned toward “getting people ready to die and go to heaven” – I was becoming increasingly aware of my desire to help people live both in the world of today and in Eternal World yet to come. Following the personal evaluation detailed in my ministry story, this comment provoked me to search Willard’s writings for practical, effective processes necessary to get people ready to live as Jesus intends. In doing so, I am seeking to grow in understanding and ability in guiding Christians to “live.”

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 238-239.

Dr. Dallas Willard is a Professor in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.² Besides philosophical publications, he also lectures and publishes in the religious field. In fact, the four major books he has written in the area of religious studies will be considered in this chapter: *In Search Of Guidance*,³ *The Spirit of the Disciplines*,⁴ *The Divine Conspiracy*,⁵ and *Renovation of the Heart*.⁶ As a careful student of the Scriptures, he has thoughtfully evaluated the work of spiritual formation from both theological and psychological perspectives.

Two questions guided my reading in the previous chapter: 1) What is the preferred future (in terms of goal) for anyone following Christ? 2) What is the preferred future (in terms of process) for anyone following Christ? The same two questions guided my reading for this chapter. The selected books of Willard will be examined to discern his understanding of the “goal” and “processes” of spiritual formation.

² Willard has taught at USC since 1965, serving as the Director of the School of Philosophy from 1982-1985. His philosophical publications are mainly in the areas of epistemology, the philosophy of mind and of logic.

³ Dallas Willard, *In Search Of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1984). This was updated in his *Hearing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).

⁵ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998). This book was selected “Book of the Year” for 1999 by *Christianity Today*.

⁶ *Renovation of the Heart* received the 2003 Book Award in the category of Spirituality by *Christianity Today*.

The Goal of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation, without regard to any specifically religious context or tradition, is the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite “form” or character.⁷ Spiritual formation is a reality every human being experiences regardless of gender, culture, vocation or lineage. “Spiritual formation for the Christian,” Willard teaches, “basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”⁸ The goal of Christian spiritual formation is the transformation of the human being into the shape of Christ. And, the transformation is intended for more than a human being’s spiritual dimensions, since the “ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations”⁹ are also to be “shaped along the same lines as His Son.”

Willard holds that the preferred future (in terms of goal) for anyone following Christ is being immersed into his ideas, his thoughts, his attitudes, his behaviors, his relationships, and his way of life. Such immersion comes as the result of personal study under Jesus, learning the disciplines of Jesus, and intentional, relational listening to Jesus. Writing that the “fundamental idea of Jesus’ program for his people on earth” is that we would live our lives as his students and co-laborers,” Willard reflects that “the effect of such continuous study under Jesus would naturally be that we learn how to do everything

⁷ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 19.

⁸ *Ibid*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

we do on his behalf or in his place; that is, as if he himself were doing it.”¹⁰ This “continuous study” immerses the believer into the thought and behavioral patterns of Jesus. Reflecting on the “whole life” approach, Willard believes that the secret of the “easy yoke” (Matthew 11:30) is learning “from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest all our time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn how to follow his preparations.”¹¹ “Following his preparations” is a commitment to “the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life.”¹² *Hearing God* answers the important question – “How can we have the mind of Christ?” – by concluding that the Christian’s personal and communal development comes “through the action of the word of God upon us, throughout us and with us that we come to have the mind of Christ and thus to live fully in the kingdom of God.”¹³ While the goal is stated in various ways – having the “mind of Christ,” adopting his “life-style,” studying “under him,” becoming “like him” – Christian spiritual formation is expressing Jesus’ life-pattern fully lived in the real world of every day.

The Process of Spiritual Formation

In Search of Guidance, the first book written by Dr. Willard appropriately outlines the processes of spiritual formation – being with Jesus learning to be like Jesus – that will

¹⁰ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 273.

¹¹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 9.

¹² Ibid, 10.

¹³ Willard, *Hearing God*, 148.

be advocated throughout the four books. Keeping the focus upon the Word of God through Christ, he reminds:

The gospel both empowers and calls forth a response by its own power, enabling us to see and enter the kingdom of God as participants. It opens the door of the mind and enters the heart. From there it is able to progressively transform the whole personality.¹⁴

Here, Dr. Willard provides an effective organizational structure of the various processes of spiritual formation. First, and foremost, he understands the journey of spiritual formation begins with the Gospel. Then, beyond the initial entrance into the Kingdom Life, he outlines the process of spiritual formation as encompassing three primary emphases: Participation, Penetration and Transformation. Participation rejoices in God's redeeming work that, once the Christian is fully alive, moves into the life that learns from Jesus how to live. Penetration is the ongoing process of the mind being opened and the heart being entered by the Spirit through the Word. Transformation engages the whole person as the Christ-follower is progressively transformed into the image of the Teacher. Each of these processes develops the "small steps" that lead to the preferred future advocated by Dr. Willard for the man, woman or community immersed in Christ.

The Spiritual Formation Process of Participation

Dr. Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines* effectively summarizes the process of Participation by focusing on the key insight that "*full participation in the life of God's Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit.*"¹⁵ Initially, the individual is brought into

¹⁴ Ibid, 149.

¹⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 26.

this “participation” through divine initiative, becoming alive to God and his Kingdom by the work of the Spirit through the Gospel. For our purpose here, beyond the initial work of the Spirit, it is his ongoing work alongside of the Christian that focuses the process of Participation. The extent of integration of a Christian’s being into “full participation in the life of God’s Kingdom” depends upon “what we actually *do* with our lives, from the *habits* we form, and from the *character* that results.”¹⁶ Because the “physical human frame as created was designed for interaction with the spiritual realm,” and that this interaction must be “resumed at the initiative of God,” it is “*through the disciplines for the spiritual life* that this interaction can be developed by the joint efforts of both God and the person alive in the dynamism of the Spirit.”¹⁷ Even as Dr. Willard laments that many Christians today “tend to think of the body and its functions as only a hindrance to our spiritual calling,” he argues it is important for spiritual formation to overcome the current failure on the part of many Christians to recognize the role our body plays in our spiritual formation. Immersion into the life of God’s Kingdom engages both my body and my spirit.¹⁸

The process of Participation prepares the Christian for gaining and maintaining control of his or her body, using the body differently for the purposes of the Kingdom of God. *The Divine Conspiracy* understands the body as the “chief repository” of the wrong habits that we must set aside, as well as the place where new habits are to be instituted.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid, 77.

¹⁸ Ibid, 30.

The spiritual disciplines are the way we direct “our bodies into activities that empower the inner and outer person for God and through God.”¹⁹ As such, the “*appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit*” deals with the body in two primary ways: disruption and development. The process of “disruption” is the negative aspect that deals with the body as the “chief repository” of the wrong habits of “thought, feeling, and action that govern our lives.” The patterns of sin and self are disrupted through the focused practice of the appropriate disciplines. At the same time – disruption and development are concurrent processes – the process of “development” is the positive aspect by which the appropriate disciplines lead to “*new habits*” which are “simply a matter of following Jesus into his own practices.”²⁰ Finally, in the process of Participation, the Christian is “putting off the old person” and “putting on the new nature,” by learning from Jesus of the disciplines for the spiritual life he engaged to nurture and direct his own life in relation to the Father.

Disciplines for the Spiritual Life

Dr. Willard defines the disciplines of the spiritual life as “activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order.”²¹ These regular practices of daily life are “time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as a new man or woman to allow our spirit ever-

¹⁹ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 354.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 68.

increasing sway over our embodied selves.”²² Commenting on the purpose of the disciplines, Dr. Willard writes:

The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest our time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn how to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God’s rule that enabled him to receive his Father’s constant and effective support while doing his will.²³

What are the particular activities that can serve as disciplines for the spiritual life?

While no absolute list can be formed that expresses all of the disciplines for the spiritual life, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* does develop two basic lists of activities to be taught that have a “wide and profitable use among disciples of Christ.”²⁴ The first list includes “Disciplines of Abstinence” where the Activities of Abstinence include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice – processes of disruption.²⁵ The second list highlights the “Disciplines of Engagement” where the Activities of Engagement include study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession and submission – processes of development.²⁶ *The Divine Conspiracy* highlights the practices of study and worship as being vital to the disciple of Jesus in their early spiritual formation.²⁷ In addition, *Renovation of the Heart* considers various practices that reflect

²² Ibid, 86.

²³ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 9.

²⁴ Ibid, 158.

²⁵ Ibid, 159-175.

²⁶ Ibid, 175-190.

²⁷ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 357-364.

these disciplines for the spiritual life when it comes to the human frame.²⁸ And, as it draws to a close, *Renovation of the Heart* also deals with the process of participation as Dr. Willard shares his thoughts on the disciple's "immersion in the Trinitarian Presence" in fulfillment of the Great Commission.²⁹

Living Well through Listening to God

The "small steps" leading to full participation in God's Kingdom include understanding the body's place in our spiritual formation, and implementing the practices that disrupt and develop our embodied life into active participants in the divine life. Yet, the process leading to participation in the Kingdom is more than just guidance into the right way of living. Dr. Willard's *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* is his way of dealing with the obsession of "doing all God commands" because this may be the very thing that rules out "being the kind of person that he calls us to be."³⁰ Thus, Dr. Willard reflects:

In our attempts to understand how God speaks to us and guides us, we must above all hold on to the fact that this is to be sought *only as a part of a certain kind of life*, a life of loving fellowship with the King and his other subjects within the kingdom of the heavens. We must never forget that God's speaking to us, however we experience it in our initial encounter, is intended to develop into an intelligent, freely cooperative relationship between mature people who love each other with the richness of genuine *agape* love. We must therefore make it our primary goal not just to hear the voice of God but to be mature people in a loving relationship with him. Only in this way will we hear him rightly.³¹

²⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 172-176.

²⁹ Ibid, 245-246.

³⁰ Willard, *Hearing God*, 11.

³¹ Ibid, 31.

Hearing God offers sound counsel and practical advice for the cultivation of the “certain kind of life” that is fully participating in the Kingdom: “Be still each day for a short time, sitting before God in meditation, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the truth of Christ’s indwelling. Ask God to be pleased to make known to you what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (Colossians 1:27).”³²

Believing that Jesus came to “respond to the universal human need to know *how to live well*,”³³ Dr. Willard furthers our understanding and application of the disciplines for the spiritual life as providing a framework for hearing the voice of God that is grounded in Scripture and daily life. *Hearing God* develops two foundational steps for entering the conversational relationship with God. He reflects upon the first step:

We have entered into the additional life by the additional birth, and so far as it lies within our understanding and conscious will, we plan and make provision to do what we know to be morally right and what we know to be explicitly commanded by God. This commitment includes the intention to *find out* what may be morally right or commanded by God and hence to grow in our knowledge.³⁴

Again, he keeps the proper order in terms of the “additional birth” that brings the Christian into the Kingdom Life prior to the ongoing growth that it anticipates. The first step actively incorporates the disciplines of engagement and abstinence, naturally leading to the second step:

We seek the fullness of the new life in Christ at the impulse of the Spirit of God in service to the good wherever it may appear, venturing beyond our merely natural powers in reliance on God’s upholding power. Thus we move from faith to more faith (Romans 1:17) as we find him faithful.

³² Ibid, 199.

³³ Ibid, 212.

³⁴ Ibid, 213.

Above all we venture in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and his kingdom as presented in the New Testament Gospels.³⁵

The “adventure” of entering the life of “Jesus Christ and his kingdom as presented in the New Testament Gospels” immerses the disciple into the teachings and life-patterns of our Lord. These two foundational steps engage the Christian into the journey of spiritual formation that fully penetrates the mind and heart of the believer.

The Spiritual Formation Process of Penetration

At the core of the process of Penetration is the Great Commission action for making disciples by “training them to do everything I have told you” (Matthew 28:19). Again, Dr. Willard keeps the spiritual formation process in the proper order: once the spirit or will of the apprentice has been quickened with new life from above, the priority of the inner transformation of one’s thoughts and feelings must immediately get underway.³⁶ This is the deliberate intention to “take in the Word of God” such that beliefs and feelings are steadily pulled in a Godly direction³⁷ along with the ideas, images, the “information” and ways of thinking that occupy our mind. Upon entrance into the Kingdom, the believer’s whole way of thinking, feeling and choosing must be changed toward godly thoughts, feelings and choices.³⁸ The process of Penetration seeks to know truth as we teach others: “There is a God. This is his world, and we with it. This God is totally good and totally competent. He comes to us in Jesus Christ, whom we can

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 248.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 248.

totally trust. He gives us a book and a history, through which the Spirit will lead us to all we need to know about him and about us.”³⁹

The Divine Conspiracy acknowledges two primary objectives for the spiritual formation process of Penetration, or the “opening of the mind” and the “entering of the heart.” The first objective is the intention “to bring apprentices to the point where they dearly love and constantly delight in that ‘heavenly Father’ made real to earth in Jesus and are quite certain that there is no ‘catch,’ no limit, to the goodness of his intentions or to his power to carry them out.”⁴⁰ The first objective is accomplished by what Dr. Willard calls “enthraling the mind with God.”⁴¹ The process prepares the spiritual mentor for “*how* to bring God adequately before the mind and spirit of the disciple.”⁴² Because the process of Penetration deals with the significance of the mind, the thought and the practice of thinking since what “*occupies* our mind very largely governs what we do,”⁴³ the process for penetrating mind and heart is developing disciples into the fullness of Christ by forming the “insights and habits of the student’s mind so that it stays directed toward God.”⁴⁴ Intellectually speaking, Dr. Willard suggests three primary pathways as God comes before our minds: through his creation; through his public acts on the scene of

³⁹ Ibid, 249.

⁴⁰ Ibid, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 321.

⁴¹ Ibid, 323-41.

⁴² Ibid, 324.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 325.

human history; and through individual experiences of him. These pathways outline the key practices of the spiritual formation process of Penetration.

The first pathway is to present our Father, the one in the heavens, as “maker and sustainer of everything.”⁴⁵ Under the tutelage of the Spirit of truth “who is constantly at work in the disciples of Jesus,” we must cultivate the mind and spirit “through art and imagination, poetry and song, praise, prayer and worship. These all help our minds to lay hold of this God, this most loveable being in all reality.”⁴⁶

The second pathway is to present our “faithful Creator” as One who blesses human beings by personally engaging in “face-to-face relationship renewed by periodic visits.”⁴⁷ The key to loving God is helping the disciple “to see and understand the person of Jesus,” to *see Jesus* with as much fullness and clarity as possible.⁴⁸ To make this happen, the content of the Gospels must be explained and brought to life in such a way that Jesus becomes a permanent presence and possession of the mind of the disciple; that this wonderful person walked among us and suffered a cruel death to enable the disciple to have life in God; that the *continuing* incarnation of the divine Son among his gathered people continues today; and that Jesus is the master of the created universe and of human history.⁴⁹ Respecting the “priority of the mind (thought and feeling)” as first in the order

⁴⁵ Ibid, 326.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 328.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 332.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 334.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 334-36.

of real inward change, Dr. Willard advocates teaching that is “Spirit led, Bible informed, intelligent, experimental, and persistent.”⁵⁰

The third pathway is to present the goodness of God as experienced in the disciple’s personal experience and life. Talking plainly, Dr. Willard says “we will never have the easy, unhesitating love of God that makes obedience to Jesus our natural response unless we are absolutely sure that *it is good for us to be, and to be who we are.*”⁵¹ Then, practically speaking, “we must have no doubt that the path appointed for us by when and where and to whom we were born is good, and that nothing irredeemable has happened to us or can happen to us on our way to our destiny in God’s full world.”⁵²

The second objective is the intention “to remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God, to free the apprentices of domination, or ‘enslavement’ (John 8:34; Romans 6:6), to their old habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action.”⁵³ The second objective – what Dr. Willard calls “acquiring the habits of goodness”⁵⁴ – is accomplished as the apprentice’s bodily and behavioral responses are shaped according the patterns taught by Jesus. The intent is simply *how* can the disciple recognize habitual patterns of wrongdoing and escape from their grasp. Admittedly, this will be difficult for the “consumer Christian” who “utilizes the grace of God for forgiveness and the services of

⁵⁰ Ibid, 248-49.

⁵¹ Ibid, 337.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 322.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 341-52. This unites the disciplines for the spiritual life as developed in theory and practice in *Hearing God* and *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

the church for special occasions.”⁵⁵ This is the transformational work of giving one’s life and innermost thoughts, feelings and intentions over to the kingdom of the heavens, primarily accomplished in “the body and its social context,”⁵⁶ a work that will not be done for us.⁵⁷ Once again, the disciplines for the spiritual life are emphasized. Here, *The Divine Conspiracy* introduces the “Golden Triangle” of spiritual formation: the action of the Holy Spirit; the ordinary events of daily life; and the planned discipline(s) of the new heart.⁵⁸ The process of Penetration is the interplay of these three vital aspects upon the disciple’s life such that the actual transformation of the disciple’s mind and heart occurs.

The Spiritual Formation Process of Transformation

Both the process for Participation and Penetration support the objectives of the process of Transformation. For instance, developing a conversational relationship with God impacts our whole being; practicing the disciplines for the spiritual life influences our whole being; and training the mind and heart involves our whole being. Dr. Willard believes that *genuine* transformation of the whole person into the goodness and power seen in Jesus and his “Abba” Father – the only transformation adequate to the human self – remains the necessary goal of human life.⁵⁹ The “work” of spiritual formation is this

⁵⁵ Ibid, 342.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 343.

⁵⁷ Dr. Willard comments that the familiar words of Jesus “Without me you can do nothing,” (John 5:5) must be balanced by the insight that, in general, if we do nothing it will certainly be without him, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 346.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 347-357.

⁵⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 20.

transformation of the “whole personality” into the “goodness and power” as seen in Jesus. This transformation progresses in such a way that it is “*who we are* in our thoughts, feelings, dispositions, and choices – in the inner life – that counts”⁶⁰ as we become like the “inner being of Christ himself.”⁶¹

As we turn our thoughts toward the process of transformation advocated by Dr. Willard, we are to remember that this inner transformation is possible “because the spirit and inner being of the human, as well as the process of his renovation in Christ, is an orderly realm where, even in the disorder of its brokenness, God has provided a methodical path of recovery. Grace does not rule out method, nor method grace. Grace thrives on method and method on grace.”⁶² The God-ordained order of the soul under grace must be discovered, respected, and cooperated with, if its God-intended results for spiritual growth are to be attained.⁶³

The path of renovation of the heart is therefore one in which the revitalized will takes grace – provided measures to change the content of the thought life, the dominant feeling tones, what the body is ready to do, the prevailing social atmosphere, and the deep current of the soul. They all are to be progressively transformed toward the character each has in Jesus Christ.⁶⁴

Spiritual formation is about the entire being, the whole person in our physical, social and spiritual context. Dr. Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the*

⁶⁰ Ibid, 24.

⁶¹ Ibid, 22.

⁶² Ibid, 25.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 253.

Character of Christ provides both understanding and application for this physical and spiritual formation relative to what he understands as the six basic “dimensions” of human life. The summary description of the six dimensions inseparable from and intimately connected with every human life includes:

Thought: realigning our ideas and images with God and his way
 Feeling: love, joy, and peace grounded in faith and hope
 Choice: single-minded and joyous devotion to God and his will
 Body: increasingly poised to do what is good and refrain from what is evil
 Social context: we become people who love one another
 Soul: expressing the order of God’s kingdom and character

Simply put, every human being has a thought life, feels, chooses, interacts with his or her body and its social context, and (more or less) integrates all of the foregoing as parts of one life.⁶⁵ Spiritual transformation *processes* are intended to embed the Christlike thought/emotional patterns, decisions, contextual living and integration that reflect the “love of God with *all* of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). Dr. Willard’s discussion of the transformation of each essential dimension of human experience reflects his belief that the Great Commission is the actual “immersion into the Trinitarian Reality” that is the essence of Jesus’ intent for his followers.

Summarizing Dr. Willard’s “Preferred Future” Of Spiritual Formation

Through the mentoring conversation with Dr. Willard highlighted above, having recorded what I observe to be his primary insights into the spiritual formation journey for the apprentice of Jesus, the following summary answers the two questions that guided my

⁶⁵ Ibid, 31.

reading. The two questions are: “What is the preferred future (in terms of goal) for anyone following Christ?” and “What is the preferred future (in terms of process) for anyone following Christ?”

Summarizing the Goal of Spiritual Formation

The goal of Christian spiritual formation as understood by Dr. Willard is “taking on the shape of Christ.” The conversation with each book offers a unique perspective from which to view the anticipated movement of a life that takes on the shape of Christ. For instance, *Hearing God* engages the reader by considering the personal, conversational relationship God desires to have with every one of his children as most fully observed in Jesus. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* teaches the reader by considering the practice of “being with Jesus” in order to learn from him how to live our total lives. *The Divine Conspiracy* challenges the reader by considering the fundamental thought-patterns Jesus taught to those who were to become like him in the realities of every day life. *Renovation of the Heart* supports the reader by considering the vital transformation of the human being so that hearing God as Jesus heard him is a real and respected characteristic of the disciple. Each mentoring conversation reveals Jesus as the goal of spiritual formation as well as the primary example and absolute master of the life-patterns proposed for his apprentices. For Dr. Willard, being with Jesus, getting to know Jesus, practicing to live like Jesus chose to live, applying his thoughts to life, and coming to see the world as Jesus does all summarize his understanding of the goal of Christian spiritual formation.

Summarizing the Processes of Spiritual Formation

Based upon the four resources that mentored this chapter, the preferred future in terms of process engages the practical applications of Participation, Penetration and

Transformation: learning from Jesus how to live in the emerging culture of the western world. We have discerned that the spiritual formation process of Participation links the activities necessary for “hearing God” with the lifestyle practices of the disciplines for the life of the spirit as learned from Jesus. Through the process of Participation, the apprentice of Jesus is immersed into appropriate behavior patterns. And, we have discerned that the spiritual formation process of Penetration involves the appropriate training of the mind and heart in keeping with the teachings of Jesus. Through the process of Penetration, the disciple of Jesus is immersed into the proper thought patterns. Finally, the spiritual formation process of Transformation engages the “whole personality” that integrates the six essential dimensions of the human being into the patterns established by Jesus. Through the process of Transformation, the Christian is immersed into meaningful life patterns.

Next, stepping back to view the wider picture of the preferred future desired by Dr. Willard, three fundamental intentions for the spiritual formation processes are identified.

First, each book engages a conversation with the ideas and images that govern our practical approach to religious expression, spiritual formation, and daily life. In fact, each book was written to deal with various wrong ideas and images that misguidedly direct the living of Christian life, and which cause Dr. Willard great concern. *Hearing God* deals with the wrong idea that God must be non-conversational because Christians are not hearing Him: “Those who operate on the wrong information are likely never to know the reality of God’s presence in the decisions which shape their lives and will miss the

constant divine companionship for which their souls were made.”⁶⁶ *The Spirit of the Disciplines* deals with the wrong image that the life of Jesus is just too “perfect” for anyone to actually follow. Dr. Willard mentors the reader toward the understanding that a Christian can become like Christ by doing one thing: “following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself.”⁶⁷ *The Divine Conspiracy* deals with the wrong idea that Jesus has little to offer the practical life that every one lives. This book challenges the “ideas that automatically govern our thinking about who we are, as Christians and human beings, and about the relevance of Jesus to our cosmos and our lives,”⁶⁸ and teaches that any transformational change in the Christian can come only by “breaking the stranglehold of the ideas and concepts that automatically shunt aside Jesus when questions of concrete mastery of our life arise.”⁶⁹ *Renovation of the Heart* deals with the wrong image that following Christ in any meaningful way is a hopeless, thus foolish if not useless, endeavor. The problem, writes Dr. Willard, is that we do not think rightly about the problem – thinking that changing the externals of an organization can “shape” the people – and we do not act appropriately toward solving the real problem – people are not guided into true inner transformation so they can become like Christ. So, as a mentor, Dr. Willard provides counsel and direction to understanding these inappropriate ideas and images that practically guide daily Christian living, and offers suggestions to respond

⁶⁶ Willard, *Hearing*, 10.

⁶⁷ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

⁶⁸ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, x.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

appropriately to those whose lives long for the proper ideas and images in order to live as Jesus intends.

Second, every conversation aroused by each book demands that spiritual formation be understood as being more than just for the spirit, or inner being. Spiritual formation is for more than just the “software” of inner character or personality. Spiritual formation deals with the “whole person,” including what could be called the “hardware” – the human body and social experience – of everyday life. In other words, the processes of spiritual formation practiced must engage “who” we are as well as “what” we do – what we do with our bodies in the social and physical environment of vocation, family, recreation and service. As such, the processes advocated by Dr. Willard war against the tendency to isolate spiritual formation from the very practical, almost mundane, realities of every day living. What we know is important, but we do with what we know is vital. All four resources advocate the “whole person” approach as well as providing necessary help in the “whole life” approach that is more in keeping with who we really are as human beings.

Third, Dr. Willard understands that the successful spiritual formation process is really “immersing the apprentices at all levels of growth in the Trinitarian presence – the teaching and healing God in their midst.”⁷⁰ He believes that “God’s intent is to be present among his people and to heal them, teach them, and provide for them.”⁷¹ This Trinitarian presence “inhabits and encloses” the community of apprentices such that the

⁷⁰ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 240.

⁷¹ Ibid, 246.

single major component of spiritual formation is “the teaching God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – in the midst” of the community.⁷² *Hearing God* immerses the Christian into the personal, communicational Reality of the Talking God. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* immerses the Christ-follower into the practical, life-developing Reality of the Living Jesus. *The Divine Conspiracy* immerses the believer into the full Life Jesus’ thoughts. For Christian leaders, this “immersion in the Trinitarian Reality” anticipates receiving from the “Christ-with-them” a “profundity of insight, sweetness and strength of character, and abundance of power to carry out their role in the local group” knowing that all have come to “encounter the Trinitarian presence” and to be held up within it.⁷³ In support of the Christian’s immersion into the Trinitarian Reality, Dr. Willard states emphatically the utter importance of the Word of God⁷⁴ and the Holy Spirit.⁷⁵

The next chapter will consider insights from the second mentor guiding this project: Dr. Leonard Sweet.

⁷² Ibid, 245.

⁷³ Ibid, 247.

⁷⁴ Willard, *Hearing God*, 148.

⁷⁵ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 24.

CHAPTER 5

SPIRITUAL FORMATION:

THE VOICE OF LEONARD SWEET

Both mentors to this project were chosen to provide guidance in understanding the practices of Jesus while giving me direction in applying their spiritual formation approaches in the real-time ministry context of the people I serve. The second mentor to be considered is Leonard Sweet. I chose him after reflecting upon his comments about maps and their basic uselessness: “Every attempt to draw a map of reality is really an exercise in lying. ... There has never been a map without omissions, concessions, and interpretations. The main purpose of a map is to help you find your way. The map is not the way, however.”¹

What I realized, given the basic framework for the training I received prior to entering pastoral ministry (my training advised me to adhere to the “traditional map” of my Lutheran roots) was the challenge that was taking place to my understanding of the ministry I was actually practicing. I was discovering more and more that the vast majority of people in the local community did not think or act in keeping with the “map” my training provided. True, those in the congregation I served seemed to follow the “map” as they were expected to do, but I was observing that even their expectations and

¹ Leonard Sweet, *AquaChurch: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 1999), 13.

understandings were changing – they wanted more than what was being provided. So, his comment provoked me to search for the practical, and effective, processes necessary to find my way into the emerging future – “getting from here to there.”

Leonard Sweet is a prolific writer and an award-winning author,² who has reflected extensively on emerging trends in the western world, including his thoughts for the spiritual formation of those who must live and minister within the emerging culture. Four of his resources were chosen to provide guidance for the journey of spiritual formation in the local culture: *AquaChurch*, *Carpe Mañana*,³ *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*,⁴ and *Summoned to Lead*.⁵ As a careful student of the Scriptures and of the cultural moment of our time, he has communicated the gospel for a postmodern age by bridging the world of academe and popular culture.

Two questions guided my reading in the previous two chapters: “What is the preferred future (in terms of goal) for anyone following Christ?” “What is the preferred future (in terms of process) for anyone following Christ?” The same two questions guided

² Sweet is the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. He also serves as a Visiting Distinguished Professor at George Fox University in Portland, Oregon. His best-selling *FaithQuakes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) was selected as one of the “10 best religion books” and “10 must-read books” of 1994.

³ Leonard Sweet, *Carpe Mañana: Is Your Church Ready To Seize Tomorrow?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001).

⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy: Lose Your Mind, Find Your Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003).

⁵ Leonard Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004).

my reading in this chapter. The selected books of Dr. Sweet will be examined to discern his understanding of the “goal” and “processes” of spiritual formation.

The Goal of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation in the future will be a continuous, intentional orientation toward Jesus. Dr. Sweet develops two “navigational” images supporting the intentional orientation for the Christian’s spiritual formation. First, Jesus is the “fixed reference point” point of Christian faith and living: “Jesus of Nazareth is our North Star.”⁶ Every Christian, and his or her faith community, begins “faith’s journey with Christ as a fixed reference point,”⁷ and develops in the knowledge that all life “begins and ends with Jesus.”⁸ Christianity is a “relationship religion” with the core relationship being a relationship with Christ.⁹ The second image for the spiritual formation journey accepts Jesus as a “moving target.” At the pace of life in today’s world, Dr. Sweet first warns, to “aim at today” is to be “caught up in the daily and miss the mission,” and then encourages, “aim at tomorrow, and you will hit the mark of God’s high calling.”¹⁰ “God’s high calling” aims at the “the image and likeness of Christ.”¹¹ Thus, spiritual

⁶ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 36.

⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁸ Ibid, 37.

⁹ Ibid, 36.

¹⁰ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 16.

¹¹ Ibid, 55.

formation in local Christian communities needs to aim at Christ, not so much as archers taking aim at a stationary target, but as skeet shooters aiming ahead of a moving target.¹²

In addition to the two “navigational” images, Dr. Sweet also highlights spiritual formation as an “extreme makeover” that transforms the believer. For instance, the Christian “makeover” transforms how and what the disciple is able to see: “Christians are called to see the world through Jesus’ eyes.”¹³ Christianity is more than a set of doctrines describing Jesus or a code of life prescribed by Jesus; it is “Christ himself” seen as “the heart of God’s revelation and salvation.”¹⁴ In addition, Christian spiritual formation involves a “face lift” such the believer is “called to become a true image of Christ, to become a Jesus face.”¹⁵ Christian “spiritual formation is really Christ-formation.”¹⁶ And, Christian spiritual formation transforms the follower’s hearing: “Where we need help is in developing a musical ear – ears to recognize the vision that is already at work in our world, ears to hear the false notes, and ears to tune ourselves to God’s Perfect Pitch, Jesus the Christ.”¹⁷ The effectiveness of spiritual formation is measured as Jesus is heard through Christian lives: “The Christian life is a quotation of Jesus.”¹⁸

¹² This makes Jesus the “bull’s eye” and the “clay pigeon” of spiritual formation.

¹³ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 15.

¹⁴ Ibid, 78.

¹⁵ Ibid, 51-52.

¹⁶ Ibid, 51.

¹⁷ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 14-15.

¹⁸ Ibid, 41.

Dr. Sweet also teaches the necessity of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures as vital to the Christian spiritual formation journey. In support of “the total transformation of heart and life”¹⁹ into the likeness of Jesus, it is the Scripture that “shapes and fashions our lives into the likeness of Christ”²⁰ – the Cruciform Life. Uniting the Spirit with the Word, he confirms that “the key instrument for any student of the Spirit”²¹ is the Scriptures, making their study and application the necessary means by which “to inhale the energies of the Spirit.”²² When the Word of God sinks into Christian souls and minds, the Word beats inside us, the result of a divine transplant of a pacemaker that governs the movement of our hearts.²³

Next, the second primary question that guided my reading of the four resources will be considered: “What is the preferred future, in terms of process, for anyone following Christ?”

The Process of Spiritual Formation

Jesus Drives Me Crazy understands Christian maturity as “the transference of Christ’s character by the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ And, counsels Sweet, “Never Underestimate the Spirit (NUTS).” The obvious question is “How does this transference

¹⁹ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 23.

²⁰ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 56.

²¹ Ibid, 55.

²² Ibid, 57.

²³ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 128.

²⁴ Ibid, 53.

take place?” He suggests, “NUTS wisdom is not ‘imitation’ of Christ. NUTS wisdom is participation in Christ. NUTS wisdom is implantation with Christ. Of course, the highest form of NUTS discipleship is incarnation.”²⁵ This quote provides an effective conceptual structure for the various processes of spiritual formation advocated throughout the four resources. Under the guidance of the Spirit and grounded in the Scriptures, the processes of spiritual formation include three primary processes: Participation, Implantation and Incarnation. The process of Participation develops the practice of the “spiritual arts” so Jesus’ life can be lived through our own; the process of Implantation shapes thought and life toward Jesus through Biblical thinking/learning; and the process of Incarnation expresses Christian life within the cultural context of our everyday living with Jesus.

The Spiritual Formation Process of Participation

The spiritual formation process of Participation honors the truth “humans acquire attributes by acting in certain ways.”²⁶ Following this insight of Aristotle, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy* reflects: “To be sure, character is transformed by action. Character is not infused in us magically by the Spirit. It takes practice and discipline. It takes habits that become habitations. These spiritual practices are the genuine growth rings that expand and build the tree of character.”²⁷ The process considers the habits and habitations of the spiritual disciplines, also called “spiritual practices” and “leadership arts.” Dr. Sweet

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 52.

²⁷ Ibid, 55.

expresses the intent of the spiritual disciplines as developing “ears to hear the false notes, and ears to tune ourselves to God’s Perfect Pitch, Jesus the Christ.”²⁸ The “spiritual practices” advocated through the process of Participation have a two-fold purpose: helping the Christian to “hear the false notes” and to “tune ourselves to Jesus Christ.” The “false notes” include the wisdom of the world that seeps into the character of the Christian as well as “numbing normality” of Christian communities more influenced by the ways of the world than the Living Water of Christ. The “tuning” process of Participation challenges this “numbing normality” and engages “the development of the inner ear trained to trust and try the inner voice.”²⁹ The “inner voice” is the Voice of Jesus spoken by the Spirit through the Word. Sabbath, Study and Tradition are representative “spiritual arts” intended to re-tune the ear of the emerging Christian in order to hear the Voice of the “North Star.”

The Art of Keeping the Sabbath

Dr. Sweet advocates the spiritual discipline of “Sabbath keeping”³⁰ as a solution to over-paced living. We live in a culture that has come to believe time is being wasted if we are not accomplishing something. This is true for many Christians living by the world’s wisdom. In order for the maturing spiritual life to be “tuned” to the Perfect Pitch of Jesus Christ, Christians need more sabbaticals, more “time to learn and explore the

²⁸ Ibid, 14-15.

²⁹ Ibid, 33.

³⁰ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 149-61.

secrets of the soul.”³¹ Both “learning” and “exploring” the “secrets of the soul” express primary practices of the spiritual arts. The process of Participation practices the “spiritual arts” to develop the listening skill of the Christian who is “summoned forth by the Voice through a process of discourse and discovery.”³² And, giving guidance to the practice of “Sabbath keeping,” he suggests that the time we need to rest is not so much to unplug as to “change frequencies,”³³ a clear hint toward the “re-tuning art” necessary for hearing Jesus in a noisy world. Dr. Sweet counsels “Sabbath keeping” in order to help Christians better understand the disposals of prayer, meditation, praise, confession, and Bible study are the best use of time,³⁴ and the solution to over-paced living.

The Discipline of Study

Like the practice of Sabbath, the spiritual discipline of study is woven throughout the mentoring resources. *Summoned to Lead* believes that the “essence of a distinguishing soundtrack,” which is another way of speaking about personal spiritual formation, is a “well-stocked soul, a well-furnished mind, a well-appointed being,”³⁵ all results of the “learning” and “exploring” that shapes the process of Participation. *AquaChurch* acknowledges the necessity of what is carried in the heart, and announces

³¹ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 150.

³² Ibid, 34.

³³ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 157.

³⁴ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 151.

³⁵ Ibid, 41.

what is “carried” between the ears is the most valuable tool of the leadership trade.³⁶ The spiritual art of study intends to develop “what you carry between your ears.” In a world drowning in information, Dr. Sweet focuses the discipline of study writing “what makes the difference is a learning culture of knowledge management where data (undigested facts) can become information (facts organized by outside sources but not yet integrated into your thinking), which then can become knowledge (internalized information), which can be turned into wisdom (integrated knowledge).”³⁷ He believes that the church must become one of the emerging culture’s chief “wisdom refineries” for the conversion of gross data into high-grade wisdom.³⁸ The spiritual art of study is the means through which these local “wisdom refineries” are created as the Word of God sinks into our souls.

“Hearing” the Tradition

“Tradition” is not normally thought of as a spiritual discipline. However, as Dr. Sweet understands “tradition,” it is another “discipline” that supports the re-tuning of the soul for life in the emerging culture. Tradition is important because the spiritual disciplines practiced in today’s emerging culture come to us as a part of the great “tradition” of the church across the ages. Dr. Sweet believes that we learn from the past and cast the past into the future – “dropping an anchor into the future.”³⁹ As a model for

³⁶ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 229.

³⁷ Ibid, 228.

³⁸ Ibid, 230.

³⁹ Ibid, 73.

spiritual formation using the best of tradition from our past, he advises that Christians must hold ever tighter to the tradition – rightly understood as Jesus – and not give up the tradition. Courageously following the “Voice” in a community – “the best we can do is hear God’s voice”⁴⁰ – is intended “to gird and guard” the members of a community “in patterns of discipleship that will help them to faithfully follow their Teacher into this new world.”⁴¹ And, we must not let the tradition become frozen in a space and time, but allow the tradition to take on the new shape of the container in which it will administer the Gospel in today’s emerging culture.

The “Spiritual Arts” Practiced as Sensual Experiences

Dr. Sweet ponders a probable methodology for practicing the spiritual disciplines in ways that are full-bodied, fully sensual and fully engaged in answer to the question “how do we savor the Spirit?” Because people under the influence of the emerging culture “require rich emotional palettes that paint in all the colors and hit all the notes,” and because “natives think with their eyes, ears, nose, mouths, and hands,”⁴² he suggests methodologies for practicing the spiritual arts as fully sensual experiences. For instance, in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper so meaningful in my Lutheran heritage, a common practice of Sabbath keeping, he reminds that the five senses – sound, sight, touch, smell, taste – are in the most harmonious, melodic relation to one another.⁴³ And, with the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 127.

⁴¹ Ibid, 120.

⁴² Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 102.

⁴³ Ibid, 104.

remarkable acceleration of aesthetics throughout life, “native” Christians now live in a multimedial, multisensory world where disciples increasingly engage learning through a rich sensorium of experiences: hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting, as well as thinking.⁴⁴ Since, in this emerging world, natives “feel” their way forward more than they “think” their way forward,⁴⁵ the challenge of the spiritual formation journey of Participation is connecting the emerging Christian’s multisensory approach to life and learning with the personal, communal and sensual practices of the “spiritual arts.”

The Spiritual Formation Process of Implantation

The spiritual formation process of Implantation challenges the general tendency to take on the shape and sound of Christ strictly as an individual. The process of Implantation intends to develop the appropriate “learning relationships” necessary for current and future spiritual formation. Dr. Sweet counsels that the key theological term of the 21st century is “relationship” because “meaning IS relationship.”⁴⁶ Consider the *With* of the “Be There With All” framework that outlines *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*. *With* is the relationship word, and “*withness* advances a relational framework” that is of such significance that “only in relationship do we discover God.”⁴⁷ Simultaneously, only in relationship do we discover what it means to be human as we receive ourselves from our

⁴⁴ Ibid, 100.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 101.

⁴⁶ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 195.

⁴⁷ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 103-104.

relationships,⁴⁸ highlighting the importance of both the Teacher and the community as “the self takes its meaning, shape, and direction from one’s community and tribe.”⁴⁹ Dr. Sweet challenges the common understanding that a Christian “possesses” an identity alone. Instead, the Christian “receives” an identity from his or her *withness*, from their relational framework. Personal identity, character and behavior are all influenced through our learning relationships. And, Christ identity, character and behavior in the Christian are certainly influenced in learning relationships. The secret to relational learning in the emerging future is to “empower people to learn, grow, think for themselves, and discover their own solutions.”⁵⁰ Mentoring is vital to the spiritual formation of future generations.

Mentoring suggests the need to develop “learning teams” as opposed to purely “leadership teams” in the Christian community. These “learning teams” can more readily respond to the future that will be, at best, unpredictable, uncertain, surprising and confusing. This uncertainty causes Dr. Sweet to wonder if Christians are spending too much time planning and too little time preparing. “Leadership teams” generally give their time to planning the future for the community; “learning teams” will give their talent to preparing the community for the future. Even Jesus did not plan his future, *Summoned to Lead* reminds, he prepared for it,⁵¹ permitting him to respond to the various challenges he faced. Learning relationships in community are vital to learning: “Nothing pushes the

⁴⁸ Ibid, 107.

⁴⁹ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 199.

⁵⁰ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 91.

⁵¹ Ibid, 177.

learning curve so much as to have people who just learned share what they have learned with others. ... Sharing learning ensures vigorous learning.”⁵²

Not only will the learning relationships of the future be interactive, dynamic, and collaborative,⁵³ learning relationships also will be built around “images, logos, metaphors, ceremonials and stories.”⁵⁴ *Carpe Mañana* confesses “Jesus knew that images more than words could best bend the world to God’s being, so he communicated most of his truths through visual images wrapped in sound.”⁵⁵ Dr. Sweet reflects on the significance of this truth for the future, “if the church is to present natives with Christ figures, it must learn to communicate like Jesus and his first followers did – through metaphor, image, parable, and icon.”⁵⁶ Spiritual formation in the future will engage learning that is more a consequence of thinking than merely teaching since “metaphors, images, parables and icons” involve the learner in thinking about what is being communicated. “Metaphors are the very stuff of which the mind is made,” explains Dr. Sweet, “change your metaphors, and the architecture of your soul is altered.”⁵⁷ And, he reflects, “In this new culture, images are central to personal life. To sculpt a metaphor is

⁵² Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 240.

⁵³ Understanding the World Wide Web to be a powerful image and possible tool for spiritual formation in the future, Dr. Sweet highlights one of the struggles for future learning relationships: “our real time relationships must begin to imitate our cyberspace relationships: interactive, cyberspatial, dynamic, collaborative, *Summoned to Lead*, 93.

⁵⁴ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 192.

⁵⁵ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 40.

to transform the world.”⁵⁸ The spiritual formation process of Implantation is “sculpting a new metaphor” to shape the “architecture of the soul.” Thus, story is vital to the transformation that shapes the soul: “When the stories of the Scripture become *our* stories, when biblical images and metaphors become *our* images and metaphors, when we structure *our* lives around the cornerstone Jesus story, a new architecture for our souls is constructed.”⁵⁹ Being with Jesus, learning from Jesus, listening to Jesus and being implanted with his Story shapes the soul.

What makes stories such a formative process within learning relationships? Stories lead to questions; and questions lead to thinking. *AquaChurch* teaches that the biggest issue of wisdomization, the focus of our learning for spiritual formation, is “helping others to see and hear, ask and think the right questions.”⁶⁰ “Mystery-loving natives do not want answers so much as they want help with the questions, help in choosing what questions their lives should be asking and answering.”⁶¹ To be a human and a follower of Jesus is “to be a continuous learner.”⁶² To be a “continuous learner” is to be a continuous disciple: being shaped by the journey of spiritual formation, exploring the appropriate question, and immersing into the “Christ answer.” Thus, Dr. Sweet advocates a learning journey that “sets students free to become self-directed learners

⁵⁸ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 132.

⁵⁹ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 57.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 230.

⁶¹ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 151.

⁶² Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 233.

using their various learning styles.”⁶³ That this is critical to the future of the church is highlighted by the practical advice “the creation of a learning info-structure is more crucial to ministry than the building of organizational infra-structure.”⁶⁴ A learning info-structure enhances the process of Implantation and engages the disciple in real space and time.

The Spiritual Formation Process of Incarnation

Everyone alive today lives in real time and space. Spiritual formation in the emerging culture must deal in real time and be experienced in real space – where I actually am, where we actually are. This is a key emphasis of the spiritual formation process of Incarnation. Spiritual formation is not just transforming “spirits,” but people, real people who are “embodied spirits,” alive in real space and time, real relationships with real responsibilities in a real world. Thus, the transformational work of spiritual formation must account for the whole person within a particular life context. Dr. Sweet reminds that this was even true of Jesus:

Jesus existed in time. When God became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, God did not just enter human history. God entered the creation story – God entered the history of this planet as well as the history of its people. God was willing to submit the Godhead to cultural conditions – that’s the Incarnation.⁶⁵

If God was willing to submit Himself to cultural conditions, then the transformation of the human being must account for the “cultural conditions” of our “incarnation.”

⁶³ Ibid, 235.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 26.

The primary tool necessary for this “incarnational transformation” – the Gospel of Jesus Christ – is uniquely able to accomplish its purpose regardless of cultural context. Dr. Sweet reminds: “The essence of the incarnation is the gospel’s ability under the direction of the Holy Spirit to throw on and off the garments of its age, cross ethnic frontiers, and become culturally at home throughout history and geography.”⁶⁶ So, for the spiritual formation practitioner, being in touch with the culture is “not with the goal of the Christ transforming culture but with the goal of the Christ who transcends culture transforming persons and communities in every culture.”⁶⁷ The spiritual formation process of Incarnation prepares Christians to be alive in their local culture, regardless of the origin of that particular culture. Thought often forgotten, incarnational Christianity is an absorbent culture, which enables other people to bring to it without damaging their own tribal or nationalistic identity.⁶⁸

Growing NUTS Disciples in the Local Culture

Jesus Drives Me Crazy is Dr. Sweet’s reflection upon the living of “incarnational Christianity.” His phrase “Be There With All” highlights the formational outline for the Christian community’s engagement with the local culture: *Be* is character; *There* is context; *With* is relationship and *All* is missional.⁶⁹ This simple, yet profound, phrase

⁶⁶ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 61-62.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 64.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 38, 100.

energizes the process of Incarnation when applied, and details a way of developing this process for practical living.

BE: Christ-character is the focus of *Be*. As a goal of spiritual formation – spiritual formation is really Christ-formation⁷⁰ – this concept has already been considered. However, in terms of mentoring the spiritual formation journey, Dr. Sweet anticipates the following necessary pathway: coming alongside of Jesus in order to see him, observe him and become like him by being with him. Christian “be-ing” is formed, reformed, and transformed by the character of Christ as “newborn Christians stare into Jesus’ face,” thus imprinting our face with a true self.⁷¹ NUTS disciples “take on” the character of Christ – taking on the being of the divine⁷² – by being mentored by Christ. Connecting to the process of Participation, taking on the “being of the divine” requires “practice and discipline” since character is not infused in us magically by the Spirit.⁷³ In fact, until our story is connected to God’s story, until our being is in a state of openness to God’s being and to the fullness of being, there can be no true Christian character.⁷⁴

THERE: Christ-character must have a space, a place, in which to incarnate. The emphasis of *There* is the context or culture into which the character of Christ is presented and practiced, and becomes a vital part of the spiritual formation journey. Just as it is the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 51.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 54.

⁷³ Ibid, 55.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 107.

work of the Spirit to transfer Christ's character to the disciple, so it is also the work of the Spirit that drives us to be in touch with the culture.⁷⁵ This "being in touch" encourages NUTS disciples to "know the microclimate of the weather patterns (intellectual, social, political, scientific) in which they live."⁷⁶ *Summoned to Lead* teaches: We must innovate. But innovation is not understood in technological terms. Innovation is "knowledge of the culture one is in and the management of that knowledge"⁷⁷ for the practice of the innovative, incarnational life.

WITH: Here, the appropriate relationships connecting Christ-character with the local cultural context is the focus. Jesus patterned "being *with*" for his followers. As such, he was always developing NUTS relationships that found ways to bring "others" in. "NUTS disciples never withhold love from anyone," believes Dr. Sweet, and Jesus found ways to be with "others," "with" these "other" kinds of people, in incarnational ways.⁷⁸ Jesus was not concerned about the people he surrounded himself with: all races, all classes, all nationalities, but especially the small of the all – those whom society marginalizes and despises.⁷⁹ When the church stops being *with* the little guys or caring for the bottom of the human heap or specializing in the forgotten, the freaks, and the

⁷⁵ Ibid, 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 165.

⁷⁸ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 115.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 116.

mistakes, it has ceased being the church.⁸⁰ The spiritual formation journey incarnates along the contours of engagement with marginalized society.

ALL: This “engagement” is the key point behind the *All* in *Be There With All*. As the missional concept, *All* relationally engages the local culture with Christ-character. Again, Jesus is the example as “he called his disciples to continue what he started” inviting them and teaching them to “become the greatest lovers the world has ever known.”⁸¹ The spiritual formation journey toward becoming the “greatest lovers” is similar to *Be* where the disciple of Jesus is brought into relationship with his or her Teacher so that when the Word of God is implanted into our souls and minds, there is a “divine transplant of a pacemaker that governs the movement of our hearts so that even when we can’t beat or speak on our own, the Word beats inside us.”⁸² Jesus calls us to refuse to accept life on the terms offered us by smashed rainbows. We are not called to make our own terms with life; we are called to make God’s terms with life.⁸³ We are called to *be there with all*.

Summarizing Dr. Sweet’s “Preferred Future” Of Spiritual Formation

Through the mentoring conversation with Dr. Sweet highlighted above, having recorded what I observe to be his primary insights into the spiritual formation journey for the apprentice of Jesus, the following summary answers to the two questions that guided

⁸⁰ Ibid, 117.

⁸¹ Ibid, 133.

⁸² Ibid, 128.

⁸³ Ibid, 130.

my reading: “What is the preferred future (in terms of goal) for anyone following Christ?” and “What is the preferred future (in terms of process) for anyone following Christ?”

Summarizing the Goal of Spiritual Formation

The preferred future, in terms of goal, for the spiritual formation of the believer advocated by Dr. Sweet focuses solely on Jesus. On the one hand, he is the “fixed” goal for Christian spiritual formation. *AquaChurch* reminds that a Christian’s faith-life “begins and ends with Jesus,”⁸⁴ and each person begins “faith’s journey with Christ as a fixed reference point.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, he is the “fluid” target for Christian life to be lived in the movement of the emerging future. *Carpe Mañana* recognizes that the Christian’s spiritual formation is aimed at Jesus who is on the move into the future, confirming the “the image and likeness of Christ”⁸⁶ as the goal. Spiritual formation also strives to listen for the “Perfect Pitch” of Jesus voice. Dr. Sweet counsels, “Where we need help is in developing a musical ear: ears to recognize ... God’s Perfect Pitch, Jesus the Christ.”⁸⁷ In addition, he acknowledges that every disciple of Jesus is “called to become a true image of Christ, to become a Jesus face,” where *Jesus Drives Me Crazy* understands Christian spiritual formation as “Christ-formation.”⁸⁸ Putting on the “face” of Christ, and developing his “voice” means a disciple takes on the shape and sound of

⁸⁴ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 37.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 39.

⁸⁶ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 55.

⁸⁷ Sweet, *Summoned to Lead*, 14-15.

⁸⁸ Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*, 51-52.

Christ in the emerging world of the future. As a result of the various spiritual formation processes that shape the thought, life, face and future of the Christian, he or she begins to look like Jesus and sound like Jesus.

Summarizing the Processes of Spiritual Formation

Based upon the four resources that mentored this chapter, the preferred future in terms of process will continue to explore the practical applications of Participation, Implantation and Incarnation: learning with Jesus how to live in the emerging culture of the western world. We have discerned that the spiritual formation process of Participation links the activities necessary for “hearing God” with the lifestyle practices of the disciplines for the life of the spirit and in the Spirit. Through the process of Participation, the disciple of Jesus is immersed into appropriate behavior patterns expressing Jesus in the local culture. And, we have discerned that the spiritual formation process of Implantation involves appropriate methodologies for learning along with the development of “learning relationships” within the Christian community. Through the process of Implantation, the Christian and his or her community are immersed into proper thought patterns that are shaped by the Christ. In addition, the spiritual formation process of Incarnation engages the whole cultural context that influences the direction and display of Christ-character. Through the process of Incarnation, all who live from a NUTS perspective imagine and implement their immersion into meaningful life patterns in the shape of Christ.

Next, stepping back to view the wider picture of the preferred future desired by Dr. Sweet, three fundamental intentions for the spiritual formation processes are identified.

First, each book engages a conversation with current methodologies used by the local church when communicating Christ into the emerging culture of the present and future. In fact, the reason each book was written was to deal with a particular communicational practice employed by the church that causes Dr. Sweet great concern. For instance, *AquaChurch* deals with the failing practice that requires the emerging culture to meet Christ through the established “plumbing” (the way a local culture accesses Living Water – evangelism) and “containers” (the way a local culture practices the image of Christ – spiritual formation) that have been accepted as “fixed” by a particular Christian group.⁸⁹ Since every culture, emerging or not, must hear Jesus in a “voice” they can understand and see Jesus in a “form” they can grasp, Dr. Sweet challenges the communicational practice that demands a fixed pathway, in order for Christ to be made known. *Carpe Mañana* deals with the inappropriate practice of communicating the gospel to “natives” – born after 1962 – in an “immigrant” – born before 1962 – style. The new world that began leaking into the old world after 1962 comes with a “fresh vision of living that has massive consequences for art, literature, music, spirituality, and other manifestations of the human spirit.”⁹⁰ It is a world where the “the holiest moments are when ear, eye, nose, mouth, and hand come together on the same axis.”⁹¹ “Who” you are, and “where” you are from, makes a real difference in “how” you hear. *Jesus Drives Me Crazy* deals with the “numbing normality” of the

⁸⁹ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 28-29.

⁹⁰ Sweet, *Carpe Mañana*, 15.

⁹¹ Ibid, 103.

church today that has been, in his opinion, communicating Christ from a “return to normal” mode for decades. In other words, since “normal” represents those who do not know Jesus, and are engaged in life according to worldly standards, a church “returning to normal” communicates a life that is more like the world and less like Jesus. *Summoned to Lead* challenges the accepted practice of communicating “vision” as the means to establish direction in the local church. Continuing Dr. Sweet’s analysis of the secular world’s influence upon the leaders of the church, this book seeks to change the primary question of leadership from “what do you see?” to “who do you hear?” Listening to the “Voice,” and teaching everyone to hear their “voice,” positions the church to engage the culture with greater influence. So, as a mentor, Dr. Sweet provides counsel and direction to understanding these inappropriate communicational practices that guide daily Christian evangelism efforts, and offers suggestions to aim ahead of the culture longing for contentment in the spiritual formation quest.

Second, every conversation aroused by each book argues that spiritual formation be understood as being for more than just the spirit, or inner being. Christians cannot engage the spiritual formation processes only within the safe confines of the local church or use them only to deal with the quiet places of the heart. Spiritual formation deals with the “whole cultural context,” including every aspect of a local culture where everyday life is lived. The processes of spiritual formation must encourage the formation of Christ-character in personal and communal ways such that his character is incarnated in the local culture. And, the local culture includes various thought patterns, communicational styles, music and the arts, the social and physical environment of neighborhoods, the marginalized and the unnoticed. As such, the spiritual formation processes advocated by

Dr. Sweet wrestle against the tendency to remain within the normally isolated confines of the local church, and respond to the very practical, almost mundane, realities of every day living. All four resources advocate the “whole cultural context” approach as well as mentoring appropriate guidance that is more in keeping with who we really are as human beings based upon where we really live.

Third, Dr. Sweet wants us to understand that the effective spiritual formation process of the future will do more to create the appropriate “connections” in support of the NUTS disciple. Spiritual formation of the future will not so much concoct the appropriate “standard” as guide the learner toward the necessary ingredients for living life. The number of connections will be significant. NUTS – Never Underestimate the Spirit – connects to the creative, communicative, dare I say “crazy” God – crazy in love that is. Spiritual formation leaders will have to connect with one another to form ongoing learning communities. Disciples will need to be connected to the “Jesus story” in ways that allow them to see, hear, touch, taste and smell the presence of Christ. Entire communities will need to be connected to the Scriptures in imaginative ways so the “Jesus story” can be experienced. Christians will need to be connected to multiple information streams to deepen their learning. Christian communities will need to connect, perhaps re-connect, with the local culture, standing under in order to understand. Mentors in the spiritual quest will need to connect the metaphors and images, parables and icons that establish the “storyline” of those whom they serve. Connectivity established, developed and sustained really is the key to the future of spiritual formation.

The final chapter of this project offers my solution based upon various insights of the Lord Jesus Christ, my Lutheran heritage, Dallas Willard and Leonard Sweet.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS TRINITARIAN IMMERSION

This chapter outlines my solution to the problem of “good” congregational activities that fail to transform the people along the “same lines as the Son.” At the heart of my solution is a practical, reproducible pattern that immerses Christians and Christian communities into the Trinitarian Life.

A Reminder

Christian congregations today are involved in many – many – good activities. The ministries of these congregations will go forward into the future, making adjustments as deemed appropriate. Unless forced by local circumstances, or through difficult choices that must be made, or by the gracious “push” of the Holy Spirit, these congregations will likely remain as they are, by and large, and will likely move forward within the boundaries established by their founding fathers. In every way possible, I believe these congregations are to be encouraged and supported as they pursue their ministry in their local context.

However, the intention of this project is to focus ministry on spiritual formation, and to aim ministry into the future. So, the solution that follows is not aimed so much at the ministry of local congregations as currently configured – except to be available should they choose to consider it as helpful. My practical, reproducible solution is offered with the desire to be rightly positioned as the culture evolves, and as the people who live in it are shaped along the contours emerging culture. In keeping with my approach to the

previous chapters, my solution expresses a particular “message,” or goal, engaged through an appropriate “medium,” or process.¹

The “Message” of Spiritual Formation

First, based upon the mentors who guided the reading for this project – Jesus, my Lutheran heritage, Dallas Willard and Leonard Sweet – what is the “message” that will facilitate the spiritual formation of God’s people in the future? The simplest way I can state the “message” is Trinitarian: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the “goal” of spiritual formation. My exploration of the Gospels reveals that the “preferred future” intended by Jesus for draws his followers toward the Trinity. Matthew’s Gospel intends a “baptism in the name of” the Trinity and a “teaching” of the commands of the Son as disciples are shaped. Mark’s Gospel has the Father demanding attentive “listening” to the Son in both the “power” and “servant” forms of ministry. Luke’s Gospel has Jesus asking for patience as the Spirit is soon to be received by those who would live as witnesses to the Resurrection. John’s Gospel has Jesus “breathing” the Spirit upon the community in preparation for their work of disciple making. My Lutheran heritage, though it is more comfortable in preaching Jesus as the “sacrifice of God” for the forgiveness of sin, still considers Jesus as the “servant of God” to imitate in the life of “good works.” Lutherans give focus to the Word as the “image of Christ” is formed in the believer. Dallas Willard plainly says that “immersing the apprentices at all levels of

¹ Especially helpful when considering the Message and the Medium is Chapter Nine “The Medium Really is the Message,” in Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003), 146-162.

growth in the Trinitarian presence” is the single major component for a prospering community of believers.² Leonard Sweet writes of the work of Jesus united with the ministry Spirit for the present and future formation of the disciple. Spiritual formation in the future must present the qualities, character and activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for and in the emerging culture of western world. The Christian “message” is both God “for you” and “with you.”

If the Trinity is the “goal” of spiritual formation, how is this to be understood? Certainly, one can understand this as learning “about” the Trinity. If this were the standard accepted, then learning the doctrines that teach of the Trinity would be the goal. However, from my exploration of the Gospel’s formation ministry, just learning “about” the Trinity is inadequate to the fullness of Jesus’ preferred future for his followers. For instance, Matthew’s Gospel describes the disciples as “becoming like” the Father (Matthew 5:48), while Mark’s Gospel anticipates a “listening to Jesus” in order to begin thinking as he thinks (Mark 9:7). Lutherans, following Luther, can understand that the Word impresses upon the Christian its imprint in both doctrinal and practical terms – both in what one believes and in how one lives. Willard advocates a “whole life” lived consistent with Jesus’ own pattern in thought and deed in order to live as he lived. Sweet, likewise, advocates a communal learning environment that makes Jesus the “reference point” for Christian relationships to one another and to the world. Thus, “Trinity” is not for the Christian to just “learn about.” Our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to be known personally, really, intimately and creatively.

² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 240.

These realities of knowledge, or knowing, are vital to our understanding of the “message” of spiritual formation practiced as Trinitarian Immersion. For instance, Jesus makes “knowing” the focus of the Life God intends for his followers: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Luther, following the Apostle Paul, writes of the character of “knowing” by comparing the Christ/Christian relationship with the intimacy of male/female in marriage. Willard comments on the results of this “knowing” between Christ and Christian such that the Christian becomes like Christ. Sweet upholds the “intimacy of knowledge” that undergirds the biblical sense of knowing. Based upon an understanding of the ancient word *yada* used in Genesis 4:1, he writes:

Adam knew Eve, and they conceived...and something was born. When you know someone or something, when you really know them in them in the biblical sense of knowing, you conceive...you give birth...you create...you bring forth art. In other words, knowing is ultimately an aesthetic of creativity.³

Then, as a necessary expansion of the “message” of spiritual formation that is Trinitarian Immersion, Sweet offers the following series of creativities:

When God knew God, God conceived...and the universe was born. When God knew the universe, the universe conceived...and Christ was born. When Christ knew the universe, Christ conceived...and the church was born. When you know Christ, you conceive...and a new life in the Spirit is born. When people know other people, they conceive...and friendships, marriages, and children are born. When you know yourself, you conceive...and wisdom about fulfillment of your creative, re-creative, and pro-creative purpose for living is born.⁴

³ Sweet, *AquaChurch*, 219.

⁴ *Ibid*, 219-220.

Based upon Sweet's series of creativities, the "message" of spiritual formation is expanded into six arenas of "knowing" that engage Trinitarian Immersion in a more "perfect," or complete and holistic, way:

1. Knowing the universe;
2. Knowing Christ;
3. Knowing the Church;
4. Knowing the Spirit;
5. Knowing the neighbor;
6. Knowing the self.

In other words, spiritual formation "shaped along the lines of the Son" that is Trinitarian, comes to know the Father, Son and Spirit; comes to know the universe he has created; comes to know the people he has redeemed; comes to know the neighbor he has provided; and comes to know the self he has called forth into the Light. The appropriate understanding for the "goal" of spiritual formation is to "become like" the Trinity. The remainder of my proposed solution considers "how."

The "Medium" of Spiritual Formation

The simplest way I can state the "medium" is "immersion," which is the "process" of spiritual formation. The process, I believe, involves a Ministry and a Method. With this in mind, I "hear" three interactive ministries as vital for the emerging future relative to spiritual formation. Like the Global Positioning System satellites that serve as technological reference points for people traveling anywhere on the planet, so these three "ministries" serve for anyone mentoring the learning relationships of the future. Let me help you to hear what I hear.

Spiritual Formation as “Exposure”

In order to help his disciples move beyond their understandings, Jesus dealt with the core beliefs that governed their response in each of the various circumstances. Their fear and unbelief were indicators that their core beliefs were inadequate to the Life that Jesus intended to develop. In their case, so much like us, they believed they had to care for their own needs, and did not believe that their heavenly Father wanted the best for them. They believed they knew better how to live their lives. The ministry of Exposure reveals the core beliefs held by both the spiritual formation mentor and those on the spiritual formation quest. The ministry of Exposure uncovers our spiritual deafness in order to “hear” the conviction of the Spirit as he exposes the ideas and images that govern our spiritual quest. This ministry answers the difficult question: “what do I/you/we actually believe?” Spiritual formation into the future exposes what a person actually believes about God, about humanity, about their understanding of the relationship between the two, and about the goal and process of their spiritual quest.

What are possible “methods” to accomplish this “ministry”? Three primary activities are to be developed in the spiritual formation community: ask, listen and observe. Ask questions. Questions can be personal, of other people, even of God. Jesus did. Mark’s Gospel shows Jesus asking probing questions in order to draw out the actual core beliefs of those around him. Listen carefully. People will offer their response, which provides opportunity for further probing. More importantly, listen to the response the Spirit gives. Jesus did. Observe behaviors. What people say and what they actually do, teaches Jesus, are good indicators of the actual core beliefs that govern the person (Matthew 6:21; 12:33-35; 15:18-19; etc).

Spiritual Formation as “Encouragement”

In order to move his disciples into the Life he desired for them (John 14:12), Jesus taught the reality of his, and our, heavenly Father as a living Being. In addition, he lived in a mature relational response to him as guided by the Spirit. Both his teachings and his living express these necessary, and profound, spiritual formation truths: knowing and living. The ministry of Encouragement seeks to do the same. The ministry of Encouragement evaluates the continuing questions: “who is my God, really, and how do I respond to him through my life?” Spiritual formation ahead of the future deeply knows the Father and deeply depends on the Spirit. The ministry of Encouragement experiences God’s goodness, faithfulness, forgiveness and concern for his children – all of them. The ministry of Encouragement considers who he is, what he does, when he responds, where he is, why he does what he does, how he intends life to be lived, etc. The ministry of Encouragement matures the disciple through “immersion” into thoughts, life, passions, and activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (John 14:23).

Again, what are potential “methods” to accomplish this “ministry”? Without doubt, this ministry is as multi-faceted as any diamond, and just as beautiful. Our God is known through teaching, learning, experience, imagination, thinking, relationship and images. Through stories and questions, visual aids and daily living, Jesus sought to develop his followers. The various options for guiding people to know the Father and to learn from Jesus how to live could be as varied as the people being spiritually formed.⁵

⁵ Helpful here is Chapter Six, “Whispering to the Soul,” in Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, 95-107.

At this point, the simplest expression of practicing Encouragement I have discovered is Dr. Sweet's four-fold E.P.I.C. faith formation ministry.⁶ Just as our lives are grounded in our real beliefs of the living God, so our real Life is encouraged through thought-full and real-life application of Jesus' "Way" that is Experiential, Participatory, Image-Driven and Connective. In an E.P.I.C. way, simultaneously, Christian spiritual formation is encouraged.

Spiritual Formation as "Engagement"

In order to guide his followers in the adventure of life in proper relationship with our heavenly Father, Jesus provided some great examples to consider. One such example reveals Jesus washing feet. Here, Jesus had to do something very practical and purposeful with his body. What he did that evening was deliberate and appropriate to the desired result. Through his actions, he "loved." He loved by simply washing. The ministry of Engagement explores the necessary question: "how do I put my new belief into practical action?" Spiritual formation ahead of the future gives consistent and meaningful direction for the spiritual use of the body in relationship with our heavenly Father, and in the daily life of the disciple. The ministry of Engagement learns and creatively engages the disciplines for the spiritual life for the purpose of "hearing" the regular guidance offered by the living Spirit.

Again, how? The clearest way is by "being with" Jesus (Acts 4:13). This brings the four Gospels, and the life of Jesus, to the forefront of the spiritual formation quest. In

⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

order to teach those who want “to live the life Jesus lived,” teach them “to live the Life Jesus lived.” Teaching people to think and live like Jesus involves not only the study of the Gospels, but also the application of his teaching (Matthew 7:24-29). The “method” is to engage the life of Jesus in full chronological order, observing his patterns of work and rest, of “power” and “service,” of relationships and responsibilities. “Being with Jesus” in this way engages the disciple while traveling with him, listening to him, observing him, and learning from him how to live today. Without doubt, this effort is best engaged in a community of like-minded learners. And, without doubt, this effort is best engaged in ways appropriate to the local cultural context.

The Importance of Triangulation

Each of the above ministries, in isolation, is inadequate to the task of spiritual formation aimed into the future. Regular Exposure of core beliefs apart from the necessary Encouragement and the appropriate Engagement reduces the hope and support vital to spiritual formation. Regularly providing Encouragement with little regard to Exposure develops the knowledge base without dealing with the core issues. Regular Engagement apart from Exposure and Encouragement insures activity without transformation. Similarly, the three ministries are not offered as a solution for use in a linear, sequential program. For instance, choosing one belief to expose followed by the necessary encouragement leading to the appropriate engagement before moving to other life arenas will lead, in my opinion, to congregations drafting a list of “wrong beliefs, right beliefs, and acceptable behaviors.” These ministries must be inter-activated if the desired result is to be achieved.

In order to inter-actively embed these three ministries into the spiritual formation of the community, the navigational practice of “triangulation” must be implemented. Triangulation is the practice of using two or more stationary, and well-recognized, reference points in order to discern one’s current position. For example, when navigating cross-country, triangulation takes a compass reading on each reference point, draws a line through each reference point based upon the compass bearing, and locates the intersection point, which is the current position of the navigator. Then, knowing the current position, aware of the local terrain, and knowing the destination, the navigator can determine the next course of action that accomplishes the goal. Then, once at a new location, the practice of triangulation can be used again. It is important to remember that each time the navigator moves, his or her relationship to the reference points changes. Thus, regular evaluation is important as the quest is undertaken.

The ministries of Exposure, Encouragement and Engagement are the “reference points” for navigating the journey of spiritual formation into the future. The navigator of the spiritual quest must understand each “reference point” and the practice of triangulation. In actual practice, “triangulation” activates the ministries of Exposure, Encouragement and Engagement. Once activated, the connectivity of each ministry offers simultaneous, directional guidance for the spiritual quest. Guidance is offered, and regularly adjusted, as the spiritual formation journey exposes the inappropriate ideas and images that pull us away from the journey; as the appropriate ideas and images are encouraged to move us toward the journey; and as the local cultural context benefits through our engagement through the journey. Those on the spiritual quests of the future must also be prepared to navigate their way – whether alone or with a group.

In light of the above, my solution to over-active, less-than-transformational congregational activity is like the seatbelts of your car. The seatbelt has a moving part and a fixed part. Only when the two are properly aligned and connected is the seat belt useful. The preferred future for the formation of God's people holds the "Trinity" as the goal and "immersion" as the process. God is the "message," and the "medium" is through our lives "immersed" into his Life.

Two Final Thoughts

First, spiritual formation is not a simple process. In fact, prone as we are to consider "rocket science" as something most people do not understand,⁷ spiritual formation is even more difficult, more involved. Rocket science is merely a matter of physics, chemistry and mathematics. Spiritual formation is a matter of each individual shaped through personality, experiences, cultural context and global forces all under the careful tutelage of the Trinity. The solution I have offered is, in practice, more complex than "rocket science." As such, implementation of my solution anticipates several intentional efforts for the spiritual formation mentor:

1. My solution demands that the spiritual formation mentor truly be a "voracious learner." Multiple strands of learning must be discovered, synthesized, and communicated. Along with being a voracious learner, mentors of the spiritual quest of the future will need to be "voracious thinkers."
2. My solution demands the development of "ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."⁸ The seemingly lost arts of the spiritual life will need to be resurrected for the spiritual quests of the future. Mentors will need to participate fully in the "life of the Spirit" as they offer direction to those whom they serve.

⁷ I am thinking of common phrases such as "you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure this out," or "come on, it's not rocket science."

⁸ Revelation 2 and 3.

3. My solution demands relationships, even “dirty” relationships. The spiritual formation mentor of the future must know how the Scriptures relate to life. They must know how to make friends, and keep them. He or she must know God and people.
4. My solution demands a working knowledge of the three ministries. Mentors of the future must know how to lovingly expose core beliefs, how to enthusiastically imagine our Living God, and how to engage the spiritual quest with those whom they mentor.
5. My solution demands fluidity and flexibility. If the culture seems to be in continuous motion, that suggests the people are also in constant motion. Mentors will need to guide people on the move, respecting where they “are” while directing who they are to “be.”

Realistically, I believe my solution actually means more work, not less. The pastor or teacher who coaches another in the partnership of spiritual formation must be prepared for the important work ahead.

A second thought: spiritual formation is not a three, seven or twelve step method in order to “guarantee” the intended result. There is no spiritual formation “guarantee” in the future; there is only preparation for the future. Both my Teacher and my mentors refuse to outline a “this is how you do it” approach to spiritual formation.⁹ Jesus treated people with dignity, respecting their personhood and individuality. Thankfully, both mentors advocate a “this is how you think it” approach. My solution advises against a “do as I do” approach, and advocates a “think as I think” approach.¹⁰ Any approach to the spiritual formation of an individual or group is not to be reduced to a step-by-step program. What could be so deceptive about a simple, stepped program of spiritual formation? The deception lurks within the human heart guided by the wrong image of the

⁹ I would observe that my Lutheran heritage attempted such a specific program with less-than-enthusiastic results.

¹⁰ Gratitude is here expressed for Rev. Dr. Charles S. Mueller for helping me both to understand and practice this approach.

process of spiritual formation. The problem, as I “hear” it, is our tendency to “organize” and “objectify” the spiritual experience so that some level of acceptable accomplishment can be recognized, admitted and applauded. Jesus deals with this tendency in Matthew 5 by providing concise Exposure (“you have heard that it was said”) followed by specific Encouragement (“but I tell you”) for the purpose of Engagement with the Father (“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”).

At the heart of the issue is the question: once we are “saved by grace,” is it the external observance of the Law that shapes us into the image of Christ, or is it the inner workings of the Spirit who matures us into the image of Christ? The Apostle Paul mentors spiritual formation in the Spirit:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. ... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16-25)

Through the Spirit, the Christian is immersed into the Trinitarian Reality, and is prepared to immerse others through the ministries of Exposure, Encouragement and Engagement. To what end? *“God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son.”* (Romans 8:29, *The Message*)

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