

2005

Living Waters: An Invitation to Contemplative Spirituality for the Quail Springs Church of Christ

Wyatt E. Fenno
wyatt.fenno@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/dmin_theses



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Organizational Communication Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), [Rhetoric Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fenno, Wyatt E., "Living Waters: An Invitation to Contemplative Spirituality for the Quail Springs Church of Christ" (2005). *Doctor of Ministry Project/Theses*. 9.
https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/dmin_theses/9

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Doctor of Ministry at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Project/Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

ABSTRACT

This project addressed an acknowledged need for ministry action to promote and facilitate communal spiritual formation in the present and future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. The focus of the project was to present a model of contemplative spirituality determined to be accessible to the ministry context at Quail Springs. In addressing the problem of community fragmentation at Quail Springs, this model was offered as a means of grace to deepen faith and strengthen relationships in church life at Quail Springs. A pilot group of six women and six men served as the working group for this project. The process and procedure of an eight-session ministry intervention taught that Christian spirituality is a “lived experience” and that the goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God.

The results of this study indicate that the pilot group eagerly embraced this model and found it accessible to the ministry context at Quail Springs. The experience of group members proved that the model functioned as a means of grace to facilitate individual as well as communal spiritual formation. The thesis concludes with implications and suggestions related to how this model can have a continuing impact on fostering spiritual formation in the future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

LIVING WATERS:
AN INVITATION TO CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY
FOR THE QUAIL SPRINGS CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Wyatt E. Fenno

April 2005

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Doctor of Ministry

Date

Thesis Committee

Chair

To the pilot group, for bearing witness
that the living waters we tasted together
truly make a difference and enable us
to live and participate in the life of God

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my advisors, Fred Aquino and David Wray, for their support, affirmation, and encouragement. I am thankful that Fred is a teacher and that it is not just something he does. Fred's support has emboldened my confidence and strengthened my faith. I appreciate David's willingness to spend time with me whether under an old oak tree or elsewhere. The remembrance of moments with David inspires me as I consider how I have been blessed by being in the presence of this godly man. I want to thank Charles Siburt. Charles was God's witness who befriended and encouraged me at a critical time in my ministry life. Since then, Charles has continued to be a source of encouragement and ministry support. I value his love and friendship.

I express my gratitude to each member of the pilot group. They inspired me by the way they eagerly embraced the invitation to contemplative spirituality. I was encouraged in observing how they were spiritually shaped and transformed by the project. I am especially thankful to George Faulk and Trey Finley for the significant roles they played in the process and procedure of the ministry intervention.

I want to thank Paul Varner and Monema Stephens for proofreading the manuscript. They provided an invaluable service to me by sacrificing much of their personal time. I am thankful for their willingness to take a personal interest in me and to share their own thoughts and ideas along the way. I also thank Carolyn Thompson for her expertise in the final editing of the thesis.

I am grateful to my fellow ministers, the office staff, and the elders of the Quail Springs Church of Christ for their support and encouragement as I worked toward completion of this project. I am especially thankful for the support of my ministry assistant, Madonna Hayes, and her husband, Fred.

I thank God for my precious wife and best friend, Thu. Without her love and support, this would have never happened. I also want to express appreciation to my two sons, Taylor and Timothy, and my daughter, Tiana. My children have never known a time when I was not going to school. I am thankful for their willingness to wait as I often had to take time away from them to complete my doctoral work.

Finally, I want to thank those special people, past and present, some now asleep in the arms of Jesus, whose lived experience of Christian spirituality encouraged me to pursue God and the life of ministry. I stand on their shoulders. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

My hope is that the fruit of this ministry experience lives beyond me in the hearts of pilot group members. By God's grace, I trust that what has been initiated will continue to create access to streams of living water for the present and future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Title of the Project	1
	Ministry Setting Analysis	2
	Demographics	2
	Origin and Growth History	4
	Significant Ministry Decisions	9
	Present Ministry Context	17
	The Problem and Purpose	21
	The Problem	21
	The Purpose	22
	Basic Assumptions	23
	Delimitations	23
	Conclusion	24
II.	THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES	25
	The Goal of Christian Spirituality	26
	The Role of Contemplative Spirituality	31
	Creating Space	32
	Imaging Christ	43
	The “One Another” Life	48

	Conclusions	54
III.	METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION	55
	Methodology	55
	Evaluation	80
	Conclusion	84
IV.	RESULTS	85
	Faulk’s Report: Independent Expert	85
	Finley’s Notes: Participant as Observer	91
	Personal Narratives	95
	Conclusions	101
V.	CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE ACTIONS	102
	Conclusions	102
	Implications	104
	Future Actions	106
VI.	WORKS CITED	109
VII.	APPENDICES	114
	A. Family of God at Quail Springs	114
	B. Rule of Life	116
	C. The “One Another” Life	117
	D. The Importance of “Story”	118
	E. Seeing God in Your Past	120
	F. An Untold Story: Group Process as a Pilgrimage	125
	G. A Theological Template	126

H.	The Lived Experience of Christian Spirituality: The Journey	129
I.	Taking Time to Be “Holy”	131
J.	Some Benefits of Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines	133
K.	Creating “Space”: Silence and Solitude	135
L.	The Shield of St. Patrick (paraphrased)	139
M.	Lectio Divine Brochure	140
N.	The Mountain Survival Problem	142
O.	Some Basic Assumptions about Spiritual Discernment	145
P.	Liturgical Actions: The Rehearsal of Our Faith	146
Q.	The Lived Experience of Christian Spirituality: Collaborating with God in Our Future	149
R.	George Faulk Letter	151
S.	Trey Finley Letter	152

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This project addressed an acknowledged need for ministry action to promote and facilitate spiritual formation in the life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. The focus of the project was to present a model of contemplative spirituality accessible to the ministry context at Quail Springs. Chapter 1 begins with an analysis of the ministry context at Quail Springs followed by a presentation of the problem and purpose, basic assumptions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 presents the theological perspectives that establish the framework for the methodology used in the project. Then, in chapter 3 a description of the ministry intervention is given. In addition, the means used for evaluating the project is presented. Chapter 4 contains analysis and reports from the three means of evaluation. Finally, chapter 5 presents a summary of conclusions and implications of this project for future ministry.

Title of the Project

The title of this project was *Living Waters: An Invitation to Contemplative Spirituality for the Quail Springs Church of Christ*. Jesus used the expression “living water” to describe the gift of eternal life and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). Scripture uses living water metaphorically to refer to a gift from God that quenches a person’s thirst and makes life possible. Since a spring is living water, the title

was especially appropriate to our church context at Quail Springs. The ministry intervention intended to teach and illustrate how the Christian spiritual life is best understood as participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. During each session of the ministry intervention, I introduced actions of contemplative spirituality to encourage and facilitate this participation in the life and activity of God.¹ The effort was also made to show that the process of spiritual formation is not just to be an isolated, personal experience, rather one that is communal as we, together, consider God and act ourselves into a new way of being.

Ministry Setting Analysis

Demographics

The Quail Springs Church of Christ is located in the rapidly growing and developing northwest quadrant of Oklahoma City² just west of Quail Springs Mall on May Avenue. This location provides easy access to a major highway for convenient,

¹Contemplative practices (e.g., spiritual disciplines and exercises) create space in our busy and complicated lives. This space creates opportunities to explore our thoughts and examine our hearts. Most importantly, this space heightens our awareness of God's presence and of the invitation he offers us to participate in his life.

²While the church building is within the Oklahoma City city limits, many members of the Quail Springs church live inside the Edmond city limits. Therefore, the church seems to identify more with Edmond than with Oklahoma City. This is consistent with the fact that the membership also reflects the demographics of Edmond in matters related to household income, median age, and educational attainment (in Edmond, the average household income is \$76,312, the median age is 34.5, and more than 47% of Edmond residents age 25 or over possess at least a bachelor's degree). See "2004 Economic Abstract" [on-line]. Edmond, OK: Edmond Economic Development Authority; available from http://www.eeda.com/down/images/2004_Economic_Abstract.pdf; Internet; accessed 17 June 2004.

crosstown travel. The congregation consists primarily of middle and upper middle class members. Most of the adult members of the Quail Springs church are between the ages of 25 and 54. A majority of adult members in the congregation have a college degree. This affluent congregation has a weekly budget of \$31,800, or approximately \$30.78 per capita.

The membership at Quail Springs is characterized by an atmosphere of theological openness.³ At the same time, there remains a solid conviction that Scripture is the word of God and that we must submit to its authority.⁴ Quail Springs eagerly embraces an identity as a healing place for those who have been wounded by their life experiences.⁵ Many Quail Springs members have left what they would describe as “legalistic” Churches of Christ and have found the grace-centered worship and preaching at Quail Springs to provide renewal and encouragement.

³This trait has prompted the majority within Church of Christ circles to brand Quail Springs as a “progressive,” or “liberal,” church. The branding is for the most part associated with worship and ministry practices that are viewed to be different from those generally associated with Churches of Christ. For information that helps explain these kinds of tensions, I recommend the following resources: Leonard Allen and Lynn Anderson, eds., *The Transforming of a Tradition: Churches of Christ in the New Millennium* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2001); Jeff W. Childers, Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese, *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001); and C. Leonard Allen, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) the Modern Age* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood, 2004). For an intellectual history of Churches of Christ, see Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁴A congregational profile inventory during the fall of 2002 showed that 95% of the 258 respondents affirmed a high view of Scripture as being the word of God.

⁵The word “healing” is found in the mission statement as well as in one of the ten core values that serve to define the Quail Springs Church of Christ (appendix A).

Over the past few years, a growing ministry in the church has been children's ministry. The worship ministry, youth ministry, adult education, and "Connections" (i.e., small group) ministry are also featured ministries at Quail Springs. In addition to a full range of ministry programs, the congregation supported the establishment of the Cross and Crown Mission in March 2001. This mission continues to provide significant ministry among the poor near a downtown section of Oklahoma City.

Currently, the congregation has seven full-time ministers and two part-time children's ministers.⁶ The church has fifteen elders who provide shepherding and oversight to congregational life. Less than half of the current membership has been at Quail Springs for more than ten years.⁷ Over 65% of the present membership have life-long association with the Churches of Christ.⁸

Origin and Growth History⁹

The Quail Springs Church of Christ was originally established as the Church of

⁶During 2003, the ministry staff experienced a significant season of transition. During the year, four full-time ministers left (Membership, Children's, Connections / Adult Education, and Outreach). Two part-time children's ministers were hired to replace the full-time minister position in August 2003. Existing staff assumed and shared the other ministry responsibilities. In May of 2004, a new Connections minister was hired and arrangements were made to make the Worship minister position full-time.

⁷This information is based on the congregational profile inventory.

⁸This information is based on the congregational profile as well as personal observation of church life over the past twenty-one months.

⁹This information is derived from bulletin archives of the Quail Springs Church of Christ, informal interviews, and Robert Mark Henderson, "Leadership and the Life of God: Distribution of Ministerial Gifts and Leadership Practices at the Quail Springs Church of Christ" (D.Min. thesis, Abilene Christian University, March 2004).

Christ in the Village in August 1953.¹⁰ The church began with an idea and was started by a visitation campaign. On July 23, 1953, twenty-six interested people met in a home to discuss the organization of a church. At a second meeting, plans were made to begin meeting as a church. The first meeting was held on August 2, with fifty-four people present. In the fall of 1953, the church acquired land and made plans for a building. They moved into the partly completed building in September 1954. During the first year, average attendance more than doubled. By June 1956 average attendance was about 180, and by the close of 1960 the average attendance had grown to be about 300.

Throughout the turbulent 1960s, the congregation's growth was measurable. By the end of 1971, average attendance was about 450. The first significant event to affect the congregation's health occurred on October 1, 1972, when the preacher, Mac Layton, led a group of more than fifty members out at the close of the morning worship assembly.¹¹ This public display represented the culmination of a conflict that existed between Layton and some of the elders.¹² In June 1973, the Village Church called a new minister, Don Vinzant, who worked to rebuild the congregation. Vinzant possessed a calm and gentle disposition. He helped the congregation recover and rebuild after the

¹⁰The Village is an incorporated community within Oklahoma City. In 1953, the Village was part of a growth pattern that was expanding the northwest side of Oklahoma City.

¹¹The North MacArthur Church of Christ in Oklahoma City was formed in 1973 as a result of this split under the leadership of Mac Layton, the preacher who left the Village Church.

¹²It is interesting to note that the bulletin archives are empty following August 3, 1972, until January 4, 1973.

painful October 1972 rupture. During his three-year tenure, average attendance grew to almost 500. In August 1976, Vinzant announced that he would be moving to be the minister for a church in Austin, Texas. In his final written charge to the Village congregation presented in a bulletin insert dated August 11, 1976, Vinzant's words were prophetic: "The best is yet to be. . . . For the Village church this has to be the case. You must move right along to your goal of 1000 in your twenty-fifth anniversary year of 1978."

After Vinzant's departure, the elders asked Ronnie White to do some interim preaching for the church. At the time, White was a senior at Oklahoma Christian College¹³ and was a member of the Village Church. White was in his last semester and was to receive his bachelor's degree in December 1976. The determination to hire Ronnie White as preaching minister was one of the most significant decisions made in the congregation's history.

When White began what would be a twenty-three year ministry, the congregation stood firmly in the traditional mainstream of Churches of Christ. For the most part, the congregation shared the sectarian point of view that only those in Churches of Christ were saved and members of the one true church. In addition, the Sunday worship style followed a simple, predictable routine common among other Churches of Christ. Since White's religious heritage was not in Churches of Christ, he brought a new perspective to the pulpit. From the beginning, White's preaching emphasized the grace of God. He subtly advocated a less exclusive and more ecumenical understanding of the body of

¹³This is now Oklahoma Christian University.

Christ. White's ministry also served to create a positive environment for worship, ministry, and church growth.

By the fall of 1978, average attendance for Sunday worship had grown to be over 650. On October 8, 1978, the church celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. There were 856 in attendance for Sunday worship on this special occasion. Vinzant's prophetic words were being fulfilled. The church had outgrown its building in the Village. On June 13, 1979, the congregation broke ground for a new building at its present location on North May Avenue. The church changed its name to the Quail Springs Church of Christ when the new facility was dedicated on November 9, 1980. The dedication service drew more than 1,800. By the end of 1981, average attendance had grown to almost 1,200. Attendance reached this high point and then through the 1980s slightly declined so that average attendance in 1990 was 1,055. Since 1990, average attendance has varied between 1,000 and 1,200. The average attendance for the first half of 2004 was 1,012.

The congregation was stunned when White announced his resignation in November 1998, ending a twenty-three year ministry. Very few members had been at Quail Springs long enough to remember the church without him. White's influence was so weighty that many in the church wondered whether they could continue without him. During White's tenure, the congregation had changed locations, changed names, and more than doubled in size. Under White's preaching, the church, in many respects, had changed its identity as well. The period following White's departure was a significant time of transition for the congregation.

At this time, the elders asked Don Hebbard to be an "intentional interim

minister”¹⁴ with an agreement for him to preach for about six months until a new pulpit minister could be hired. Hebbard had served as an interim minister elsewhere on four previous occasions. Hebbard, glad to accept the challenge, compared the situation to the Israelites crossing the Jordan River. It was a time of spiritual crossing, and Hebbard saw his role as one to hold the people’s hand and help them across the river. While the elders were anxious to hire a new pulpit minister, Hebbard counseled them to allow an appropriate period of time to grieve White’s departure and to prepare for his successor. The elders heeded Hebbard’s advice and began an intentional transition period that would last eleven months. Hebbard’s preaching endeared him to the congregation. His pastoral approach assisted Quail Springs in its move from one era to the next. The elders credit Hebbard’s work as a major factor in building momentum for the hiring of a new pulpit minister.

Mark Henderson was called to be the new senior minister and began his ministry at Quail Springs the first week of October 1999. Since the beginning of Henderson’s tenure, he has continued to build upon White’s legacy by preaching God’s grace and advancing a non-sectarian view of the body of Christ. In addition, Henderson’s leadership has guided the church to participate in a number of ministry opportunities and cooperative

¹⁴This is the way it was formally announced to the congregation. Don Hebbard and his family had moved to Oklahoma City about sixteen months previous to this decision. Don had come to teach at Oklahoma Christian University and to lead the Institute for Marriage and Family. At the time, he was associate professor of family ministry at Oklahoma Christian University.

efforts that provide concrete expressions of a non-sectarian view of the body of Christ.¹⁵

Significant Ministry Decisions¹⁶

Beginning in the 1990s, the leadership made several significant ministry decisions that affected congregational life. These decisions often challenged the status quo. Nevertheless, they were made by visionary leaders who saw a meaningful and desirable future. In some cases, these determinations upset members and caused them to leave Quail Springs and go to other churches. These ministry decisions are cited here because of what they expose regarding matters of spiritual formation and communal life in the history of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. The attitude of theological openness at Quail Springs explains why the leadership was willing to take risks and make these kinds of choices. Sadly, what seems to be revealed is that life at Quail Springs has too often been characterized as a collection of individuals united upon personal preferences instead of a community joined together by essential matters of Christian faith.

Praise Team

In May 1990, Ronnie White took several church leaders from Quail Springs with him to a leadership conference at Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington,

¹⁵Two examples suffice: In July of 2000, Quail Springs Church of Christ and Quail Springs Baptist Church celebrated together their first Freedom and Faith Festival. This event received state-wide attention (see Pat Gilliland, "Congregations Shun Differences for Celebration," *Daily Oklahoman*, 1 July 2000, sec. B, 1-2); and Henderson was a member of the executive committee of the Billy Graham Mission and led the congregation in a limited involvement with this event that was held June 2003 in Oklahoma City.

¹⁶Information derived from bulletin archives, Henderson, and informal interviews.

Illinois. This experience was life-changing for White. He and the leaders returned with a new vision for the way a church could function more effectively. In September 1990, White introduced a worship team in the Sunday night assembly as part of a movement toward a more contemporary worship style. The introduction of the worship team resulted in strong, negative reactions by a number of concerned church members. As a result, a February 1991 unsigned bulletin article announced that the worship service experiment had ended. However, there was a majority in the congregation that supported the contemporary style with a worship team. After the announcement, this group met with the elders and criticized them for changing course. At this point, White and the elders decided to hire a church-growth consultant to come and do an assessment of the congregation beginning in June 1991.¹⁷ Most dramatic among the recommendations was to begin two Sunday morning worship services with two different styles: one would be for those who favored a more predictable, traditional style; the other for the majority of the congregation who favored the contemporary style with a worship team. The elders adopted the recommendation, and the congregation started having two Sunday morning worship services in December 1991.¹⁸ While an overwhelming majority of the members

¹⁷John W. Ellas was the consultant hired. He was the Director of the Center for Church Growth in Houston, TX. For an understanding of his church growth philosophy at the time, see John W. Ellas, *Church Growth through Groups: Strategies for Varying Levels of Christian Community* (Houston, TX: Center for Church Growth, 1990).

¹⁸About one hundred fifty persons attended the traditional service the first week. However, thirty families left that day, pledging not to return. By the fall of 1992, average attendance at the traditional service was less than one hundred. This attendance continued to decline in following years. In March 2002, after average attendance had dropped to about thirty, the elders decided to discontinue the traditional service.

embraced the change to a more contemporary worship style, the change was costly. During the first two years after the change, the congregation lost over 250 members, including the top five contributors to the church budget. In spite of the loss, the elders and White held firm to their decision that this change was best for the future of Quail Springs. Gary Bruce was hired in October 1994 as a part-time worship minister. In May 2004, Bruce became full-time in this role. Chiefly because of Bruce's spiritual leadership, a positive, contemporary worship experience has now become central to our congregation's life and identity.

Small Group Ministry

One other dramatic recommendation from the church assessment was for the congregation to implement a small-groups ministry. The stated purpose for this decision was to respond to the urgent need for more effective ways to nurture one another, assimilate new members, and reach out to the unchurched. In August 1992, Eddie Stephens was hired as the first small-groups minister. Once the small-groups ministry was initiated, groups were encouraged to meet on Sunday evenings. The transition to small groups led to the eventual abandonment of a traditional Sunday evening service. The small groups or "Connections" ministry, has also become one of the defining ministries for congregational life and identity. Barry Thomas became the new small-groups minister in June 1998, replacing Stephens, who had left earlier in the year. In the fall of 2002, Thomas organized and led an all-church celebration, "Ten Years of Christian Community." Thomas left Quail Springs in May 2003 after five quality years of investing

in the small-groups ministry. Following his departure, the number of small groups fell from about fifty-five to around thirty-five. In June 2004, Trey Finley began his work as Connections minister at Quail Springs.

Purpose-Driven Church

In the fall of 1997, Ronnie White led the church in implementing a new church ministry model based on Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church*.¹⁹ In the beginning, White focused on matters related to membership. White was filled with optimism that this model would mobilize a plan to aid the Christians at Quail Springs in unprecedented ways. Beginning in April 1998, a reorganized adult education program began that offered a curriculum that would mirror and advance the goals of the purpose-driven church model. In September 1998, it was announced that White would begin a series of sermons that would address "maturity," the second phase of the model. This series promised to provide Quail Springs members with a pathway of spiritual growth that would lead them to life on a higher plane than they had previously walked. In addition, a Maturity 201 class was announced to assist members in the spiritual disciplines of reading and reflecting on Scripture, prayer, giving, and fellowship.

The purpose-driven model was received well by the members at Quail Springs. The model promoted spiritual growth and intended to facilitate communal development. The paradigm seemed to give the congregation a new vision for church life and ministry. In 1998, several new ministers were hired specifically to provide ministry support based

¹⁹See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

on the new ministry model. However, the purpose-driven model experienced a short life. When White resigned in November 1998, the purpose-driven church model began fading from the life and consciousness of the Quail Springs Church. Since October 1999, Mark Henderson and other staff ministers now view the purpose-driven model as a helpful tool but not necessarily as a grid to be placed on church life at Quail Springs.²⁰

Worship Nite

In 2001, issues related to what was called “Worship Nite” affected the Quail Springs church in dramatic ways. Worship Nite had a long history. Not long after the addition of the worship team, a small group of worship team participants and other members began gathering in homes. These participants were musicians, and in these gatherings they would sing contemporary Christian music with instrumental accompaniment. They soon began to outgrow the homes and began looking for alternative sites to meet. The elders at Quail Springs had never discouraged this group from meeting, but there was an understanding that the group would not be allowed to use the church building for these gatherings. Through the years, churches from other denominations allowed the group to use their buildings. In 1999, the group was meeting monthly at Southern Hills Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Edmond. Attendance had grown to between 75 and 115. These numbers included members and leaders of Quail Springs and their guests.

In late 2000, Southern Hills Christian informed the group that their building

²⁰In many respects, the current vision, mission, and core values statement (see appendix A) expresses the purposes and values of the purpose-driven church model.

would soon be unavailable for use due to a renovation project. The group began to look for another location to meet. A member of Quail Springs, with no connection to Worship Nite, brought this situation to one of the elders and asked if Quail Springs could host the group on a monthly basis. This elder agreed that the time was right to consider bringing Worship Nite to our building. He then presented the request to the other elders in January 2001. The elders agreed to enter into a time of prayer, study, discussion, and debate concerning the issue. After a short time, the elders agreed that approval to bring Worship Nite to Quail Springs would not be given without a two-thirds majority vote. At the same time, debate was opened regarding the Articles of Incorporation for the church.²¹ During the course of the discussions, one of the elders pointed out that one of the articles expressly prohibited the use of instrumental music in any of the activities of our congregation.²² The elders agreed that this particular article had archaic language and really had no bearing on how they saw the religious purpose of Quail Springs as a

²¹The “Articles of Incorporation” was a statement of religious purpose and was required in order for the church to incorporate as a religious non-profit organization in Oklahoma. This particular document was originally drafted in 1961 when the Village Church first incorporated.

²²Article IV read as follows: “The purpose or purposes for which the corporation is formed are: To encourage and build up churches that will in all their work, worship, and teaching, use and employ only that which is authorized and required in the New Testament, rejecting all creeds, innovations and devices of man, such as the use of mechanical instruments of music in connection with the worship and of any societies other than the Church of Christ in carrying out the work of God, or the teaching of any unscriptural or speculative theories on unfulfilled prophecies such as the personal return and reign of Christ on earth, known as the millenium [*sic*] theory, and to see that in the event of a scism [*sic*] within this congregation as a result of departure from such purposes all right and title to any and all such physical assets of the congregation shall at such time vest in the group maintaining the purposes set forth herein, whether such group be in the majority or in the minority.”

congregation of God's people. The consensus among the elders was that this article needed to be amended regardless of how the Worship Nite debate unfolded.

On May 23, 2001, seventeen elders voted on a motion to allow Worship Nite to be held at the Quail Springs church building. The motion passed by a twelve-to-five margin, just enough to cover the two-thirds majority mandate that the elders had set earlier. The elders announced this decision to the congregation on June 3, 2001. The elders also invited the congregation to a corporate meeting on August 19, 2001, to vote on the proposed revision²³ along with other matters related to the bylaws and articles of incorporation. The meeting was a disaster as two of the dissenting elders spoke against the proposed revisions. The long, emotional meeting ended without a decision and exposed a divided leadership. The elders agreed to table the matter and to lead the congregation through a period of teaching and discussion about the issue during the fall quarter of 2001. It was agreed that, after this period, another corporate meeting could be scheduled at which the revision of the articles could be considered again. Two weeks later, the elders met and reaffirmed their decision concerning Worship Nite and the use of

²³The elders proposed to revise Article IV as follows: "The purpose or purposes for which the congregation is formed are: To encourage and build up ministries that will: celebrate our Savior, Jesus Christ, and share his salvation with others; help people improve their relationships with God and each other; encourage disciples in their walk with God and support them during their journey on earth; help Christians grow and mature in their spiritual walk; minister to those who are in need; glorify Christ in all they do and say; uphold the Bible as the word of God and the authority of the New Testament in all matters of Christian faith and practice; promote the unity of believers through love, rejecting all creeds of men; and be the light of the world so that others will see their good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. Consistent with our heritage in Churches of Christ, the Quail Springs Church of Christ will employ only *a cappella* in its Sunday and Wednesday corporate worship."

our building. The dissenting elders were reminded of their responsibility to support the decision even though they disagreed. Over the next few weeks, four of the dissenting elders resigned and left the congregation. After several months of teaching and discussion, the next corporate meeting was held on February 10, 2002. At this gathering, the proposed revisions to the articles of incorporation were overwhelmingly approved, without discussion, in a meeting that lasted less than thirty minutes.²⁴

The first Worship Nite at Quail Springs was held March 23, 2002. In the eighteen months between the elders' first announcement concerning Worship Nite and the end of 2002, about one hundred fifty members departed Quail Springs for other, more traditional Churches of Christ.

New Logo

On May 16, 2004, Mark Henderson preached a sermon entitled "Mistaken Identity."²⁵ In the message, Henderson presented a new logo to the church that would now serve as a new "brand" for the congregation.²⁶ From a marketing standpoint, Henderson noted that the new brand would give the congregation recognition and would serve to create an emotional impact. The purpose behind the new logo was to provide a

²⁴At the time of this meeting, I had been at Quail Springs for just over four months.

²⁵See www.quailchurch.com. Click on "Listen to sermons online" and then "Click here to choose from all titles." This sermon is under the name "Family of God."

²⁶The logo simply said, "Family of GOD at Quail Springs" and had a cross centered in the "o" in God. This logo would replace a previous one that had been adopted in November 1994. The previous logo said "Celebrating Our Savior and Sharing His Salvation" and was illustrated with a sunburst and three crosses.

welcoming, inviting, and positive image of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

Henderson explained that the logo also put God and the cross at the center of our identity.

The idea for the logo had evolved based on the work of a vision team that had been organized and meeting together since May 2003.²⁷ In addition, Henderson strongly emphasized that it was just a logo and that we were not changing the name of the church.

The introduction of the new logo was received well by the majority. However, there was a vocal minority who spoke disparagingly of the change. Following the sermon, a congregational meeting was scheduled for June 13, 2004 at which one of the items to be discussed was the new logo. Over one hundred twenty people attended the meeting. During the meeting, several expressed their concern that the new logo proposed a new identity for Quail Springs. These members were upset and thought that the new identity sought by the new logo would distance the church more and more from its Church of Christ heritage. Despite Henderson's insistence that Quail Springs was not changing its name, these members understood the change to be just one step closer to an eventual name change for the church. One person angrily walked out during the meeting. Since that meeting, several families have left Quail Springs because of the introduction of the new logo.

Present Ministry Context

The present ministry context is affected by unpleasant memories of the past. Seemingly every proposed change or new idea is met with resistance and an attitude of

²⁷The vision team consisted of Henderson, two other staff members, two elders, and seven other members of the congregation, four men and three women.

suspicion toward church leadership by some of the members. This attitude of suspicion can be explained by examining the past. Significant ministry decisions such as the ones noted have often resulted in disruption and division in the life of the church. For example, issues related to the introduction of a worship team in the 1990s and, more recently, Worship Nite have resulted in a membership flight. These circumstances have exposed a diminished understanding of Christian community.

Quail Springs remains a church in transition. In January 2004, Henderson began a sermon series on vision. In this five-week series, Henderson unveiled a new vision, mission, and core values statement.²⁸ The vision statement reads: “Our vision is to become a community of believers fully devoted to God and his purposes in the world by sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ through the power and gifting of the Holy Spirit.” The mission statement declares: “Our mission is proclaiming and living the love of Jesus Christ through an authentic community offering salvation to the lost, encouragement and growth to the saved, and healing to the wounded and brokenhearted.” During the series, Henderson outlined ten core values for congregational life. Core value number seven reads as follows: “We believe that authentic Christian community is necessary for the edification and transformation of believers and that small groups are the best setting for nurturing this kind of community.” In one of the sermons, Henderson also revealed a new church slogan: “Fully Redeemed, Fully Devoted, Fully Surrendered.” Since the end of the series, there has been a continuing effort to speak the language of the new vision,

²⁸See appendix A. This represented the work of the vision team that has already been noted.

mission, and core values statement through sermon, song, and church-wide communication.

The vision and mission statement, along with core value number seven, directly related to my ministry project. The model of contemplative spirituality I presented had as its intention to promote spiritual growth and to facilitate communal formation among the members of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

Despite the troubled times, there have been seasons in which actions related to contemplative spirituality have been presented to the church and members have been encouraged to participate. In January 1990, the congregation was invited to participate in forty days of prayer for the decade of the 1990s. Daily prayer calendars with specific requests were made available to members. The introduction of the purpose-driven church model in the fall of 1997 provided an initiative to increase contemplative activity.²⁹ The Maturity 201 class introduced spiritual disciplines to over 250 members over a two-year period. This class was received well by the members who participated. After Ronnie White resigned in November 1998, the elders called the congregation to forty days of prayer and fasting beginning on February 7, 1999. During the summer of 2000, adult classes engaged in a study of spiritual disciplines based on Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*.³⁰ In the spring of 2003, the ministry staff led a congregation-wide study,

²⁹During this transition, the adult education curriculum was reorganized to mirror and advance the goals of the purpose-driven church model. There were over eighty class and seminar offerings, yet very few had any direct association with contemplative actions.

³⁰See Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998).

“Forty Days of Purpose,” based on Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*.³¹ The study was conducted to help members clarify the purpose of their lives and have a better understanding of their relationship with God.

These attempts to strengthen spiritual life at Quail Springs are noteworthy. They were obviously conducted to deepen the spiritual vitality of members at Quail Springs. Yet despite these efforts, what has been painfully apparent is the underlying fragmentation that has existed. Hence, there is a great need to engage in communal, contemplative actions that can facilitate a continual, ongoing spiritual formation of community life at Quail Springs.

The theological openness at Quail Springs creates a ripe atmosphere for the introduction and exploration of contemplative spirituality. There is a hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Results from the congregational profile taken in 2002 indicate a stirring interest in matters related to spiritual formation and development.³² However, the attempt to disciple through present church programs leaves many with no clear pathway to Christian spiritual formation. A contemporary style of worship that is only praise does not necessarily create a longing for God. Being progressive does not alone guarantee a Christ-formed spirituality. In assessing congregational life, one can readily

³¹The effort included Bible classes, a sermon series, and a special small-groups ministry effort. This study by Rick Warren promises to help people understand why they are alive and what God’s amazing plan is for them. See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

³²For example, 96% of respondents believe that church programs and activities should help members develop a stronger personal relationship with God. Of 176 members who responded to directed questions, twenty-two hoped that adult education in the next five years would be better equipped to help them grow spiritually.

conclude that the Connections, the small-groups ministry program, has provided much needed spiritual support and fellowship. However, this and other ministry efforts have proved inadequate to meet the needs for spiritual direction and communal formation.

The Problem and Purpose

The Problem

The problem addressed by this project was a lack of contemplative spirituality in the life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. Our church history, heritage, and ministry context have not fostered contemplative practices.³³

In this analysis of the history of Quail Springs, controversies related to significant ministry decisions have exposed a unity, or rather, disunity, conditioned more on meeting and agreeing than participating in one another's lives. During my three plus years at Quail Springs, I have observed a steady, revolving door of church membership with people leaving Quail Springs because they were upset about one thing or another. This fragmentation is sad testimony to an understanding of what it means to live together in Christian community. I am convinced that practices associated with contemplative

³³Therefore, this is not just an indictment of Quail Springs. The history of Churches of Christ reveals the favoring of a modernistic, rationalistic approach to Christian faith and practice that has, in many cases, contributed to an impoverished spirituality. For an analysis, see C. Leonard Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God's Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2001).

Churches of Christ do not have a history of, or reputation for, the practice of contemplative spirituality. Besides its own heritage, the problem is compounded by the fact that Churches of Christ find their closest association with protestant, evangelical churches. Also, in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, about 70% of church adherents are members of evangelical protestant churches. See <http://thearda.com/RCMS/2000/Metro/5880.htm>.

spirituality will deepen faith and strengthen relationships in church life at Quail Springs.

The Purpose

The purpose of the project was to equip members of a pilot group to lead others in practicing a model of contemplative spirituality. My plan included introducing actions and behaviors associated with contemplative spirituality. The intent of the ministry intervention was to teach and illustrate how the spiritual life is participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. My aim in the project was to stir awareness and to breed a heightened sensitivity to God. For example, Rose Mary Dougherty writes that the primary discernment for spiritual community is to ask “Do you seek God?” and then “What does this seeking mean for your life?”³⁴

In Christian community, I believe that we learn and experience this reality through the engagement of our intellects, the practice of various disciplines and exercises, and the rehearsal of our faith through ritual and sacramental activities. Dougherty notes that the critical element in group spiritual direction is the intention to rely on God, to seek God actively, and to wait for God’s leading.³⁵ In addressing the problem of fragmentation at Quail Springs, I believe the model of contemplative spirituality that I presented to pilot group members can and will act as means of grace to facilitate communal spiritual formation for the members of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. It is my hope that the

³⁴Rose Mary Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 14.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

model I offered will continue to assist us in our pursuit of God and the acting³⁶ of ourselves into a new way of being. This effort will remain a communal quest as we, together, seek to be formed and shaped into the image of Jesus Christ (Luke 6:40; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19; Col 1:28-29).

Basic Assumptions

The project was founded on the two following assumptions:

1. The longing for God creates the possibility for a contemplative spirituality.³⁷

The Christian spiritual life begins with a desire for God and for the manifestation of God in our lives and in the world. This longing also provides the foundation for spiritual formation in Christian community.

2. Spiritual direction is vital for every Christian, but personal spiritual formation is not intended by God to be an isolated experience. Life in community plays a vital role in facilitating healthy and balanced spiritual formation.

Delimitations

1. A pilot group comprised of twelve selected people participated in the ministry intervention.

2. In the project, I presented a model of contemplative spirituality that I

³⁶“Acting” here is used in the sense of bringing about change. Contemplative practices provide means through which spiritual formation can occur.

³⁷Ronald Rolheiser writes: “Long before we do anything explicitly religious at all, we have to do something about the fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality.” Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 7.

determined accessible to the ministry context of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

Conclusion

The theological openness that characterizes Quail Springs made this ministry project possible. A study of our history explained why this project was needed. If we are to become an authentic Christian community, a true family of God, then we must act ourselves into a new way of being. I believe the model of contemplative spirituality that I presented will promote and facilitate communal spiritual formation in the future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. The contemplative actions presented in the ministry intervention provided a way for the pilot group members to live and participate in the life and activity of God. Our group experience in contemplative practices united us and resulted in edification, transformation, and a more God-centered consciousness. Chapter 2 will describe the theological perspectives that formed the foundation for this project.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

While no single understanding can be presented to define Christian spirituality, a proper understanding of Christian spirituality is grounded in the triune nature of God. The triune nature affirms that communal life is inherent in God's being and inseparable from his character.¹ The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit invite us into the relationship they share.² In the life of God, we learn that personal and communal dimensions of faith are indivisible. Therefore, this ministry project emphasized and encouraged group spiritual formation. In the ministry intervention, we reflected on God's life and activities and on how we might live and participate in his life. In each session, our theological reflection assisted us in discerning and acting out the goal of Christian spirituality. The perspectives offered here address how contemplative practices provide means of grace that lead thirsty believers toward wholeness and into deeper communion with God and with each other.

¹Allen and Swick: "As the doctrine of the Trinity affirms that relational, covenantal love is inseparable from the very nature of God, Trinitarian Life highlights the way God's nature proceeds from His heart, through the cross and into our lives by the power of the indwelling Spirit" (164).

²R. Paul Stevens and Michael Green, *Living the Story: Biblical Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): "This is the gospel. God draws us into relationship with himself within the circle of God's own loving communion. The God who is 'us' is not solitary, is not abstractly 'one' but a unified communion of personal relationships" (xv).

The Goal³ of Christian Spirituality

The goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God. This proposition is foundational to my practical theology, and it provided the theological rationale for my ministry project. While Scripture testifies to the ultimate consummation of eternal life in the eschaton, the focus of my project was on the present lived experience of life with God. According to the Apostle Paul, the gospel calls us to new life with God in Jesus Christ.⁴ Jesus is life (John 1:4; 10:10; 14:6). Jesus invites us to his life and offers us “living water” (John 4:13-14). Jesus promises this water will quench our thirst and will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 7:37-38).

Christian spirituality is a call to a specific way and kind of life. This life is rooted in the nature and character of God. Alister E. McGrath defines Christian spirituality in this way: “Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the

³I associate the use of “goal” here with τέλος. In the New Testament, τέλος has a dynamic character and primarily denotes “fulfilment,” “achievement,” or “aim.” Gerhard Delling, s.v. τέλος, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 8:49, 54-56 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

⁴Paul exhorts fellow Christians to live in Christ according to the way they had previously received him because all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form in Christ. Therefore, since they are in Christ, they have been given fullness. Paul reminds these Christians that they were previously dead. Consequently, they were buried with Christ in baptism, and then God raised them up through faith and made them alive with Christ. Since they have been raised with Christ, they are to set their minds and hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Here, Paul unequivocally declares that in conversion we die and that our life now becomes hidden with Christ in God (Col 2:6-13; 3:1-4).

whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith.”⁵

As a lived experience, Christian spirituality is authentic when it is God-centered. The believer’s quest is living and longing for God. This lived experience is learned from the biblical story as well as from proven traditions of Christian faith. According to Scripture, the experience is made possible through an encounter with Jesus Christ, the living Word. Christian spirituality is lived in the presence, and by the power, of the Holy Spirit.

According to Francis W. Vanderwall, “The world of the Spirit is as much a part of our daily world as our morning cup of coffee may be. It participates in our world of feelings, inner inclinations, hopes, visions, and dreams.”⁶

The story of the Bible is the drama of God’s creative and redemptive actions. Throughout biblical history, life with God is seen as a journey. Beginning with creation, God, through gracious initiative, calls humanity into relationship with himself. The good news is that God is not dissuaded by the failure of those whom he loves. Instead, he makes provision and creates opportunities for reconciliation. God’s faithful, compassionate, and abounding love explains his every action as well as his passionate desire to live in covenant relationship with us (Exod 34:7). This story makes us who we are as the people of God. The climax of the story is found in the personal revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Matt 1:23; John 1:14; Col 2:9). Consequently, a proper understanding of Christian spirituality finds its basis, purpose, and understanding as it is

⁵Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 2.

⁶Francis W. Vanderwall, *Spiritual Direction: An Invitation to Abundant Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 5.

directly related to, and drawn from, the person, ministry, and mission of Jesus Christ.

The story of Abraham serves in a paradigmatic way to teach us what it means to live in a faith-based relationship with God.⁷ The lived experience of Christian spirituality is about embarking on our own journey with God. The initiative and invitation to companionship are entirely the work of God. The response lies with us. God invites and wills to adopt us as participants in his life. However, the lived experience of an authentic Christian spirituality depends upon recognizing and accepting our place in God's story. Ultimately, our story begins to make sense only when it finds meaning within the greater story of God. McGrath observes, "To become a Christian is not merely to learn the Christian story; it is to enter into it, and accept it as part of our own existence."⁸ Therefore, Christianity is about a way of life and is not simply a set of ideas. Gary Holloway and Earl Lavender write: "Christian spirituality is falling in love with the God we see in Christ. That mysterious process of God lovingly at work in us is not a trick, a shortcut, or a technique. It is a way of life. It is believing from the heart, the very center of our being, believing that God loves us. It is living in that place of deep trust and acceptance."⁹

Christian spirituality is a daily, ongoing experience of God, in Jesus Christ, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This daily, ongoing experience has as its goal

⁷Genesis 12-22. "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6; cf., Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23).

⁸McGrath, 119.

⁹Gary Holloway and Earl Lavender, *Living God's Love: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004), 21.

participation with, and assimilation into, the life of God. Christian spirituality pursues an understanding of what it means to live and participate in God's life. Several key elements of knowing are necessary for the beginning and living of the journey. First, we seek to know God.¹⁰ Second, we pursue understanding of who we are as human creatures and as objects of God's love (Gen 1:26-27). Third, Christian spirituality seeks understanding of the relationship that exists between God and each one of us. The goal of Christian spirituality can be realized as the life of Christ is incarnated in the soul of the believer by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:29; 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19). Every awakening to God is the result of the Holy Spirit's action in, upon, and among us. We are awakened to God and sustained by the gracious initiative the Holy One takes toward us. Therefore, Christian spirituality is understood as the lived experience of God in the multiple contexts of everyday life. Our journey, like Abraham's, is guaranteed to be filled with trouble, uncertainty, and adventure.¹¹ "But," Jesus says, "take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).¹²

Christian spirituality is about both belief and encounter. Christian faith is rooted in the belief that God is a living God who has propositionally revealed himself through

¹⁰This is the posture of faith seeking understanding (e.g., John 17:3; Phil 3:10-11). It is the quest to recognize and know personally through experience.

¹¹Ben Campbell Johnson observes, "The adventure with God is not a destination but a journey. The never-ending journey begins when you open the door and invite the Presence to come into your consciousness in an abiding way." See Ben Campbell Johnson, *Calming the Restless Spirit* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 50.

¹²All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless indicated otherwise.

his saving actions in history. These actions find their climax in the Christ event.

Therefore, Christian faith is active response to this living God. Responsive faith is a desire to encounter God and collaborate with him in the ongoing, unfolding drama of his saving actions.¹³ The one who lives in God's love will become an incarnational witness who embodies the nature and character of God. Because of God's gracious initiative, our faith in God and his promises allows us to be participants in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). As participants, God calls us to collaborate with him in creating a partly open future. Allen and Swick observe that it is indeed an astounding truth that God invites us to share his life and draws us into the fellowship of his joy and delight.¹⁴ Thus Christian spirituality can be understood as the practice of one's participation in the dramatic story of God's salvific actions in Jesus Christ. In Christ, we discover incredible, unexplainable, and unconditional love. In Christ, God offers covenant community and companionship to all of us.

In the lived experience of Christian spirituality, we discover that our unity is not

¹³Jeff W. Childers suggests that the Incarnation is a story of collaboration. The example of Jesus teaches us that God has a plan for the world and that he is at work in our lives. God is sovereign; therefore, he may act to control in any way he chooses. However, as Childers observes, there seems to be little reason to create us if the script of our lives were already written and we brought nothing of our own to the relationship. As participants in God's life, he expects us to do our part and rejoices when we do. Childers adds that we ought to behave as people who realize that God made us to be his partners and co-creators in the world. Childers advocates that God calls us to exercise our creative energies in ways that are consistent with his character and that advance his plans but are not scripted in every way. See Jeff W. Childers and Frederick D. Aquino, *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ's Transforming Presence* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003), 47, 50.

¹⁴Allen and Swick, 186.

based just on shared ideas, agreement on particular church doctrines, or personal preferences. Theological reflection confirms that our unity results from our common participation in the life and activity of God.¹⁵ In this participation, we recognize that God has joined us together through his gracious initiative and kind invitation. The actions of contemplative spirituality heighten our sensitivity and increase our awareness of God and his life. The acceptance of God's invitation results in streams of living water that flow from within our souls.

The Role of Contemplative¹⁶ Spirituality

Theology is an incarnational word: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). For theology to be real and substantive, it must intersect with humanity in such a way that it shapes, forms, embodies, and expresses the qualities and attributes of God. The lived experience of Christian spirituality has to do with how God relates to us and how we relate to him. The psalmist wrote, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Ps 63:1). Contemplative practices buttress our

¹⁵"Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954], 30).

¹⁶"In Christian spirituality, contemplation refers to the focused attention of the soul toward the Divine" (Amy Sturdivant Jennings, s.v. "Contemplation," in *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation*, ed. Keith Beasley-Topliffe [Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003], 67).

thirsting and longing for God. Contemplative actions add flesh to the bones of theology by creating “space”¹⁷ for us to hear, listen, discern, and then respond to the voice of God. In essence, the lived experience of Christian spirituality is really an exercise in theological reflection. In the ministry intervention, I suggested several significant ways that contemplative practices perform. First, they create space. The space created by contemplative actions fosters theological reflection. Second, they assist us in examining and assessing our lives before God. These practices provide means through which our character is shaped and transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. And third, the practices I introduced provide means of grace that awaken us to a deepening communion with God and with each other.

Creating Space

Theology is best understood as a divine-human enterprise. The serious work of looking for God and reflecting upon him in the moment-to-moment unfolding of our lives gives incarnational substance to our faith. Abigail Johnson observes, “Theological reflection is a process of discerning where and how God is present and at work in our lives, against a backdrop of the biblical story, theological themes and concepts, and our church traditions.”¹⁸ Within any particular context of human experience, theology is both

¹⁷I use “space” here in the sense that we escape our lethal environments that are too often dominated by noise, busyness, and a multitude of things that distract us on a daily basis. In creating space, we heighten self-awareness, foster theological reflection, and give God space to act.

¹⁸Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 37. Johnson suggests we are theologically reflecting when we ask “Where is God in this?” or “What does God want me to learn

a given and a continuing task.¹⁹ Thus, it is crucial to create space to hear, discern, and experience the work of God in our lives.

Remembering Our Story

It is vital to remember and reflect upon the story of our lives. Our story reminds us that our lives are unique and invaluable. By remembering, we are reminded that we do matter to someone and that regardless of how life has been, it has brought us to this moment in time.²⁰ In reflecting on God's life, we can be inspired to write down our own remembrances, reflections, and feelings about the beginnings of our life with God. We begin to hear God speaking to us in our stories. In remembering our own story, we discover points of contact and intersection between the biblical story and our own. This reflection is encouraging as we are able to discern God's presence and activity in the midst of our own experiences.

As we reflect upon our lives and experiences, we uncover explanations to why we

from this?" Beyond asking ourselves, we can add other questions to deepen our reflection such as "Where is God for others?" "What biblical stories or images come to mind?" "What theological themes or concepts come to mind?" "What church traditions connect with this event?" (32).

¹⁹Ibid. "Theology is alive and lively because it is a conversation arising from real-life situations. We add the stories of our lives to the ongoing story of church history and theology" (24-25).

²⁰"Remembering our story helps us journey into wholeness. In the process of remembering and sharing our stories, we restore those parts of ourselves we have forgotten, suppressed, or denied. We discover that we can reconceptualize and that even the difficult memories become moments of God's grace. As we touch the stories of Christ and connect them with our stories, we find wholeness" (Richard L. Morgan, *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Biography*, rev. ed. [Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002], 23).

think, believe, and act the way we do. In deliberating, we detect our own “theological template.”²¹ Our template functions as a perceptual framework that shapes our understanding of God, ourselves, and others. It explains how we sort and organize our reflections about what happens to us and to those around us. In musing on our theological templates, we recognize how significant resources of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience have formed and shaped us. This reflection is a dynamic process that makes our theology touchable in the lived experience of Christian spirituality.

Spiritual Disciplines and Exercises

The Christian spiritual life is a journey; it is a daily, ongoing experience. In being a disciple of Christ, it is necessary to live a disciplined life. In addressing the term “discipline,” Henri Nouwen wrote the following:

But in the spiritual life, the word discipline means “the effort to create some space in which God can act.” Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you’re not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn’t planned or counted on.”²²

Therefore, the practice of spiritual disciplines and exercises creates space that gives God room to act. These contemplative actions provide tangible means that heighten our awareness of God and invite us to participate in his life and activity. These means

²¹A “theological template” is simply a framework for ongoing, theological reflection. It explains the way we sort and organize the data of life. For a brief, but helpful primer regarding this, see Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

²²Henri Nouwen, “Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry,” *Leadership* 16, no. 2 (spring 1995): 81.

function to shape and transform our minds and hearts as we seek those things that are above (Col. 3:1-3). Many benefits exist for practicing spiritual disciplines. Among the most important benefits is that they cultivate actions that center us in God's will and encourage us to model Christ.

Our world has robbed us of the natural rhythms of silence and solitude. Our lives are bombarded with words and sounds that beg for our attention. Our homes are filled with televisions, DVD players, radios, CD players, computers, telephones, and other noise makers. In addition, we are distorted and distracted by our occupied lives. We believe the lie and the illusion that our worth and value are determined by what we do and by what we produce. This conspiracy of clutter robs us of intimacy with God and with each other. The noise and busyness leave us spiritually empty and dying of thirst.²³

Spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude open the windows of our souls to the living water God offers. These disciplines create space for us to escape our lethal environments and to abandon our pathological busyness. The space created by silence and solitude heightens our awareness of God, the true source of joy, comfort, and security. Additionally, this space operates to heighten our own self-consciousness. In the examination, we become aware of the attitudes and behaviors that dominate and dictate the course of our lives. We come face to face with who we are and with how desperately

²³In the church profile inventory, 53% of respondents acknowledged they spent an hour or less in focused prayer each week. In addition, 91% of those who participated agreed that an important task of the church was to help members develop practices of prayer and meditation. However, only 41% expressed high levels of satisfaction.

we need to be filled with the Spirit of God.²⁴

The patterns of Jesus' life indicate his commitment to silence and solitude. For example, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Although Jesus was crowded by noise, busyness, and multitudes of impatient people, he modeled the normal and necessary practice of seeking silence and solitude. The rhythms of his life were regulated by a retreat into silence and solitude.

Jesus' prescription for our busy, distracted, and worry-filled lives is that we relocate the center of our attention and change our priorities. The space created by silence and solitude will remind us that we are indeed the beloved of God. We remember that it is God who invites us to be participants in his life. It is vital to create space for silence and solitude in order to receive God's affirming, nurturing, and renewing care. In silence and solitude, we can experience the satisfaction of living water that quenches the thirst of our souls.

Prayer is foundational in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. The Apostle Paul wrote that we are to "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). Fil Anderson observes, "Ceaseless prayer is not about a constant flow of words, focused thoughts, or enduring feelings toward God. Instead, it's a simple practice of keeping company with the

²⁴Nouwen refers to this as the "furnace of transformation" where we have no choice but to pay attention to the inner self. See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981), 25.

God who is always present and attentive to us.”²⁵ Too often we have been taught to think of prayer as something we do in order to get God to produce the results we believe are needed. As a result, our shopping list mentality can actually prevent us from entering into a vital, transforming encounter with God. We must not forget that our heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask (Matt 6:8).

Therefore, prayer is primarily relational, not functional. Conversing with God in prayer is living in the mystery and wonder of God’s presence. The self-disclosure of God not only elicits our prayers but also shapes the form of our prayers. Ben Campbell Johnson writes: “The divine presence in its myriad forms elicits multiple forms of prayer in and through us.”²⁶ When God comes to us as mystery, our response is awe and wonder. We offer prayers of thanks in response to the revelation of God’s love. An encounter with God’s holiness summons prayers of confession and lament. Engaging in contemplative prayer heightens awareness of God and fosters a proper response to him in the circumstances of life. In contemplation, we learn that prayer is more than just talking to God through expressions of praise, thanks, requests, intercession, confession, and lament. We discover that prayer is more than an intellectual exercise in which we speak to God and think about him. Instead, the life of prayer calls us to be with God as a friend to be known and enjoyed. In prayer, we take time to rest in God and “be still” before him (Ps 46:10). Contemplative prayer encourages us to receive and be receptive to God rather

²⁵Fil Anderson, *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 114.

²⁶Ben Campbell Johnson, *The God Who Speaks: Learning the Language of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 92-93.

than attempting to get him to hear what we have to say. The contemplative way also fosters community as we listen to those around us instead of being concerned about how we might get others to listen to us. Jesus taught us to pray “Our Father” (Matt 6:9), indicating the essential corporate dimension of Christian spirituality. Praying in community connects us to the primary and essential means by which we, as individuals, are formed and shaped into the image of Christ.

The form of contemplative prayer has many historical and contemporary variations. In the ministry intervention, I decided to present three particular ones for consideration and experience. In these prayers, the object is to yield to God and allow his presence to fill our consciousness.

The first prayer is known as the “Jesus Prayer.”²⁷ This is a brief prayer that combines praise, petition, and confession. One popular form of it is “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”²⁸ The constant, repeated, and rhythmic breathing of this prayer focuses one on God-in-Christ. A second prayer is simply called

²⁷The Jesus Prayer is central to the Hesychast tradition within Orthodox spirituality. It appears that most of the Hesychast tradition is a restatement of the spiritual masters of the desert. The Hesychasts renewed different elements from the ancient tradition, including the Jesus prayer and their efforts formed a powerful renaissance in the spiritual tradition of the East. Gregory of Sinai (d. 1346) advocated the Jesus prayer as the surest way to enter into an intense union with Christ. See Gordon Mursell, ed., *The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years, from East to West* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 148. See also Keith R. Beasley-Topliffe, s.v. “Jesus Prayer,” in *The Upper Room Dictionary*, 151.

²⁸The prayer is based on various pleas to Jesus made by blind men (Matt 9:27; 20:30; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:38), the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:22), and some lepers (Luke 17:13). It is also linked to the prayer of the tax collector (Luke 18:13). See *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, 25.

the “breath prayer.” The name is given to this form because prayer is to be as natural as breathing.²⁹ This is a short prayer of petition or praise that heightens our awareness of God’s presence. This prayer emphasizes the importance of repeating a word or phrase.³⁰ A third prayer form is called “centering prayer.”³¹ In this way of prayer, one chooses a sacred word (e.g., “Immanuel,” “love”) that focuses on the life and activity of God. Centering prayer generates awareness of God’s presence by withdrawing attention from the ordinary flow of one’s thoughts.

In contemplative prayer, we taste the living water of resting in God’s love and companionship. Contemplative prayer results in a clearer vision and culminates in a transformed consciousness. Marjorie Thompson observes, “In contemplation we move from communicating with God through speech to communing with God through the gaze

²⁹The Hebrew word for breath is *ruach*, meaning also “wind” and “spirit.” Thus, a breath prayer is a prayer of the Holy Spirit. The aim of this form is to integrate internal thoughts with external actions. See Patricia D. Brown, s.v. “Breath Prayer,” in *The Upper Room Dictionary*, 44-45.

³⁰For example, “Holy Spirit, fill me.” “Give me strength, O Christ.” Scripture and hymn phrases can be prayed in the same way.

³¹*The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century writing, is the classic text on this kind of meditative, contemplative prayer. This guide to contemplative life originated with the reflections of an unknown priest (ca. A.D. 500) who believed that a “cloud of unknowing” separated people from God. The author advised placing all thought and mental imagery behind a metaphorical cloud of forgetting while seeking to experience God. For the writer, divine love could be reached through a single-word prayer. See *The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism*, ed. Evelyn Underhill (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003). See also Russell M. Hart, s.v. “Centering Prayer,” in *The Upper Room Dictionary*, 55.

of love.”³² To shape our lives and ministries by contemplative prayer is vital. This centers us in God, the wellspring of the Spirit of life.

The spiritual exercise of divine reading (*lectio divina*³³) creates space to hear and be receptive to God’s word. Sacred reading cultivates the ability to listen deeply to the God who speaks through holy Scripture. Duane Bidwell observes, “Divine reading helps people approach Scripture from a more contemplative stance and, once they have actively reflected on the Word, to enter into dialogue with God about what they have encountered in their reading.”³⁴

Sacred reading has a formative intent. As we read, meditate, pray, and contemplate, we are called forward by the living, transforming encounter with God in Christ.³⁵ In sacred reading, the text of Scripture is viewed as an icon³⁶ of God that acts

³²Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 45.

³³“The ancient art of *lectio divina*, or sacred reading, was introduced to the West by the Eastern desert father John Cassian early in the fifth century. It has been practiced for centuries by Cistercian monks and is being rediscovered in wider parts of the Christian community” (Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 96).

³⁴Duane R. Bidwell, *Short-Term Spiritual Guidance* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 76.

³⁵*Lectio divina* involves a progression through four movements: (1) *lectio*, reading to hear; (2) *meditatio*, pondering the personal word; (3) *oratio*, intimate dialogue with God; and, (4) *contemplatio*, silence and yieldedness in the presence of God. This progression provides the process for spiritual formation. For information and suggestions for process, see Cynthia I. Zirlott, s.v. “Lectio Divina,” in *The Upper Room Dictionary*, 167-70; Bidwell, 76-78; Boa, 96-97, 174-86; and Thompson, 22-25.

³⁶The word “icon” comes from the Greek *eikon*, “image.” The following quotation clarifies the meaning and understanding of “icon” presented here: “The icon is a point of

upon the heart. The author of Hebrews wrote: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12). The Apostle Paul wrote: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God’s way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do” (2 Tim 3:16-17, NLT). In sacred reading, the Word moves us into an encounter with God, and the process becomes a means of grace that changes us. God awakens our sensibilities, takes control of our wills, and transforms our attitudes and behaviors.

Sacred reading is reflective and prayerful. Divine reading is not concerned with speed and volume but with depth and receptivity. In sacred reading, we stand before the text and allow it to exegete us instead of standing over the text and exegeting it. As we approach Scripture, we listen deeply to the God who speaks through the Word; then we allow that Word to shape an appropriate response in the context of daily life.³⁷

departure. It moves us, with our permission, beyond the image to an encounter with the divine reality the image represents” (Russell M. Hart, s.v. “Icons,” in *The Upper Room Dictionary*, 140).

³⁷M. Robert Mulholland Jr. suggests methods that assist us in moving from an “informational” reading stance to a “formational” reading posture in our approach to Scripture. The contrast he presents between the two kinds of reading is intended to show that only through formational reading can one be shaped by the Word. See M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000).

Liturgical Actions

Spiritual disciplines and exercises provide means that heighten our awareness of God and awaken us to the deeper realities of Christian spirituality. Liturgical actions provide necessary support structures that nurture the new order of life in God's kingdom. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matt 22:37-38). Thus, the priority of true worship is responding to God's glory with our entire being. Our worship is grounded in who God is and in what he has done. Liturgical actions usher us into God's presence and fill us with his grace and truth.

The process of spiritual formation cannot occur in a healthy way apart from the retelling, reliving, and rehearsing of God's saving actions. Our identity as a people is shaped by the story of God's salvific actions (e.g., the exodus from Egypt, the cross of Christ). Our practice and participation of ritual acts serve to remind, illustrate, and incarnate the story of God's love, grace, and mercy for the welfare of his people. Ritual actions create and express meaning. Thompson observes, "Without the rites and sacraments of public worship, there would be no body of Christ. It is through the praises, prayers, sacraments, and scriptural proclamations of common worship that the church is continually given its life."³⁸ Thus liturgical actions provide means that invite us to participate in God's life. In these actions, we are reminded that we are made for communion not only with God but with one another in Christ. We gather at the Lord's table to be fed. We listen to teaching from God's word so that we might be shaped and

³⁸Thompson, 56.

formed by that which is true. We give, not out of guilt or obligation, but because giving allows us to participate in God's gracious nature. These kinds of actions encourage us to live in the real story of God's purposes instead of the temporary story of this passing world. Liturgical actions remind us that we are collaborators with God in his ongoing story.

Imaging Christ

Christian spirituality is about doing, not just thinking. If we desire to be formed and shaped into the image of Christ, then we must engage in certain disciplines, exercises, and actions that enable the transformation. The God-shaped life will not result from happenstance. It results from intentional practices that invite us to participate in the life and activity of God. The renewing of mind, nurtured by contemplative actions, leads to transformation with ever-increasing glory into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 4:19). Our lives become virtuous as we reflect the nature and character of God.

Self-Examination

Christians are not to be distinguished simply by their functions or gifts, but rather by their character. In effect, the Apostle Paul summarized his goal in ministry: "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we might present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col 1:28).³⁹ The process toward perfection to which

³⁹"Perfect" is translated from τέλειος and here has the idea of complete, mature, whole, or full-grown. Peter O'Brien observes that Paul, as a true pastor, will not be satisfied with anything less than the full Christian maturity of each believer. See Peter T.

Paul refers will flow as we examine ourselves in view of God's work in Christ. Paul yearns for our character to be formed into a certain kind of person, the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). In addressing the process, Paul wrote: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5).⁴⁰ Self-examination can be a difficult and uncomfortable experience. In self-examination, we remove our masks and come face to face with the destructive attitudes and habits that too often control us. However, the realization of God's love and mercy grants the courage to look honestly at who we really are before God. The purpose of self-examination is to become increasingly God-centered in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. A posture of God-centeredness in the contemplative action of self-examination facilitates authentic spiritual transformation, not just boundary-marker spirituality.⁴¹

The call to follow Christ is inviting, but also demanding. It is a call to "live in him" (Col 2:6) and to "live a life worthy" of the calling we have received (Eph 4:1). This call expects a follower of Christ to put off the "old self" and put on the "new self" that is created to be like God (Eph 4:22-24). What distinguishes the "new self" is the

O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 89-90.

⁴⁰"Examine" is translated from δοκιμάζω. In the New Testament, this word has the idea of testing in order to prove genuineness or authenticity (cf., 1 Cor 11:28; Jas 1:2-3; 1 Pet 1:5-6).

⁴¹John Ortberg writes: "If people do not experience authentic transformation, then their faith will deteriorate into a search for boundary markers that masquerade as evidence of a changed life." See John Ortberg, "True (and False) Transformation: Two Counterfeit Forms of Spiritual Maturity, and One Way to Find the Real Thing," *Leadership* 23, no. 3 (summer 2002), 102.

“mind of Christ” (e.g. Phil 2:1-8). How the Christ-formed character looks is fleshed out in those attitudes, qualities, characteristics, and traits that embody a real presence of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, there are a number of lists and passages that illustrate the Christ-formed life. These passages have to do with everything from general instructions on Christian living to qualities for leaders. Yet one thing that they all have in common is character transformation.

The mind of Christ transforms us. In Christ, we become people of virtue.⁴² The mind of Christ enables us to think and do the kinds of things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8; Col 3:15-17). The “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). The fruit results from having the mind of Christ. Since we have been raised with Christ, we put to death things that belong to the old self. Instead, we clothe ourselves with qualities and attributes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love (Col 3:1-14). Participation in the divine nature inspires us to add to our faith effects of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet 1:3-7). Church leaders are called to embody certain attributes that are revealed in and through their various relationships (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:2-3). These marks of character qualify them to provide leadership

⁴²“A virtue is a capacity, cultivated by experience and training, to have emotions that make you feel like doing good things” (Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* [New York: Oxford, 2001], 62). Benjamin W. Farley observes that based upon biblical principles, “virtue may be defined as an *activity of the whole person in conformity with love of God and love of neighbor*” (Benjamin W. Farley, *In Praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Values in a Christian Context* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 160).

for God's people. The Beatitudes that Jesus taught speak to the formation of character that impels a person toward God-like perfection (Matt 5:3-10, 48).

Self-examination is not just to be a personal experience. The shaping of the spiritual life also takes place in the midst of Christian community. In community, we are forced to be objective about ourselves. In the process, we become accountable and responsible to others. The exercise of self-examination humbles us and, therefore, assists us in becoming true and genuine people. In community, we face the reality that we can not earn God's love or achieve our own security and perfection. As we perceive the realities of sin in our own lives, we become more compassionate and forgiving toward others. In communal life, we acquire a heightened awareness of ourselves before God and of our relationships with others (Phil 2:1-4). We learn to honor, respect, and be devoted to one another (Rom 12:9-13). These realizations instruct and enable us in our goal to live God's life together in the body of Christ.

The fruit of contemplative spirituality is a changed life. In reviewing our lives, we come to agreement that there is nothing we could ever do to cause God to love us more. At the same time, we learn that there is nothing we could ever do to cause God to love us any less. Self-examination, as a contemplative practice, opens our hearts to genuine renewal and authentic transformation in the lived experience of Christian spirituality.

Rule of Life

Contemplative practices cultivate a life in which theological reflection becomes systematic. An important tool that assists us in the lifelong process of spiritual formation

is called a “rule of life.” A rule of life consists of concrete, tangible actions that provide structure to the lived experience of Christian spirituality.⁴³ A rule of life is not to be construed as a legalistic checklist of what to do and what not to do. Instead, a rule of life is a formal list of actions that attends to the rhythms and streams of our spiritual lives.⁴⁴ The aim of the rule is to make actions of contemplative spirituality routine and ordinary.

The rule of life is personal; it should also be practical and relevant to the particular time and place in our lives. Thus a rule of life written today is not a once-for-all-time decision. Instead, today’s rule is simply a written agreement, consisting of spiritual habits that are natural and normal for us within the context of our present roles and responsibilities. Changes and transitions in life should result in adjustments to our rule of life.

Developing our own personal rule is a matter of spiritual discernment. Yet in developing our rule, it is vital to seek communal support. Our personal spirituality is not just a private matter between us and God. The lived experience of Christian spirituality is not to be traveled in isolation; God calls us to community. Therefore, our rule of life should join the personal with the corporate. In doing so, our personal rules will contain actions that raise communal awareness and foster communal responsibility. Holloway and Lavender observe, “The proper exercise of the spiritual disciplines will always lead us to

⁴³For an example of a “rule of life,” see appendix B.

⁴⁴Thompson observes that there are three basic questions to reflect on in choosing disciplines for our rule of life: “What am I deeply attracted to, and why?” “Where do I feel God is calling me to stretch and grow?” and “What kind of balance do I need in my life?” (142).

a deeper participation in community, not a spiritual elitism.”⁴⁵

The point of contemplative practices and of a formal rule is not to earn God’s love or to make us spiritually superior to others. The point of this lived experience is to grow in our relationship with the God who has demonstrated his love for us in Christ (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). Aquino observes, “We are defined by relationship, not by our performance, and our conduct is an outgrowth of that relationship with God.”⁴⁶ A rule of life, with its accompanying actions, does not earn or achieve transformation. However, the practice of a rule of life can nurture a life of theological reflection where spiritual transformation is received as a gift from God. In living our rule of life, we collaborate with God. We live and participate in God’s life.

The “One Another” Life⁴⁷

Community is essential to life. According to Scripture, we are destined for community (cf., Eph 1:3-14; Rev 21-22). When God calls, he calls us to live and participate in his community of love: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Cor 12:13). Therefore, the post-baptismal life is one that is to be lived in

⁴⁵Holloway and Lavender, 140.

⁴⁶Childers and Aquino, 145.

⁴⁷See appendix C for a selected list of “one another” passages in the New Testament.

community.⁴⁸ The “one another” life blesses us in numerous ways. In the ministry project, I highlighted three particular ways in which we can be blessed by communal life. First, the one another life brings balance as we live in a communal context of confession and mutual responsibility. Second, the experience of community life unifies and binds us together. And third, the one another life informs and assists us in discerning God’s will and purposes.

Balance

Becoming a better Christian is not just a matter of individual personal development. The New Testament clearly teaches that our relationship with God is inseparably linked to our relationships with others.⁴⁹ Mulholland defines spiritual formation as a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.⁵⁰ In the lived experience of Christian spirituality, we not only encounter God but we are also called to examine the nature of our relationships with each other. The one another life plays a necessary role in encouraging, as well as animating, healthy and balanced spiritual formation. None of us reaches spiritual maturity by ourselves. We need a community to embrace and nourish us. According to Paul, as we grow up in Christ, the

⁴⁸Simon Chan writes: “To be a Christian is to be ‘in Christ,’ that is, to be baptized into the one body, the church (1 Cor 12:13). Our Christian life cannot properly exist apart from that body. Our fellowship is always ‘in Christ’ and through Christ” (Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998], 110).

⁴⁹This is a primary theme of 1 John.

⁵⁰M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

whole body grows and builds itself up in love (Eph 4:11-16). In the midst of Christian community, we learn and experience what it means to submit to, and serve, one another (Eph 5:21; Matt 20:20-28). In communal life, we are challenged to relinquish our self-centered perspectives and, instead, look to the needs and concerns of others (Rom 12:3; Phil 2:3-4). We recognize that it is the image of Christ and not our own self-image that constitutes the center of who we are. In community, we learn to pray beyond ourselves. Because of our incorporation in the body of Christ, we worship, pray, and serve as members in communion with other members.

Bonding

The church is a living body created and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-created community has little to do with mutual compatibility. Fellowship is not conditioned on our attractiveness to each other. The faith community is joined together by more than just rules and practices. Eugene Peterson observes, “Building community is not an organizational task; it is relational—understanding who people are in relation to one another and to Jesus and working on the virtues and habits that release love and forgiveness and hope and grace.”⁵¹ In response to the question of a religious expert, Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of the heart, soul, and mind. Jesus then added, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matt 22:39). According to Paul, love is the virtue that binds all things together in Christ (Col 3:14). The Apostle John wrote that “love comes from God” and upon that reality we are

⁵¹Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 200.

called and commanded to love one another (1 John 4:7).

In the process of learning and embodying this truth, we become more united and committed to each other than could have been previously possible. The more genuine our community becomes, the more clearly Jesus Christ and his life will be seen as the most vital link between us. The ordinary relationships of marriage, family, and friendships become extraordinary in Christ. The mentality of “me and my God” is replaced by an “If God is for us, who can be against us” posture (Rom 8:31).

The willingness to listen to each other creates community. While it is vital to recall and remember our own personal stories, it is also vital to listen to the stories of others. Thomas Hart observes, “There is nothing quite so sacred, so fragile, or so mysterious as the human being. There is probably no service we can render other persons quite as great or important as to be listener and receiver to them in those moments when they need to open their hearts and tell someone their story.”⁵² The willingness to listen to another person binds us together and deepens our community. Despite the fact that there are details and circumstances that make our individual stories unique, there are moments in which we find that our story intersects with the story of another. In the experience of listening, we grasp that in some way every story is the story of us all. The sharing of our stories binds us together deeply. We assimilate each person’s story into the larger Christian story. By remembering our stories, we also discern that they are now incomplete. In the process of sharing, we are reminded that God, through his grace and

⁵²Thomas N. Hart, *The Art of Christian Listening* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 1.

power, calls us to be a community that collaborates with him in a partly open future.

Discernment

True devotion to God means seeking the divine will in all things. One of the great blessings of community is the opportunity to seek guidance through the collective wisdom and understanding of our brothers and sisters. Group discernment invites us into the heart and life of the triune God. In Christian community, we share in the common journey of relying on God, of seeking him actively, and of waiting for his leading. As we entrust ourselves into the care of a loving community, our faith is bolstered with confidence knowing that we are not alone in attempting to discern God's will and purposes in the everyday details of life. The primary purpose of spiritual discernment is to make ourselves available to God as we seek his wisdom and guidance. Any process of discernment is buoyed by the acknowledgment that we desire the Lord's kingdom to come and his will to be done (cf. Matt 6:10).

One important step in group discernment is recognizing that the Bible is most often written in the plural.⁵³ This realization enlightens us as we agree that most often God addresses a community, not an individual. Therefore, the experience of collective discernment in the reading and understanding of Scripture is a gift. While Scripture is the primary way God speaks to us, it is important to acknowledge that, in our present lived

⁵³Dawn observes, "We all need to become Southerners to read the Bible correctly, because to inhabit its world is to speak about our lives as *y'all* (plural), instead of *you* (singular)" (Dawn and Peterson, 214).

experience of Christian spirituality, God speaks to us in other ways as well.⁵⁴

Marva Dawn writes that perhaps the most important instrument for discovering God's will besides the Scriptures is one that many Christians do not realize—God's will is revealed in the counsel of the community.⁵⁵ In group spiritual direction, the collective experiences of biblical, historical, philosophical, moral, and social insights can be woven together in order to form a coherent, meaningful account of Christian faith within our own present lived experience of Christian spirituality.⁵⁶ Our collective templates of understanding function to integrate knowledge, reason, and experience in order to make informed judgments for particular situations. The purpose of communal discernment is not just to give advice, alter, or fix things. Instead, communal discernment functions most appropriately to remove obstacles and to help each of us discern the divine assistance that dwells with, in, and among us. Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer observe, "We must continually remind ourselves that discernment has more to do with deepening

⁵⁴Holloway and Lavender observe, "God is a consistent God who will never speak to us in ways contrary to the Bible (although he may very well speak in ways contrary to our understanding of the Bible). But our God is a living, active, loving God who seeks us in every circumstance of life. He speaks through other people, through circumstances, and in the deep recesses of our hearts. Through his Spirit he enlightens us, not by inspiring new revelation so we can write new books of the Bible, but by opening our lives to what he is saying to us and to the churches through his word, the Bible" (62).

⁵⁵Dawn and Peterson, 173.

⁵⁶See Frederick D. Aquino, "A Theology of Informed Judgment," *Restoration Quarterly* 45:1-2 (2003): 115-25. Aquino observes that a theology of informed judgment stresses the communal nature of theological reflection. Without this communal presence of wisdom, the process of theological judgment is left to personal choice (125).

our relationship with Christ than it does with making right decisions.”⁵⁷ In communal discernment, the Spirit works to bring decisions and provide solutions that reveal the will of God. In the process, we become a more informed people. Yet for any process of discernment to be successful, there must be an escape from the competing noises that fill our daily lives. We must be willing to be still and silent before God as we seek his guidance. In group spiritual direction, we draw deeply on the strength of the community and taste the living waters of God’s life that is within each one of us.

Conclusions

The theological perspectives offered here formed the foundation for the ministry project. In chapter 3, I share the methodology used in the process and procedure of the ministry intervention. In addition, the means of evaluation selected for qualitative assessment are shared. The goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God. In the triune life of God, we learn that personal and communal dimensions of faith are indivisible. Actions and practices of contemplative spirituality, like the ones I have identified here and presented in the project, will play a key role in making this goal a lived experience in the spiritual formation and future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

⁵⁷Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 101.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION

Methodology

Chapter 2 established the theological foundation for this ministry project. The design of the ministry intervention that was presented taught and illustrated how the Christian spiritual life is participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. The lack of contemplative practices at Quail Springs has contributed to the fragmentation that has been characteristic in the church's life and history. Therefore, each session of the ministry intervention introduced different elements and actions of contemplative spirituality. A pilot group of twelve individuals was selected for the project.¹ Group members were asked to participate in eight sessions. After the introduction in each session, members of the pilot group were invited to practice and experiment with the various actions and behaviors that were presented. The ministry intervention began with a weekend retreat. It continued with six, one-hour class sessions on Wednesday nights. The final meeting was a three-hour session on a Sunday evening. A brief description of each of the sessions follows.

¹The group included two elders and their wives, another couple, one single woman, Trey Finley and his wife, George Faulk, my wife, and me. All are members at Quail Springs with the exception of Faulk. Finley and Faulk are introduced here by name because of the roles they played as means of evaluation for the ministry intervention.

The Ministry Intervention

Session 1: Remembering Our Story—Seeing God in Our Past

Session 1 functioned as a retreat with the theme “Remembering Our Story—Seeing God in Our Past.” It began with a three-hour session on a Friday evening (6:30 to 9:30) and then continued for six hours on Saturday (9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). I was determined to make our time together an enjoyable, informative, inspiring, and interactive experience. In my scheduling, I planned for a ten-minute break each hour to help keep everyone refreshed. I also provided a variety of drinks and snack items to be enjoyed.

At the beginning, I gave all group members the opportunity to introduce themselves and share just a little about their lives. This was important, especially since George Faulk was a new face to everyone except me. It also helped clarify the roles that Faulk and Trey Finley would play in the ministry intervention.² After the introductions, we watched chapter 60, “The Tales That Really Mattered,” from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.³ I used this clip to set the stage for our weekend together. At this point, my purpose was to suggest to group members that we all have a story and that our stories really do matter.

Following the clip, I introduced the project and provided my theological perspectives for the ministry intervention.⁴ I discussed the title and provided the

²Their roles will be discussed in the evaluation section beginning on page 80.

³*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, dir. by Peter Jackson, New Line Home Entertainment, Inc., 2003, digital video disc.

⁴Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 25-31 of this thesis.

theological rationale for “living waters” by sharing how Jesus used the expression “living water” to describe the gift of eternal life and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). I also pointed out that living water is used metaphorically in Scripture to refer to a gift from God that quenches a person’s thirst and makes life possible. I then suggested that since a spring is living water, the title is especially appropriate for our church context at Quail Springs.

From the beginning of the ministry intervention, I wanted to establish my conviction and working thesis for the project that the goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God. I suggested that, in order for this goal to be realized, we must engage in theological reflection and seek to discern where and how God is present and at work in our lives. As I invited reflection upon this working thesis, I proposed that Christian spirituality is a lived experience and the Christian spiritual life is best understood as participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. I emphasized that Christianity is about a way of life, not simply a set of ideas. Thus the lived experience of Christian spirituality is, in reality, an exercise in theological reflection. In addressing the idea of lived experience, I suggested it is important to ask questions “What does this look like?” and “What can be done to nurture this?” Following some brief discussion, I then explained how I believed actions and practices of contemplative spirituality serve to encourage and facilitate this lived experience of participating in the life and activity of God. For ministry support, I gave group members a copy of *Living God’s Love: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*⁵ and

⁵See n. 47.

the current issue of *Discipleship Journal*, which had as its theme “Entering His Presence: How the Spiritual Disciplines Turn Your Heart toward God.”⁶

In the first hour, I wanted to establish my conviction that a proper understanding of Christian spirituality is grounded in the triune nature of God. In other words, God’s triune nature affirms that communal life is inherent in his being and inseparable from his character. Based upon this biblical and historical perspective, I suggested to our group that in God’s life we learn that personal and communal dimensions of faith are indivisible. What did this mean for us as a group? It meant that the process of spiritual formation is not just an isolated, personal experience; rather, it is communal as we, together, consider God and act ourselves into a new way of being. Since we were now a group, I shared some guidelines suggested by Abigail Johnson for a group covenant: (1) we would have respect and consideration for ourselves and others; (2) we would share with each other when we were ready; (3) we would attend sessions to the best of our ability; (4) we would understand that sessions would start and end on time; (5) we would allow and respect differences between people; and (6) we would hold what is shared in the group as confidential.⁷ I ended our first hour together by inviting group members to listen to, and reflect upon, the words of the song “Word of God Speak” by MercyMe.⁸

The second hour began with the invitation for group members to do some

⁶*Discipleship Journal* 143 (2004).

⁷Johnson, *Reflecting*, 54.

⁸MercyMe, “Word of God Speak,” *Spoken For*, Word Entertainment, 2002, compact disc.

theological reflection by answering the question “Who would you say is one of the most significant spiritual influences in your life and why?” I gave group members about three to five minutes to share with us this significant part of their life’s story. This experience created an openness and a budding intimacy that created community through the rest of our weekend together.

After a break, we watched the last portion of the movie *Apollo 13*, beginning with chapter 50, “The Global Drama.”⁹ After viewing the clip, I sought group response from the following questions:

1. What was it about this story that drew you into it?
2. What were some of the emotions you felt as you entered into and participated in this story?
3. What does this movie clip teach us about the power of ‘story’?

After some good discussion, I distributed “The Importance of Story”¹⁰ to highlight that “story” is the language of our hearts and souls and that it is vital to reflect upon, and remember, the story of our lives. I suggested that the value of reflecting and remembering is that it empowers us to live out our stories; it unifies us as we begin to recognize how our stories intersect with each other; and, most importantly, this practice helps us identify the fingerprints of God on our life’s experiences.

After our final break, we began the last hour listening to the song “Who Am I?”

⁹*Apollo 13*, dir. by Ron Howard, 140 minutes, Universal, 1998, digital video disc.

¹⁰See appendix D.

by the group Casting Crowns.¹¹ I asked group members to listen carefully to the powerful lyrics of this song and then share what words particularly spoke to them. Following the song, we then engaged in a time of sharing. After this period of reflection, I passed out a copy of “Seeing God in Your Past,” by Becky Brodin¹² and explained how this article would serve in a remarkable way to help each of us get in touch with our own story. I encouraged group members to read the article and engage in theological reflection by writing or charting a brief spiritual autobiography to share with the group beginning Saturday morning. Because of the environment that had been created during our time together Friday evening, participants eagerly embraced this request. We dismissed with a prayer.

We began our time on Saturday morning with about twenty minutes of worship. I invited group members to reflect upon our time together Friday and then encouraged them to rest in the embrace of God and his life. After a few moments, I played the song “Breathe,” performed by Michael W. Smith.¹³ Following the song, I read Psalm 46:1-3, 7, 10 and invited group members to “be still.” After a pause, selected group members participated in the reading of Psalm 139, John 6:35, and Matt 11:28-30. Our worship time

¹¹Casting Crowns, “Who Am I,” *Casting Crowns*, Beech Street Records, 2003, compact disc.

¹²See Appendix E. Becky Brodin, “Seeing God in Your Past,” *Discipleship Journal* 106 (1998): 51-55.

¹³Michael W. Smith, “Breathe,” *Worship*, Reunion Records, 2001, compact disc.

continued with the playing of “Untitled Hymn” by Chris Rice.¹⁴ We ended our worship time together by standing, holding hands, and reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Following a short break, I showed another clip from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, beginning at chapter 65.¹⁵ The point of the clip was to impress upon us the need to reflect on our own stories and ask the important question “What will be written about us?” Following a brief time of orientation preparing us to tell and listen to each other’s stories, I passed out a poem by Richard L. Morgan entitled “An Untold Story: Group Process as a Pilgrimage.”¹⁶ After the reading of this poem, we spent the rest of the morning telling and listening to our stories. Because of time considerations, the participants had ten to twelve minutes each to share their spiritual autobiography. After the telling of each story, the group gathered with the person, placed hands on him or her, and a different group member each time would lead us in prayer thanking God for the story we had just heard.

I had scheduled an hour for lunch. We enjoyed the box lunches that were delivered. The experience of the morning made our lunch together even more meaningful. Our discussion during lunch included the idea that the Holy Spirit was at work among us, forming and shaping us into a community.

After the lunch break, we continued with telling, and listening to, our stories.

¹⁴Chris Rice, “Untitled Hymn,” *Short-Term Memories*, Rocketown Records, 2004, compact disc.

¹⁵In the clip, Samwise asks Frodo, “I wonder if we’ll ever be put into songs or tales. . . .”

¹⁶Richard L. Morgan, *Remembering Your Story*, 26-27. See appendix F.

After we finished, I presented these questions to the group for theological reflection:

1. Did God speak to you as you listened to the stories of others? In what ways did this experience in theological reflection inform you about yourself?
2. What did you learn about yourself as you listened to the stories of others? Did you find any points where your life intersects with others?
3. As you listened to the stories, were you able to discern the presence and work of God in your life as well as in the lives of the others?

These questions generated meaningful responses. There was agreement that our experience of remembering gave us confidence in God's abiding presence, faithfulness, and love. Group members now perceived the importance of learning our story, learning from our story, and learning to live out our story. Remembering our own stories and listening to the stories of each other stirred thoughts and feelings that heightened our awareness to discern how God had been involved in our past. The exercise had also assisted us in discovering our own theological template that helps explain why we think, believe, and act the way we do.¹⁷ The exercise of remembering our stories had enlightened us to recognize that our individual stories intersected not only with God's story but also with each other's stories.

As we ended our retreat, it was encouraging to me that the participants were not concerned with time. There was a sense that what had happened in our nine hours together had been good and that we were not ready for it to end. As we closed, there was blanket affirmation that, because of our weekend together, we would never be able to

¹⁷See appendix G for the handout "A Theological Template."

look upon one another the same again. I encouraged group members to remember our time and to pray for each other. We stood together, recited Psalm 23, and closed our retreat with a prayer of thanks.

Session 2: The Role of Contemplative Spirituality

In session 2, I gave a brief overview of matters related to contemplative spirituality and suggested the role that contemplative actions play in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. What is contemplative spirituality? Who needs it? Why? How, when, and where are matters related to contemplative spirituality practiced? At the beginning, I reminded the group of my proposition presented at the retreat that the lived experience of Christian spirituality is, in reality, an exercise in theological reflection.

As we began, I asked group members to reflect on the past weekend together. “How did our time together last weekend bless your life?” “What contributed to the blessing?” After some discussion, I then asked group members to close their eyes, breathe deeply, and bring calm to their souls. After a few moments, I read a brief essay that I had written entitled “The Journey.”¹⁸ The essay focused on the idea that the lived experience of Christian spirituality is a journey marked in a special way by companionship, first with the God we seek to follow and second with those who also seek to follow Jesus Christ. Following the reading, we recited the Lord’s Prayer together. At this point, I asked more questions: “What remembrances, reflections, and feelings do you have right now as you consider your story as a journey?” “In looking back to last weekend, what did you learn

¹⁸See appendix H.

about yourself as you listened to the stories of others?” “As you reflect, what do you discern about the presence and work of God in your life as well as the lives of the other members of the group?”

After meaningful discussion, I continued with some instruction on matters related to contemplative spirituality. I proposed to the group my understanding that theology itself is an incarnational word (e.g., John 1:14). This means that for theology to be real and substantive, it must intersect with our lives in such a way that it shapes, forms, embodies, and expresses the qualities and attributes of God. At this point, I suggested three ways that contemplative actions add flesh to the bones of theology for us. First, they create “space” that heightens self-awareness, fosters theological reflection, and gives God room to work in our lives. Second, contemplative actions assist us in examining and assessing our lives before God. In other words, these practices provide means through which our character is shaped and transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. Third, the selected practices provide means of grace that awaken us to a deepening communion with God and with each other.

Our hour passed quickly. I gave group members two additional handouts: “Taking Time to Be ‘Holy’”¹⁹ and “Some Benefits of Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines.”²⁰ At this point, I shared with group members that in upcoming sessions I would introduce different actions and practices of contemplative spirituality that we would practice together. As we came to the close of session 2, I emphasized the importance of practicing

¹⁹See appendix I.

²⁰See appendix J.

disciplines and exercises in a group setting, not just as an individual experience. We closed with a prayer of thanks.

Session 3: Listening for, and Hearing, the Voice of God

In the beginning, I asked group members if they had visited with each other or with someone else about the project experience thus far. After a few moments of sharing, I invited group members to close their eyes, breathe deeply, relax, and then listen to a reading from the last chapter of *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas R. Kelly.²¹ In the reading, Kelly encourages us to “center down” by having the desire to live every moment of life in the holy silence and living presence of God. This time of reflective reading prepared the group for my introduction of matters related to the spiritual practices of silence and solitude.²²

During a brief period of instruction, I suggested that solitude is not necessarily isolation to a particular place away from people or to be understood as a certain kind of loneliness. Instead, this spiritual practice of solitude is an attitude of the heart; it is a state of mind that is not restricted by time or place. My emphasis was to show how the space created by silence and solitude heightens our awareness of God and our need to be filled with the living water of his Spirit.²³ As I shared this information, I suggested that actions

²¹Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 89-100.

²²Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 31-36 of this thesis.

²³See appendix K for the handout “Creating ‘Space’: Silence and Solitude” given to group members.

of silence and solitude can become natural rhythms in our lives that open up the windows of our souls to life and intimacy with God. The space created by silence and solitude allows us to receive God's affirming, nurturing, and renewing care. In addition, I suggested that the practices of silence and solitude heighten our self-consciousness and confront us with the attitudes and behaviors that dominate and dictate the course of our lives. After this period of instruction, we spent ten minutes in silent solitude. As we began, I encouraged the participants to think about a moment when they responded to God's love in Christ. Following the ten-minute period, I asked the group to reflect upon the quality of the silence. I also asked them to consider how silence together might be different from silence alone. After this discussion, we closed our meeting with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 4: Conversing with God: The Life of Prayer

At the beginning of the session, I asked our group to share how the practice of silence and solitude is leading them into a deeper experience of intimacy with God. I also asked any to share what struggles or disappointments they might have experienced in attempting to practice silence and solitude. After a few moments of sharing, I turned our attention toward a discussion of actions and practices related to contemplative prayer.

Our discussion on prayer began with the question: "What are your greatest struggles or disappointments in prayer?" Our discussion allowed me the opportunity to remind our group of the importance of "centering down." It was encouraging to see that the group was beginning to grasp the importance of becoming still, of entering into the

recreating silence, and of allowing the fragmentation of our hearts and minds to become centered in the life and presence of God.

At this point, I spent about fifteen minutes giving instruction and sharing information on matters related to kinds and actions of contemplative prayer.²⁴ I suggested that it is best to think of prayer as primarily relational, not functional. I advised that conversing with God in prayer is nothing more than living in the mystery and wonder of God's presence. I wanted the group to find a renewed confidence in knowing that the life of prayer calls us into living communion with God as a friend to be known and enjoyed. I wanted to encourage the group by asserting that, in the lived experience of Christian spirituality, prayer, as conversation, is keeping company with the God who is always present and attentive to us. I proposed that this understanding, and then subsequent engagement in prayer, heightens awareness of God and fosters a proper response to him in the varying circumstances of life. I concluded that prayer actions that are contemplative in nature will inevitably result in a clearer vision and culminate in a transformed consciousness.

As our conversation continued, I led our thoughts toward consideration of the role of breath in Scripture as an expression for living. To complement this discussion, we read the following passages: Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37:1-14; John 20:22; Acts 17:25; and James 2:26. Following the reading of these passages, I invited group members to relax and do some good, deep breathing. While they were breathing, I encouraged them to think

²⁴Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 36-40 of this thesis.

of the “peace” that Jesus was breathing on them. Following this contemplative time, I read “The Shield of St. Patrick” prayer and invited group members to repeat the prayer with me beginning with the section in which Christ is invited to be with us in every aspect of our lives.²⁵

After the discussion, I introduced several kinds of contemplative prayers. First, I shared the Jesus Prayer with the group: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I explained how Christians for centuries had used the constant, repeated, and rhythmic breathing of this prayer to focus on God and to allow his presence to fill their consciousness. I then modeled for the group how the prayer could be breathed in a rhythmic manner. A second kind of prayer I presented to group members was the “breath prayer.” I explained how this prayer emphasized the importance of repeating a word or phrase and then provided some examples “Holy Spirit, fill me” and “Give me strength, O Christ.” In addition, I suggested that Scripture and hymn phrases could be prayed in the same way. I encouraged group members to consider how these short prayers of petition or praise can serve to heighten our awareness of God’s presence. A third form of prayer I presented is called “centering prayer.” In this kind of prayer, I explained to the group that a person chooses a sacred word (e.g., Immanuel, love) that focuses on the life and activity of God. People then engage in this single-word prayer in order to generate awareness of God’s presence by withdrawing attention from the ordinary flow of their thoughts.

As our time was running out, I encouraged group members to experiment with these kinds of contemplative prayers. I also talked about varying postures that might

²⁵See appendix L for “The Shield of St. Patrick.”

assist us in our desire to engage in contemplative actions of prayer. One particular posture I noted was the “palms up, palms down” practice.²⁶ In “palms down,” we turn over any concerns we may have to God as we surrender ourselves to him. Then, with “palms up,” we express our desires to receive from the Lord. As we closed, I encouraged group members to write a prayer of some kind.²⁷ In doing so, I believed their personal or breath prayer would serve to open up lines of communication with God and foster theological reflection. I encouraged group members to read and pray their prayer every day and be willing to share it with the rest of the group at our next gathering. Our session ended with the speaking of a rhythmic, repeated breath prayer together.

Session 5: Reading to Be Shaped and Formed by God

Session 5 was designed to emphasize the formative intent of Scripture by introducing the group to the contemplative practice of divine reading (*lectio divina*).²⁸ My purpose was to show how in divine reading we read to be shaped and formed by God—not just to obtain information about God. I also accentuated the faith posture that in divine reading we encounter God in meaningful dialogue.

For this session, I invited a special guest, Sister Benedicta from Red Plains

²⁶See Foster, 30-31, for more discussion of this approach.

²⁷I encouraged group members to use this prayer as a way to tell God their hopes and dreams or their worries and concerns. In the prayer, they had freedom to say what they felt moved to write. I did suggest that they keep the prayer short so that it could be memorized.

²⁸Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 40-41 of this thesis.

Monastery in Piedmont, Oklahoma. After my introduction of Sister Benedicta, she lit a candle in the middle of the room and encouraged us to visualize the trinity in the flame of the candle. As Benedicta worked to center us in God, she oriented our group by sharing information related to the history and practice of *lectio divina*.²⁹ At this time, Benedicta also shared details about her personal practice as well as the group practice with the community of sisters of which she is a part. Benedicta encouraged us to learn the value and importance of practicing sacred reading as a group, not just as an individual.

Following the period of information and orientation, Benedicta led our group in the actual practice. Our text for the evening was the story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus (Luke 17:11-19). Before the first reading, Benedicta instructed us to listen carefully to the Word and allow it to speak to us. She encouraged us to hear our own word from God as we proceeded through the exercise together. There was a first reading and then a pause. At this time, Benedicta encouraged us to center ourselves by meditating on the word or phrase that was speaking to us. Then we had a second reading and a pause. During this period, Benedicta instructed us to pray the word or phrase as we engaged in conversation with God about it. After the period of silence, we had a third reading. Then after another pause, Benedicta encouraged us to share with each other the word we each had received from God. This turned out to be a wonderful experience for all of us. We each received the blessing of a gift from God through the word he had spoken to each individual. We ended our hour together by standing and reciting the

²⁹See appendix M for the brochure “Lectio Divina” that Sister Benedicta distributed to group members.

Lord's Prayer.

Session 6: Discerning God's Will Together

I began session 6 by having each individual in the group do "The Mountain Survival Problem."³⁰ They had seven minutes to complete the exercise by themselves. Then I divided members into two groups and gave them ten minutes to work the exercise together. After the ten minutes, I instructed them to compile their individual and group scores on the score sheet. The working out of the problem revealed that the group process had proven to be more successful than any individual attempt to work out the problem. The exercise had worked exactly as I had hoped. I then asked the group, "What did you learn from this experience?" It was agreed by all that the collective knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and experiences of a group are, in most cases, more successful than the efforts of one individual in working out a problem or issue.

After returning to our regular places, I asked group members to take a few moments to give consideration to the following: "Think about a past or present circumstance in which you were either confused or at least unclear about what you ought to do. How did you feel? If past, what did you do? If present, what are you doing?" After a few moments, I encouraged the group to center down by reflecting upon the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (see Matt 26:36-46). This period of theological reflection served well to create an openness to discuss matters related to

³⁰See appendix N.

spiritual discernment.³¹ At this point, I cited some additional passages of Scripture that addressed the subject of spiritual discernment (e.g., Matt 18:20; Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 12:10; Eph 1:17-18; 1 John 4:1) and suggested the following questions as ones that can be asked by all of us in matters related to spiritual discernment: (1) “How can I be sure that I am doing God’s will?” (2) “How do I know that what I discern is really what God wants and not just what I need?” and (3) “How can I be sure I will make the right decision?”

At this point, I shared ideas and gave instruction on basic assumptions related to spiritual discernment.³² I proposed that the purpose of spiritual discernment is to seek, know, and do God’s will. I suggested that discernment is detaching ourselves from the things that occupy, preoccupy, and concern us and then attaching ourselves to God and his life in order to clarify vision and increase understanding. I shared the following quotation: “Discernment creates the capacity to see. To discern is to see through to the essence of a matter. Discernment distinguishes the real from the phony, the true from the false, the good from the evil, and the path toward God from the path away from God. Spiritual discernment sees reality from God’s perspective.”³³ In considering this perspective, I suggested that, in regard to any particular issue or circumstance, it is best to think of spiritual discernment as a process, not a single step.

³¹Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 48-54 of this thesis.

³²See appendix O.

³³Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997), 19.

Following the group experience in “The Mountain Survival Problem” and the period of instruction, I used the last ten minutes of our session to address the question “What role does communal life play in spiritual discernment?” After a few minutes of sharing, I presented the following thoughts to conclude our discussion. First, in group spiritual discernment, we are present and available to assist one another. We function as a community of “informed judgment.”³⁴ Our collective templates of understanding function to integrate knowledge, reason, and experience in order to make informed judgments for particular situations. In community, the collective experiences of biblical, historical, philosophical, moral, and social insights are woven together to assist us in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. Second, the community is a check against my personal distortions. The community provides mutual encouragement, discipline, testing, understanding, and insight. Group spiritual direction is the process in which our sorrows are divided and our joys multiplied. Third, group spiritual direction is a necessary vehicle of support, discernment, and accountability through which participation and assimilation into the life of God becomes possible. And, fourth, much of our spiritual discernment does not necessarily have to do with making decisions as much as it does in accepting the decisions we have already made and then living with the assurance that, right or wrong, the meaning of our choices will become clear.

In closing session 6, I encouraged our group to consider that the more we embrace our life in God, the more our actions and practices reflect the image of Christ. In conclusion, I asked them to consider how different our lives would be if we frequently

³⁴See n. 94.

and earnestly asked, “God, what is your will?” In addition, I asked them to reflect upon how different our church life could be if, at every important venture, we asked, “God, what is your will?”

During the course of this session, several issues surfaced that required group spiritual discernment. I encouraged group members to make themselves available to put into practice what we had learned together during our session. We closed by standing together and reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Session 7: The Rehearsal of Our Faith

In this session, I presented information related to the role that liturgical actions play in the lived experience of Christian spirituality.³⁵ At the beginning, I shared some introductory thoughts related to worship.³⁶ Foster wrote: “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch life.”³⁷ I wanted our group to understand how crucial it was to discern that the gracious actions of God are etched not only into human history but also into our personal histories. This awareness solidifies an understanding that God’s actions in history form the basis for our liturgical actions. Worship, then, is our human response to God’s gracious initiative to invite, accept, and embrace us. Robert E. Webber observes, “Worship should be seen as a dramatic enactment of the relationship that exists between

³⁵Group members were provided a modified version of information found on pages 42-43 of this thesis.

³⁶See appendix P. I provided this as a handout for group members.

³⁷Foster, 158.

ourselves and God, a relationship with its roots in historical events.”³⁸

After this introduction, I invited the group to center down with me in a reading of Psalm 136. I read each verse and had group members repeat the refrain, “His love endures forever.” Following the reading, I asked the group, “How does this psalm invite us to rehearse our faith?” This discussion welcomed theological reflection to consider how contemplative actions and practices such as ones we had considered in previous sessions functioned as means of grace that prompt, encourage, and invite us to rehearse our faith.

At this point, I suggested that, while spiritual disciplines and exercises provide means that heighten our awareness of God and awaken us to the deeper realities of Christian spirituality, liturgical actions provide necessary support structures that nurture the new order of life in God’s kingdom. In addition, I advised that ritual actions create touch points of God’s story and express meaning by providing participative reminders of who we are. In the discussion, I asked group members to consider how our practice and participation in ritual acts such as the Lord’s Supper serve to remind, illustrate, and incarnate the story of God’s love and grace. We talked briefly about the idea of “drawing near” to God (e.g., Heb. 10:19-25) and how a contemplative approach to liturgical actions creates opportunities for us to encounter and experience the life of God.

Next, I turned our attention toward the small table in the center of our circle. On the table was fresh, unleavened bread baked by my wife and twelve crystal cups filled with grape juice. As we prepared to eat the Lord’s Supper, I asked group members to

³⁸Robert E. Webber, *Worship, Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 97.

reflect upon our experience together over the previous five weeks and then be willing to share these thoughts following our partaking of the Lord's Supper. I then invited group members to read with me a Lord's Supper liturgy I had arranged.³⁹

With the remaining five minutes in our scheduled session, I posed these two questions to the group:

1. How does the rehearsal of faith function to remind us that we are created for communion not only with God but also with one another as the body of Christ?

2. How does the Lord's Supper invite us to participate in God's life and remind us that we are collaborators with God in his ongoing story?

Our session ended without the time needed to explore these questions as fully as we would have liked. However, the thoughts and questions presented in this session served to create a receptive environment to encounter God and to experience community since we had rehearsed our faith in the partaking of the Lord's Supper. We closed by standing and reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

Session 8: Collaborating with God in Our Future

My wife and I hosted the final three-hour session at our house. We began by sharing a meal. Following an enjoyable time of eating and sharing, I coached the group on matters related to the remainder of our final session for the project.⁴⁰

As a way of review, I called them back to the beginning of the project by sharing

³⁹The reading consisted of John 6:35, 53-57; 1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:23-26.

⁴⁰Group members were given a modified version of information found on pages 43-48 of this thesis.

two key assertions I had made: (1) the goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God; and (2) the lived experience of Christian spirituality is really an exercise in theological reflection. From the beginning, I believed it was necessary for these assertions to be grasped and understood by group members. I also reminded members of the role that contemplative actions and practices play in our lived experience and I suggested that contemplative actions center us by creating space that heightens self-awareness, fosters theological reflection, and gives God room to work in our lives.

At this point, I began a transition for our partaking of the Lord's Supper. I read the words of Jesus "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37) and attempted to center us on his invitation to "come." After a few moments of repeating "come to me" and "come," I invited group members to read aloud the liturgy that we had used in session 7. We then watched a clip from *The Passion of the Christ*, beginning at chapter 27.⁴¹ My purpose in using this particular clip was the way it portrayed events related to the Last Supper in the midst of the horror of the cross. After viewing the video, the bread and fruit of the vine were served. As we ate and drank, I spoke of the promised "peace" (John 14:27; 20:21-22; Col 1:20) we receive when we accept the invitation of Jesus to come. We then took a short break.

As we began the second hour, I alerted group members to my need to hear from them about their experience in the project. I provided them a handout requesting to hear

⁴¹*The Passion of the Christ*, dir. by Mel Gibson, 126 minutes, Icon Productions, 2004, digital video disc.

their own personal narrative in the following ways:

1. Share the story of your life the past six weeks. How has your experience in this ministry project affected you?
2. What have you learned about yourself? How has this experience affected your understanding of Christian community?

Instead of seeking this information in the gathered group, I decided to ask them to engage in this exercise on their own. In this way, I believed that members could engage in theological reflection as they responded to my request. I asked group members to complete the request in the following week.

At this point, I invited group members to reflect on what it means to live and participate in the life of God by asking questions such as the following: How is this life and participation worked out? What does it mean to me on a daily basis? What does this experience mean for my future? How can I participate in God's life? How do I collaborate with God in a partly open future? I then directed the group to look at a handout I had prepared for this session.⁴² The introduction began by asserting that Christian spirituality is an imitative faith. They understood and agreed that, in the lived experience of Christian spirituality, we are to seek a Christ-formed life. There was also agreement that the God-shaped life will not result by accident. This discussion provided an appropriate time to distribute to group members a more recent edition of two books

⁴²See appendix Q.

considered classics on Christian spirituality: (1) *Of the Imitation of Christ*⁴³ and (2) *The Practice of the Presence of God*.⁴⁴ After presenting the books as a gift, I highlighted the information on the handout regarding the history as well as the influence that these two significant works have had on Christian spirituality through the years.

Then, I called attention to two questions on the handout:

1. If God calls every human being into union with him, why do so many seem unaware of this divine invitation?
2. What means can we use to make ourselves and others more aware of the invitation to live and participate in the life and activity of God?

The introduction of these questions provided a natural transition for the group to read and discuss information in the handout regarding a “rule of life.” At this time, I pointed out the example of a rule of life found in *Living God’s Love*.⁴⁵ The idea of a rule of life was received well. They understood that a rule serves as a means to examine and discipline on a daily basis. The group grasped the idea that the aim of a rule of life is to make actions of contemplative spirituality routine and ordinary. The response of the group indicated a comprehension of how the practice of a rule can nurture a life of theological reflection wherein spiritual transformation is received as a gift from God. In concluding this discussion, I emphasized that the practice of a rule of life complements us

⁴³Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981).

⁴⁴Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982).

⁴⁵Holloway and Lavender, 113. See appendix B.

in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. Our rule of life serves as a guide for us as we collaborate with God in a partly open future.

After a short break, I started our last hour together by asking, “Where do we go from here?” I reminded group members of how important it was for them to respond to my previous request for their own personal narrative. Following this repeated request, I invited their input and discussion related to future actions and ideas associated with the invitation to contemplative spirituality they had received in the ministry intervention. I sought their input and ideas in response to the following questions:

1. What is the future of the pilot group?
2. What role or impact can this model have on fostering spiritual formation in the future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ?
3. How can we go about leading other groups through the same or similar process? What are some ways we can invite others to participate in the actions and practices of contemplative spirituality?⁴⁶

Everyone participated in this time of sharing. Group consensus indicated sadness that our six-week experience together was coming to an end. We closed our meeting by standing, holding hands, and reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Evaluation

I used three means to evaluate the qualitative effectiveness of the project. First, Faulk served as an independent expert. Faulk is a graduate of Johnson Bible College and

⁴⁶This input is shared in chapter 5 of the thesis.

has a master of divinity degree from Butler University.⁴⁷ In addition, Faulk earned a master of science degree in education. After completing a five-year program at Red Plains Monastery in Piedmont, Oklahoma, Faulk has now served as a spiritual director for the past six years. Faulk is a member of New Covenant Christian Church in Oklahoma City. His theological training, ministry practice, and life experience equipped him to serve as an independent expert. In attempting to evaluate the ministry intervention portion of the project, I asked Faulk to respond or interpret the curriculum and presentations in the following ways:⁴⁸

1. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, is the theological, spiritual, and historical content presented in each session adequate to make contemplative practices and actions understandable and accessible to the pilot group?

2. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, do I communicate information related to particular practices in an engaging way that encourages and persuades others to participate?

3. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, do the practices, interactions, and times of theological reflection shared in the sessions conceive, give birth, and nurture healthy group spiritual formation?

These questions provided an important angle for qualitative evaluation of my

⁴⁷Butler University Graduate School of Religion is now Christian Theological Seminary.

⁴⁸William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program* (Chicago: Exploration, 1993), 74-75.

project. Faulk provided me with a full report at the conclusion of the ministry intervention.⁴⁹

A second means of evaluation was provided by Finley, who adopted a participant-as-observer stance.⁵⁰ As of this writing, Finley is one class short of completing his master of divinity degree from Abilene Christian University. Finley has both knowledge and personal experience in matters related to contemplative spirituality. In recording his observations, I asked Finley to look for the following:

1. Key words, emerging themes, and the first and last remarks in each conversation
2. The role of silence and nonverbal behavior that adds meaning to the exchange— for example, is it critical thinking or non-understanding
3. Other matters related to group dynamics— who talks, who does not, what kind of interaction takes place within the group.

In coding his data for my later interpretation, I asked Finley to use the following summary guidelines:⁵¹ (1) be descriptive in notes, (2) capture participants' views of their experiences in their own words, (3) include your own thoughts, experiences, and feelings,

⁴⁹A letter acknowledging Faulk's agreement to participate in the project and to establish evaluation protocols for him is appendix R.

⁵⁰Finley will adopt Merriam's suggested stance *participant as observer*: "The researcher's activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher's role as a participant." See Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, revised and expanded from *Case Study Research in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), 94-111.

⁵¹Michael Quinn Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 105.

and (4) arrange a useful synthesis as the project draws to a close.⁵²

My third means to evaluate was the narratives of pilot-group members.⁵³ As noted, at the beginning of the ministry intervention, pilot-group members were invited to engage in personal theological reflection by outlining and sharing a brief spiritual autobiography. Throughout each succeeding session, I looked for evidence and listened for the various ways that the ministry project might be informing and affecting the story of their lives in their own lived experience of Christian spirituality. In session 3, I invited group members to reflect upon, and write down, some thoughts related to the stories of their lives over the six-week experience. It was important to me to know how the experience in the ministry project might have affected them. From beginning to end, I listened for the following: (1) the feelings and emotions as group members responded to the recognition of God's work and presence in their lives and (2) evidence that the experience of group members in the project had led them to a less individual and more communal understanding of the lived experience of Christian spirituality.

As noted previously, the design of the ministry intervention was to inform and demonstrate how the lived experience of Christian spirituality is participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. I had confidence that the three means of evaluation selected (Faulk as independent expert, Finley as participant as observer, and the narratives of pilot-group members) would function to assist me in determining the

⁵²A letter acknowledging Finley's agreement to participate in the project and to establish evaluation protocols for him is included as appendix S.

⁵³Tim Sensing, "Narrative as a Critical Tool for Research Methodology," TD (photocopy), Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX.

qualitative effectiveness of this ministry project designed for the Quail Springs Church of Christ.

Conclusion

The methodology for the project involved eight sessions in which different elements and actions of contemplative spirituality were introduced. A pilot group of twelve people was selected to participate in the ministry project. In each session of the ministry intervention, various contemplative actions were introduced, examined, and explored regarding the role they might play in helping each of us in our own lived experience of Christian spirituality. In order to ascertain results from this project, I selected three means of evaluation. In chapter 4, I will explore the results from the three angles of evaluation that I chose to provide qualitative assessment of the ministry project.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Chapter 3 described the process and procedure I used for the ministry intervention. In each of the eight sessions, I introduced contemplative actions and practices to the pilot group in order to present the role these actions can play in assisting us to live out the goal of Christian spirituality. I invited group members to consider, and then participate in, various contemplative actions in order to heighten awareness of God and to foster theological reflection. In each session, I emphasized that the process of Christian spiritual formation is not just an isolated, personal experience but one that is communal as it reflects the triune nature of God's life. Underlying this emphasis was my belief that practices associated with contemplative spirituality would deepen faith and strengthen relationships in church life at Quail Springs. In chapter 3, I also outlined the three means selected to evaluate the qualitative effectiveness of the project. Chapter 4 describes the results of the ministry intervention based on Faulk's report, my interpretation of Finley's notes, and the personal narratives of pilot group members.

Faulk's Report: Independent Expert

Faulk's life experience, faith, education, and training as a spiritual director equipped him to evaluate the spiritual and theological content of the ministry intervention. He served as a spiritual companion and provided encouragement to me

throughout the project. His love and kindness endeared him to all of the pilot group members. Faulk's kind and gracious spirit directed him to be more positive than he needed to be and less critical than he could have been in his overall assessment of the project. I asked Faulk to respond to, or interpret, the curriculum and presentations by answering the following questions:

1. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, is the theological, spiritual, and historical content presented in each session adequate to make contemplative practices and actions understandable and accessible to the pilot group?

2. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, do I communicate information related to particular practices in an engaging way that encourages and persuades others to participate?

3. In this invitation to contemplative spirituality, do the practices, interactions, and times of theological reflection shared in the sessions conceive, give birth, and nurture healthy group spiritual formation?

Faulk's observations made during each session as he responded to the process and procedure of the ministry intervention are now summarized. After considering his observations from each of the eight sessions, I share his overall evaluation in his own words.

Session 1: Remembering Our Story—Seeing God in Our Past

Faulk observed that the physical setting was warm, friendly, and conducive to making a person feel at ease. He perceived that the chosen group was obviously interested

in the project and was willing to make a commitment to participate. The book, magazine, and other handouts I distributed were given with a helpful word of orientation. Faulk approved of the operating covenant that I presented and explained to the group. He felt this covenant was appropriate for small-group dynamics and growth. Faulk commented that the video clips and songs I used were suitable and used in a timely manner.

According to Faulk, community was established early on, thus creating the possibility to build upon the community that had already existed within the group. Faulk said that I clarified my purposes and did a good job of defining and explaining my propositions related to the goal and lived experience of Christian spirituality. Faulk noticed that the article I assigned for reading¹ was suitable as a means to assist in preparing us, beginning on Saturday morning, to share our spiritual autobiographies.

Faulk observed that the sharing of each individual on Saturday was especially meaningful and required only the necessary comments from me as the leader. He noticed that the warm and friendly atmosphere contributed to the effectiveness of this exercise. As a spiritual director, Faulk sensed the Spirit moving in the lives of each individual. As the retreat ended, Faulk commented that cohesion in the group was evident as well as the awareness that the Spirit was moving in each other's lives. Faulk observed, "This is what Christian spiritual direction is about." In closing, Faulk stated that the Friday and Saturday retreat set the stage for the rest of the workshop to follow.

¹Becky Brodin, "Seeing God in Your Past."

Session 2: The Role of Contemplative Spirituality

For session two, Faulk observed the following: (1) at the beginning of the session, a centering down in quietness was both appropriate and helpful; (2) group members were encouraged to think of the Christian life as a journey; (3) the invitation was given to reflect and contemplate upon appropriate pieces as they were read; (4) participants were given the opportunity to share any blessings since the opening retreat session; and (5) further bonding and development of community in the group was evident. In closing, Faulk stated that the session was very effective for the time allotted.

Session 3: Listening for, and Hearing, the Voice of God

Faulk noticed that several in the group responded to the question I asked at the beginning of the session, “Have you been asked or have you talked about what we are doing in this group?” Following this introductory discussion, I set apart ten minutes for centering and quiet. Faulk considered this period of time to be appropriate for this kind of project. Faulk observed the reading from *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly was well chosen for the occasion. However, he did suggest that a slower, more deliberate reading with appropriate pauses would allow each thought and idea to sink more deeply into the consciousness of each individual. In addition, Faulk suggested that perhaps the spirit of this piece would be captured better by either shortening the reading or extending the time allotted for the reading.

Session 4: Conversing with God: The Life of Prayer

Faulk believed this session, along with sessions 1 and 2, was the most effective. In

the session, centering and breath prayers were presented and practiced. Among them was the Jesus prayer. Faulk was pleased with my reading of the Prayer of St. Patrick and noted that it was read slowly, deliberately, and with appropriate pauses. Faulk remarked that he sensed a definite movement of the Spirit within himself as well as within the group.

Session 5: Reading to Be Shaped and Formed by God

In session 5, Faulk observed that Sister Benedicta gave information and then led our group through the process of *lectio divina*. Faulk noticed that the experience was well received and that he sensed a definite moving of the Spirit within the group. Faulk suggested that sacred reading should be a part of any effort at spiritual formation.

Session 6: Discerning God's Will Together

Faulk observed that "The Mountain Survival Problem" was an appropriate exercise to illustrate that group spiritual discernment is usually more effective than decisions made by an individual. Faulk suggested that a further explanation of group dynamics and an explanation of the interaction process would be helpful but noted that the limited time for the session certainly affected this possibility. If more time were available, Faulk suggested use of the Myers-Briggs Personality Type indicator. From Faulk's perspective, this tool would clarify some important matters related to group spiritual discernment. First, the main point is that same-type personalities can make quicker decisions but not necessarily better ones. Second, a mix of different types and an appreciation of how they work together means that the strength of decisions, although they may take longer, are generally better decisions. Faulk thought that my handouts were

appropriate and helpful. Further, he suggested that I provide “Reality Checks for the Practice of Spiritual Discernment”² as an additional handout.

Session 7: The Rehearsal of Our Faith

Faulk observed that I handed out information related to the role of liturgy in Christian spirituality and the function of liturgy to retell our story. Regarding our group participation in the Lord’s Supper, Faulk observed the following: (1) the simple ritual was done with appropriate words from Scripture and (2) this straight forward experience of the story of the life of our Lord accomplished the purpose in the shortest amount of time.

Session 8: Collaborating with God in Our Future

Faulk regarded as meaningful the group’s discussion related to how elders, women’s groups, single adults, youth, and various ministries of Quail Springs could benefit from what we had learned and experienced together. Faulk suggested that members of the group could serve as role models after listening to how the project had made such a difference in each person’s life. Faulk stated that group members could now be a leavening agent in the life of Quail Springs and observed that each group member bore witness to this fact. Faulk noted the time of instruction as I presented information related to a rule of life and then also encouraged group members to write their own rules of life.

²Morris and Olsen, 154-55.

Faulk's Overall Evaluation

The following are Faulk's final thoughts from his written report:

The group was well chosen and motivated as leadership of the local congregation. Mr. Fenno was well prepared, an excellent instructor, and obviously had a great deal of feeling for what he was doing. As a trained spiritual director I could definitely feel the Spirit moving in him, the group, and myself. It is a worthwhile project that would assist any congregation in growth in the Spirit and continuing spiritual formation.

The organization of the sessions and the material were very appropriate, logically arranged, and led to an outpouring of enthusiasm, motivation, and suggestions from each member of the group for future endeavors of spiritual formation and growth. I commend Mr. Fenno on his work in this regard and pray God's richest blessings upon him in the future as he seeks to lead the congregation in spiritual formation.

A few other considerations need to be taken into account: (1) choice of future groups and how the project would be conducted with those who are not quite as motivated as the choice group for this pilot project; (2) a daily examen method of some sort should be included in the handout material; and (3) more time for hands-on contemplation and/or journaling should be included. As a whole the maximum amount was accomplished in minimum time and a suggestion would be to lengthen the course and/or make the sessions longer for a less spiritually mature and motivated group.

In closing, Faulk observed that the whole experience brought him closer to Christ and to all of the group members. Faulk was genuinely thankful for the opportunity to have participated in the ministry project.

Finley's Notes: Participant as Observer

Finley did what I asked him to do, although at times I observed he might have actually subordinated his role of participant to his work of observation. Nevertheless, he provided helpful observations that reflected various dynamics in the group during each session. I asked Finley, in recording his observations, to look for the following:

1. Key words, emerging themes, and the first and last remarks in each

conversation that takes place

2. The role of silence and nonverbal behavior that added meaning to the exchange.

For example, was it critical thinking or non-understanding

3. Other matters related to group dynamics— who talked, who did not, what kind of interaction took place within the group.

Key Words, Emerging Themes

From the beginning of the ministry intervention “story” was a key word and an emerging theme. During and after the weekend retreat, all group members seemed to understand and embrace the idea that every life is a unique, invaluable story and that God speaks to each one of us in our stories. In each succeeding session, thoughts related to story surfaced often as group members began to integrate their personal spiritual experience with the formation of community in the group. There was a developing understanding among group members that our stories create meaning, unite us with God, and join us with each other. By taking time to reflect on their stories, group members began to understand that the power of a personal story affects both the teller and hearer. The sharing of stories opened up the hearts of all group members and encouraged free and meaningful conversation. All group members were willing to share and to listen. The sharing of each story helped group members discern God’s presence in their past and then consider God’s ongoing work in their present and future spiritual journey. The sharing of personal narratives also assisted group members in discerning the presence and work of God in the lives of other members in the group.

Another theme introduced in the beginning and then developed throughout the ministry intervention was the conception of Christian spirituality as a “lived experience.” In each of the sessions, “experience” became common speech to describe what was introduced and practiced by the group each week. It was satisfying to note how group members grasped the concept of their spiritual journey with God and with each other as a lived experience.

Role of Silence and Nonverbal Behavior

Body language speaks. At the beginning, restlessness, fidgeting, and at least one couple holding hands indicated a nervousness about what to expect. However, as the individuals began to tell their stories, personal defenses lessened and group members began to feel safe and comfortable with each other. The bonding that took place in session 1 carried the group through each succeeding session. This Spirit-created community provided an open and secure environment for each person. Each session would always end with a group hug.

One goal I had in introducing various contemplative practices was to foster theological reflection among pilot group members. Since the lived experience of Christian spirituality is, in reality, an exercise in theological reflection, I felt it necessary to ask questions during each session that would encourage critical, contemplative thought. In asking these kinds of questions, I was comfortable with the resulting space created by silence. I did not feel compelled to coerce group members to make an immediate response to my questions. Instead, I wanted each group member to grow

comfortable with the space of silence and begin to understand the role that silence can play in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. After the weekend retreat, group members seemed at ease regarding when they chose to respond and engage in conversation or when they chose to be silent. For example, in one session a particular member might speak more than others. In another session, that same group member might choose to speak less than others or maybe not speak at all. This did not bother me. I wanted group members to experience the freedom of either choosing to speak or choosing to be silent. The willingness to listen to others and to empathize with them was often witnessed in the silent language of tears, facial expressions, and even a few moans. On most occasions, I interpreted a person's silence to be the result of that individual's engagement in theological reflection. Personal conversations with group members outside the sessions confirmed my interpretation in these matters.

In evaluating the overall project, group members appeared confused on only a few occasions even though they were being introduced to new ideas and practices. However, there were a number of occasions that revealed group members were being challenged and convicted by the experience together. The challenges resulted from listening and then responding to the various questions that were asked. The personal narratives confirm that in listening, group members engaged in theological reflection and then responded in either verbal or nonverbal ways.

Other Matters Related to Group Dynamics

One of my assumptions for this project was that the hunger and thirst each

individual has for God creates the possibility for a contemplative spirituality. In addition, this individual longing forms the foundation for communal spiritual formation. After being oriented in the beginning to what would take place in the project, all group members proved eager to learn about, and experience, contemplative spirituality. The interest level that existed in this group created meaningful interaction. At the beginning, I directed and facilitated the communication. As members began to share their stories, the conversation became more spontaneous and less facilitated. In each session that followed, group members seemed always ready to share and willing to listen. At the conclusion of the ministry intervention, group members sensed their lives now intersected in such a way that had not existed prior to the project. Therefore, group members were not ready for the project to end.

Personal Narratives

The Christian spiritual life begins with a desire for God. This desire can result in our becoming an incarnational witness of Jesus Christ. I selected the members of the pilot group based upon my observation of their desire to pursue Christ and to drink deeply from the well of living water. The intent of the ministry intervention was to teach and illustrate how the Christian spiritual life is participation with, and assimilation into, the life and activity of God. In presenting a model of contemplative spirituality that I determined accessible to pilot group members and for the ministry context of the Quail Springs Church of Christ, I looked and listened for the following: (1) the feelings and emotions as group members responded to the recognition of God's work and presence in

their lives and (2) evidence that the experience of group members in the project was leading them to a less individual, more communal understanding of the lived experience of Christian spirituality. During session 8, I invited group members to provide me with feedback related to how the ministry project affected them and their understanding of Christian spirituality. This was a take-home examen of consciousness. I wanted group members, in hearing these personal narratives, to engage in theological reflection as they wrote their responses. The following is a summary of the personal narratives of the group as they responded to my two-part request.

Part One

Group members were asked to share the story of their lives the past six weeks. In addition, participants were asked to consider how their experience in the ministry project had affected them.

The invitation to contemplative spirituality provided a new set of criteria for deepening the devotional life of group members. The project presented what one member referred to as a paradigm shift that encouraged group members to think differently, to experience renewal, and to awaken them to new ways of communing with God. Group members experienced the power and peace of quiet solitude. Actions associated with various kinds of contemplative prayer and sacred reading were frequently mentioned in the personal narratives. Members found agreement that suggested breath prayers as well as the practice of *lectio divina* assisted them in focusing on specific words that helped to center them in God and stay focused on what was most important in their lives.

Participants noted that this kind of praying taught them how to “pray continually” (1 Thess 5:17). The introduction to sacred reading taught group members a way to read the Bible beyond just trying to obtain information. The actual practice of sacred reading enabled group members to hear a particular word or words from God and then allow that good news to shape and change their lives. In addition, members acknowledged the gifts of God’s grace received in the sharing of the word or words that other members of the group had heard from God in these practices together.

The experience emboldened group members in their faith. Several acknowledged that they had talked with other church members as well as some of their coworkers about the project experience. Among group members, there was a desire to create opportunities for others to be exposed to contemplative practices. They sensed that there were many Quail Springs members starving for this kind of spiritual intimacy.

Group members indicated they were encouraged and strengthened by the project. For most, it served as an opportunity to examine their own journeys in view of the diverse, yet common, experiences of the others in the group. For some, the project experience served as a time of restoration as well as renewed confidence in the faithfulness of God. One person stated that the project experience had restored for her a sense of worth and dignity as she had been awakened to a renewed awareness that God could use her. Obviously, the members brought their own individual issues and circumstances to the project. Yet they all spoke of renewed confidence in an ability to trust God and submit to his control in the midst of their own individual circumstances of life. The project experience taught group members that whatever the situation—whether

times of trouble or frustration, a season of transition, or just an attempt to pacify busy schedules that create daily stress—contemplative actions can assist them in creating space, encountering God, and experiencing his peace.

The engagement of contemplative practices led to an intense experience with God. For example, one woman wrote, “The last six weeks have been the most emotionally explosive of the last twenty years.” The encounter with God through contemplative spirituality heightened awareness of God’s presence and fostered theological reflection. All group members acknowledged the use of some of the practices introduced. They shared how these practices were assisting them in bringing structure, order, and control to their lives, instead of living with a sense of being overwhelmed and controlled by daily tasks. One group member wrote, “My participation in this group has been one of the factors that has served to bring me out of the isolation of my private devotion into a shared experience of community devotion.”

The sessions of ministry intervention affected group members in dramatic ways. The practices introduced in the project suggested ways and provided means for group members to center on God and know his presence. There was consensus among group members that these kinds of actions provided a framework for Christian spirituality that inspired and emboldened them to draw near to God in proactive, focused ways.

Part Two

Group members were asked to share what they had learned about themselves as a result of the ministry intervention. In addition, participants were asked to consider how

the experience of the ministry project had affected their understanding of Christian community.

Group members shared a cluster of thoughts related to how the group experience had informed them about themselves as well as how it had affected their understanding of Christian community. Above all, the invitation to contemplative spirituality provided a framework to assist group members in their own lived experience of Christian spirituality.

In the ministry intervention, group members experienced a deepening intimacy. One person noted that this intimacy awakened a surging sensitivity within them to have an increased patience and compassion toward others in their spiritual struggles. The project experience created a freedom for group members to share and to become vulnerable with each other. Group members experienced blessing in the opportunity to know and to be known by others in the group. For many, it was the first time they felt they could be open and truthful. In the project experience, group members found safety in the vulnerability of allowing others to look into their hearts and souls. In this safe haven, they shared their struggles. Members of the group acknowledged their need for prayer and support from others.

Group members expressed a desperate need for community, a desire to seek it, and a willingness no longer to hide behind the mask of self-reliance. The project experience taught them that they performed better in a group. The ministry project also alerted them to the pivotal role that community plays in helping them grow toward God. One person shared the following: “I know from the project that I can’t do life alone. I not

only need guidance from listening to God, but I need the help and encouragement from my fellow believers. I have learned that they need me also.” The group agreed that community encourages, supports, and promotes individual accountability.

The ministry project taught group members that they do not have to do contemplative actions and practices on their own. This recognition led to the suggestion that group practice always be a factor in continuing efforts to introduce contemplative practices at Quail Springs. One person, in reflecting upon her experience in the ministry project, stated that it had served to affirm practices she had developed in private over the past twenty years but that the group experience had added a communal dimension that she never knew was possible. In becoming aware of this, she wrote:

I see that I have been comfortable “hiding” in my private devotional life, which is never a place for a Christian to stay. I’m understanding that the purpose of the transformation that results in the privacy of my personal devotional disciplines is to equip me for outward works of service to be shared in the church and in the world.

The structure of this project has shown me a “method” for instructing others in the devotional life I’ve always known was important but was never able to convey. It has helped me refocus on the simplicity of a relationship with God to be shared with others, which is the heart of the gospel.

Listening to similar experiences in each other’s stories united group members in a remarkable and mysterious way. The telling of individual stories created community and awakened group members to a heightened awareness of God’s presence in their past and present. This renewed the group members’ hope and established a sense of purpose as they considered their future life with God and with each other. The project experience filled the hearts of group members with optimism as they considered how others could

enjoy, desire, and be changed by the practices of contemplative spirituality.

Conclusions

The three means of evaluation show consistent and reliable results. The means of evaluation validate that the model of contemplative spirituality I presented to pilot group members functioned in a transformative way. This model was received by group members and was proved to be accessible to the ministry context at Quail Springs. Pilot group members found this invitation to contemplative spirituality to be one that acted as a means of grace to facilitate individual as well as communal spiritual formation. The project experience increased the understanding of group members regarding the lived experience of Christian spirituality. All group members indicated that their participation in the project had fostered theological reflection and heightened their awareness of God. The ministry intervention ended with members of the group thirsting for more as they were not ready for the project to end.

I entered the ministry intervention portion of this project with some anxiety, not knowing what to expect. I simply did not know how the members of the pilot group would receive and respond to the things I had presented. After the initial gathering in session 1, my anxieties were replaced with an overwhelming joy and satisfaction. The experience in the ministry project exceeded my expectations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE ACTIONS

This project addressed an acknowledged need for ministry action that facilitated spiritual formation in the community life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. The problem addressed by this project was a lack of contemplative spirituality in the life of the Quail Springs Church that helped explain much of the fragmentation that had characterized this church throughout the years. Therefore, the focus of the project was to present a model of contemplative spirituality accessible to the ministry context at Quail Springs. The intent of the ministry intervention was to teach and illustrate how Christian spirituality is, in essence, an exercise in theological reflection. The foundational thesis for the ministry project was the following: The goal of Christian spirituality is to live and participate in the life and activity of God.

Conclusions

The process of the ministry intervention verified my basic assumptions:

1. The longing for God creates the possibility for a contemplative spirituality. The Christian spiritual life begins with a desire for God and for the manifestation of God in our lives and in the world. This longing also provides the foundation for spiritual formation in Christian community.

2. Spiritual direction is vital for every Christian, but personal spiritual formation

is not intended by God to be an experience in isolation. Life in community plays a vital role in facilitating healthy and balanced spiritual formation.

The results collected from George Faulk's report, my interpretation of Trey Finley's notes, and the personal narratives validate that the model of contemplative spirituality I presented to the pilot group functioned in a transformative way. The spiritual thirst of group members was obvious. They embraced the model and were eager to practice the contemplative actions that were presented in each session. Group members were united by their experience in the ministry intervention and learned that community plays a vital role in an individual's spiritual growth and formation. All group members acknowledged that their participation in the project had fostered theological reflection and heightened their awareness of God. The ministry intervention ended with group members thirsting for more; they were not ready for the project to end. Testimony from all group members indicated that their spiritual lives had been dramatically impacted by the opportunity to participate in the ministry project.

The ministry intervention became one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in local church ministry. In the beginning, I was nervous about how group members would receive and understand the model of contemplative spirituality that I intended to present. However, my anxieties were quickly removed once I witnessed how group members eagerly embraced and responded to the model. The project experience encouraged me and affirmed the need to introduce others to various practices and actions of contemplative spirituality.

Implications

The project experience has several implications regarding what role contemplative spirituality will play in shaping the present and future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ. First, since the revolving door of church membership continues, it must be acknowledged that being progressive with a contemporary style of worship is inadequate in and of itself. These are good and spiritually enriching, but they do not necessarily create a thirst for God or guarantee a Christ-formed spirituality. Present ministry programs at Quail Springs provide spiritual support and Christian fellowship but seem inadequate regarding the need for group spiritual direction. Apparently, a lack of contemplative spirituality has contributed to the fragmentation that has been characteristic of the Quail Springs Church throughout its history. The results discerned from the ministry project show that contemplative actions functioned in a transformative way and brought about individual and communal spiritual formation. Therefore, in order to transform Quail Springs from a collection of individuals joined by agreement or personal preferences to a spirit-created and united community, contemplative spirituality must play a vital role.

Second, group members acknowledged that not everyone at Quail Springs is ready for an invitation to contemplative spirituality, including some elders, ministry staff, and other significant church leaders. However, they agreed that pilot group members can serve as a leavening agent to introduce actions and practices of contemplative spirituality into the broader life of the Quail Springs Church. The invitation to contemplative spirituality must be introduced in both formal and informal ways.

Third, every effort should be made to avoid any appearance or question that would suggest those participating in contemplative actions are spiritually elite in any manner. In individual and group practices, it is vital to provide windows of opportunity that expose others to the ways contemplative actions can bless them and the means contemplative practices provide to support them in the lived experience of Christian spirituality.

Fourth, some of the pilot group members need more time, training, and experience with contemplative actions before they will feel confident in leading others. One desired outcome I had for the project was that group members would be equipped to lead other groups in practicing a model of contemplative spirituality. In this way, group members will serve as spiritual leaven in the present and future life of the Quail Springs Church. At this point, it is crucial that I continue to meet with, and encourage, group members, organize gatherings of the pilot group, and provide continuing ministry support to them so that this desired outcome is accomplished.

One additional implication raised by the project concerns those church leaders and spiritually thirsty believers who may want to replicate the project in their own ministry contexts. In general, Churches of Christ do not have a history or reputation for the practice of contemplative spirituality. However, the theological openness at Quail Springs made this ministry project possible. For those in other Churches of Christ (or for churches with similar histories and traditions), it is vital to develop a model that is accessible to their own particular ministry context. In formulating their plan, I would suggest that they center attention on those actions and practices that they know their church leadership can receive, understand, and then practice.

Future Actions

In session 8, I dedicated the last hour together as time to hear the ideas of group members regarding future actions related to the ministry project. I asked the group the following questions:

1. What is the future of the pilot group?
2. What role or impact can this model have on fostering spiritual formation in the future life of the Quail Springs Church of Christ?
3. How can we go about leading other groups through the same or similar process? What are some ways we can invite others to participate in the actions and practices of contemplative spirituality?

The personal narratives give testimony to how the project experience transformed group members. At the end of the ministry intervention, group members stated they would miss being together with each other. Therefore, they expressed a desire for the group to continue to meet together on a periodic basis (perhaps quarterly). These scheduled gatherings could serve as a kind of sanctuary and insure an ongoing connection among members of the pilot group. In this way, group members thought they could continue to share in each other's lives, receive spiritual direction, and enjoy the community that had been created by the project experience. Members also agreed that future gatherings would provide opportunities for them to receive additional training and to gain necessary experience that would equip them in the effort to lead others in practices and actions of contemplative spirituality.

One member of the group observed that many people come to Quail Springs to be healed. In his judgment, the project experience provides a framework for those who are healed to then become doctors who can serve to heal others. Another member suggested that an invitation to contemplative spirituality could serve as an outreach opportunity for unbelievers who are seeking an introduction to Christian spirituality.

All group members recognized the impact of the project experience in their own lives. The blessings they received convinced them of the need for the project experience to be replicated. This attempt could be made in Bible classes, Connections groups, or other existing ministry structures. In addition, participants believed that other avenues could be conceived that would invite others to experience the living waters of contemplative spirituality. Members of the pilot group are ready to introduce others to actions and practices associated with contemplative spirituality. They hope that others can be infected with the blessing of community they now enjoy. Some of the group members are ready not only to participate in future groups but also to help facilitate the process that we used in the ministry project. All group members stand ready to serve as a ministry team. In such ways, the pilot group can serve seminally to originate and lead new ministries at Quail Springs under the heading of “Living Waters” and insure that this model has a continuing impact on fostering spiritual formation in the future life of Quail Springs Church.

Group members expressed an urgent concern regarding how other church leaders and those associated with significant ministries at Quail Springs (e.g., worship, youth, Connections) could be introduced to contemplative actions and practices. Therefore, they

thought the project experience needed to be replicated and could be in a variety of ways. The retreat experience of the first session created and nurtured a remarkable community among members of the group. Thus they agreed that a retreat setting provides the best entry point to invite others at Quail Springs into this kind of group spiritual direction. The process of spiritual formation would begin with each member in the newly selected group telling their story.

Group members now understand that they can serve as a leavening agent in the life of the Quail Springs Church. One significant role group members can play in present and future considerations is their direct involvement in inviting others into the group experience of contemplative spirituality.

WORKS CITED

- “2004 Economic Abstract” [on-line]. Edmond, OK: Edmond Economic Development Authority; available from http://www.eeda.com/down/images/2004_Economic_Abstract.pdf; Internet; accessed 17 June 2004.
- Allen, C. Leonard. *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and after) the Modern Age*. Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004.
- Allen, C. Leonard, and Danny Gray Swick. *Participating in God’s Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ*. Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2001.
- Anderson, Fil. *Running on Empty: Contemplative Spirituality for Overachievers*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004.
- Apollo 13*. Directed by Ron Howard. 140 minutes. Universal, 1998. Digital video disc.
- Aquino, Frederick D. “A Theology of Informed Judgment.” *Restoration Quarterly* 45:1-2 (2003): 115-25.
- Bidwell, Duane R. *Short-Term Spiritual Guidance*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*. Trans. John W. Doberstein. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954.
- Brodin, Becky. “Seeing God in Your Past.” *Discipleship Journal* 106 (1998): 51-55.
- Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- Casting Crowns. “Who Am I.” *Casting Crowns*. Beech Street Records, 2003. Compact disc.
- Chan, Simon. *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Childers, Jeff W., Douglas A. Foster, and Jack R. Reese. *The Crux of the Matter: Crisis, Tradition, and the Future of Churches of Christ*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2001.

Childers, Jeff W., and Frederick D. Aquino. *Unveiling Glory: Visions of Christ's Transforming Presence*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003.

The Cloud of Unknowing: The Classic of Medieval Mysticism. Edited by Evelyn Underhill. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003.

Dawn, Marva, and Eugene Peterson. *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Delling, Gerhard. "τέλος." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 8:49, 54-56. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

Discipleship Journal 143 (2004).

Dougherty, Rose Mary. *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995.

Ellas, John W. *Church Growth Through Groups: Strategies for Varying Levels of Christian Community*. Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1990.

Farley, Benjamin W. *In Praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Values in a Christian Context*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998.

Gilliland, Pat. "Congregations Shun Differences for Celebration." *Daily Oklahoman*. 1 July 2000. Sec. B. 1-2.

Hart, Thomas N. *The Art of Christian Listening*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Henderson, Robert Mark. "Leadership and the Life of God: Distribution of Ministerial Gifts and Leadership Practices at the Quail Springs Church of Christ." D.Min. thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2004.

Holloway, Gary, and Earl Lavender. *Living God's Love: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*. Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004.

Hughes, Richard T. *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

- Johnson, Abigail. *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004.
- Johnson, Ben Campbell. *Calming the Restless Spirit*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997.
- _____. *The God Who Speaks: Learning the Language of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Johnson, Ben Campbell, and Andrew Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Kelly, Thomas R. *A Testament of Devotion*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.
- The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Directed by Peter Jackson. New Line Home Entertainment, Inc., 2003. Digital video disc.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.
- MercyMe. "Word of God Speak." *Spoken For*. Word Entertainment, 2002. Compact disc.
- Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998.
- Morgan, Richard L. *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Biography*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002.
- Morris, Danny E. and Charles M. Olsen. *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997.
- Mulholland Jr., M. Robert. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- _____. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000.
- Myers, William R. *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program*. Chicago: Exploration, 1993.
- Nouwen, Henri. "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry." *Leadership* 16.2 (spring 1995): 81-87.

- _____. *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1981.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary. Vol. 44. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982.
- Ortberg, John. "True (and False) Transformation: Two Counterfeit Forms of Spiritual Maturity, and One Way to Find the Real Thing." *Leadership* 23.3 (summer 2002): 100-4.
- The Passion of the Christ*. Directed by Mel Gibson. 126 minutes. Icon Productions, 2004. Digital video disc.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987.
- Rice, Chris. "Untitled Hymn." *Short-Term Memories*. Rocketown Records, 2004. Compact disc.
- Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- Sensing, Tim. "Narrative as a Critical Tool for Research Methodology." TD (photocopy). Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX.
- Smith, Michael W. "Breathe." *Worship*. Reunion Records, 2001. Compact disc.
- Stevens, R. Paul, and Michael Green. *Living the Story: Biblical Spirituality for Everyday Christians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Stone, Howard W., and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996.
- The Story of Christian Spirituality: Two Thousand Years, from East to West*, ed. Gordon Mursell. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.
- Thomas à Kempis. *Of the Imitation of Christ*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1981.
- Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

The Transforming of a Tradition. Edited by Leonard Allen and Lynn Anderson. Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2001.

The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation. Edited by Keith Beasley-Topliffe. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003.

Vanderwall, Francis W. *Spiritual Direction: An Invitation to Abundant Life*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

_____. *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Webber, Robert E. *Worship, Old and New*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

Woodruff, Paul. *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*. New York: Oxford, 2001.

APPENDIX A

FAMILY OF GOD AT QUAIL SPRINGS

Vision Statement

Our vision is to become a community of believers fully devoted to God and his purposes in the world by sharing in the ministry of Jesus Christ through the power and gifting of the Holy Spirit.

Mission Statement

Our mission is proclaiming and living the love of Jesus Christ through an authentic community offering salvation to the lost, encouragement and growth to the saved, and healing to the wounded and brokenhearted.

Slogan

"Fully Redeemed, Fully Devoted, Fully Surrendered"

Core Values

1. We believe that the deepest longings of the human heart can be satisfied only in relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. We believe that the church should be a community where the grace and acceptance of Jesus that has been freely received is freely shared.
3. We believe that the church is called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry forward the ministry of Jesus by offering salvation to the lost, compassion to the poor, and healing to the wounded and brokenhearted.
4. We believe that authentic, Spirit-led worship orients believers to God and opens them to his transforming work.
5. We believe that the teaching and ministry of the church should be culturally relevant while upholding the authority of the Bible as the word of God.

6. We believe that an active commitment to grow in devotion to Christ and submission to his purposes should be normal for every believer.
7. We believe that authentic Christian community is necessary for the edification and transformation of believers and that small groups are the best setting for nurturing this kind of community.
8. We believe the church should function as a body of believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, where every believer faithfully stewards his or her spiritual gifts.
9. We believe that the church should be a source of blessing as we love and serve our surrounding community in the name of Jesus Christ.
10. We believe that the active pursuit of unity among believers honors God and draws people to Christ.

APPENDIX B

RULE OF LIFE (Example)

This example of a rule of life is suggested by Holloway and Lavender in their book, *Living God's Love: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, page 113.

Daily practices:

- *Arise each day with the thought, "This day is for God."
- *Spend time in meditation on Christ as I job in the morning.
- *Spend thirty minutes each morning in Bible study and prayer.
- *Say the Jesus prayer every time I look at my watch.
- *Have a brief, ten-minute Bible reading and prayer after lunch.
- *Reflect on the day with God in night prayer before bed.

Weekly practices:

- *Worship with my church.
- *Serve breakfast at the homeless shelter.
- *Spend one day resting in God's presence.

Monthly practices:

- *Meet with my small group for study, prayer, and reflection.
- *Spend a day alone with God as a spiritual mini-retreat.

Yearly practices:

- *Spend one weekend in a group retreat.
- *Spend several days in a service project.
- *Spend one weekend alone as a reflection on the year past and the year ahead.

APPENDIX C

THE “ONE ANOTHER” LIFE

Prepared by Wyatt E. Fenno

Here is a sampling of the “one another” passages in the New Testament epistles. They declare what should be the characteristic responses and behaviors of those who are a part of the body of Christ.

- They are devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10).
- They give preference and honor to one another (Rom. 12:10).
- They choose to live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16).
- They assume the continuing debt to love one another (Rom. 13:8).
- They refrain from passing judgment on one another (Rom. 14:13).
- They accept one another just as they have been accepted by Christ (Rom. 15:7).
- They instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).
- They greet one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; cf., 1 Pet. 5:14).
- They serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13).
- They are humble, gentle, and patient as they bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2).
- They are kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave them. (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).
- They speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
- They submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).
- They encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25).
- They consider how they might spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).
- They do not slander one another (Jas. 4:11).
- They sincerely love one another deeply from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22).
- They are sympathetic and live in harmony with one another (1 Pet. 3:8).
- They offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9).
- They clothe themselves with humility toward one another because “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).
- They accept the obligation and responsibility to love one another (1 Jn. 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 Jn. 5).

APPENDIX D

THE IMPORTANCE OF “STORY”

“Life” is a story. It unfolds each day with a beginning and an end with all sorts of characters and settings. Years pass like chapters in a novel. The seasons of life are experienced as drama, tragedy, comedy, and maybe even like a soap opera.

Story is the language of our hearts and souls. Stories nourish us and inform us. All great stories pretty much follow the same story line. Things were once “good,” then something or someone “bad” happened. Now, there is trouble and a great battle must be fought or a journey taken. At the last possible moment, a hero comes and makes things right again.

Why is this the case? Because every story that speaks to the needs of our hearts borrows its power from the greater and more noble story of God—a story that is woven into the fabric of our very souls as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. We long for “happily ever after.” Why? Because the story of God has placed this longing in our hearts. Yet, in this present age death remains on the horizon as a constant reminder that all is not well. Every story has an ending. Yet, our story does not have to end in death. God’s story offers us “life.”

If life is a story, what is the plot? What is my role? As noted, there is a larger story (e.g., “You are here” - locator in a mall or hospital). It is important to locate ourselves in the grander, greater metanarrative--the story of God. The story of God is hidden in the ancient past, presently unfolding, and waiting in the future for us to discover. As we come near to know the life and understand the story of God, we will begin to understand our lives and purpose. Our story is informed by the greater story of God. By paying attention to our stories, we find tangible evidence to communicate and experience the reality of God.

It is vital to reflect upon and remember the story of our lives. We learn our most important lessons through story. For example, if you want to know me, then you need to know my story. One of the greatest gifts we can offer to each other is the telling of and listening to our stories. The power of a personal story affects both the teller and the hearer. This exercise empowers us to live out our stories. This action unifies us as we begin to recognize how our lives intersect with each other. And, above all, this practice helps us to identify the fingerprints and footprints of God in our life's experiences.

Richard L. Morgan, in his book *Remembering Your Story*, offers the following "Foundation Principles of Spiritual Biography":

1. Every life is a unique, invaluable story.
2. God speaks to us in our stories.
3. Connecting our stories with God's story is the work of the Spirit.
4. Painful memories can be healed through stories.
5. Remembering our stories creates community and the future.
6. Faith stories are the legacy we leave.
7. Stories create meaning. . . at any age.¹

As we reflect upon our lives and experiences, we uncover explanations to why we think, believe, and act the way we do. This reflection is a dynamic process that makes our theology touchable in the lived experience of Christian spirituality.

¹Richard L. Morgan, *Remember Your Story*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 16-25.

APPENDIX E

Used by permission of *Discipleship Journal*. Copyright 1998, The Navigators.
Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. To subscribe, visit
www.discipleshipjournal.com or call (800) 877-1811.

SEEING GOD IN YOUR PAST HOW TO SPOT GOD’S FINGERPRINTS ON YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY

By Becky Brodin

“How old is this tree?” asked the plaque at the base of the tree stump. I wasn’t going to let that challenge go unmet so I started to count the rings: 1, 2, 3 . . . 123, 124, 125. That tree was old!

The plaque explained that the rings of a tree not only reveal its age, but also the environmental conditions in any given year—whether there had been a lot of rain or very little, for example. Some rings even indicated forest fires.

If this old tree could talk, it would sure tell us a lot, I thought. But trees can’t talk. They can reflect the past, but they cannot tell us how they felt during certain events or what they learned.

That is not so with people. We have the wonderful capacity to both recount our pasts and learn from them. Take, for example, John and Mary, a professional couple from Virginia. I knew both of them had embraced Christianity as adults, so over dinner a couple of months ago, I asked them, “How do you see God in your past?”

Mary dreamily responded, “Awesome!” I was hoping to hear more than one word, so I pried. “No, tell me, when you look back over your life, how can you see that God was at work?”

Mary told me about a college professor who had openly denied the existence of God. That had prompted Mary to toss her fragile faith out the window. Years later when she was happily married and about to have a baby, she reconsidered God’s existence. The miracle of pregnancy opened her heart to God, who had been steadily drawing her to Himself.

John explained that, while he hadn’t abandoned his faith, he had harbored deep questions about many aspects of religion. God brought people into his life who helped him wrestle with those questions. In time, his faith deepened. Both John and Mary related facts, like the rings on a tree stump, but they also associated the events with the reality of God working in their lives. They saw God in their past.

Marking Milestones

All of us need to be reassured of our relationship with God from time to time, to run our finger down the rope of the past to feel the anchor of God's love. The writer of Psalm 42 demonstrates this well. He was having a very bad spell according to his lament in verse three: "My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'"

But then the author looks to the past. There he is reminded of God's past workings. He writes, "These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng" (Psalm 42:4). The word remember means to mark. The psalmist marked a time when he led worship filled with praise. This memory reassured him that he could hope in God. Things would get better.

A few years ago I accepted an offer of my dream job. I was thrilled. Once in the job, however, it didn't take long to encounter significant problems far beyond my ability. I eventually quit that dream job, deeply shaken in my trust in God. Why had He led me into such a mess? Why had I trusted Him? Was He tantalizing me with my heart's desire just to make me watch it crumble?

To regain my spiritual footing, I looked back over my life and reviewed specific benchmarks when God had done something significant for me. The pain didn't abate immediately, but I was able to move on, assured that my anchor was secure.

Another reason to look for God in our past is to remember lessons He has taught us. The biblical prophets constantly warned people about their future by reviewing the mistakes of the past.

When I received my first credit card, I charged up a storm. I bought things I never would have considered if I was on a cash-only basis. And then the statement came—and the sharp conviction of the Holy Spirit.

It took me eight months to clear that debt! Even now, years later, when I am tempted to spend beyond my means, I remember the pain of digging out of debt. That past lesson from the Lord continues to affect my present behavior.

Living with Tunnel Vision

What happens when we fail to look for God in our past? Mark's Gospel gives us an example. The disciples were all on hand when Jesus miraculously multiplied the bread and fish to feed a crowd of 5,000 people in Mark 6:30–44. Not long after, they watched Jesus feed another crowd of 4,000.

Soon after, Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee when the disciples realized they had forgotten to bring enough bread for the journey. Jesus heard their discussion, and I can imagine Him shaking His head in amazement. He reminded the disciples of the two miracles they had just been part of: the feeding of 5,000 and the feeding of 4,000. Jesus pressed them, "Do you still not understand?" The disciples failed to connect the miracles in the past with their present situation. They failed to see God in their past.

How can we avoid the disciples' tunnel vision? How can we begin to see God in our past?

Lifelines

Seeing God in your past requires more than a casual stroll down memory lane. Rather, it takes a deliberate three-step process: stop, look, and listen. Stop and intentionally explore the past. Look at what the events meant or what you learned. Listen and discern how God was involved in the events.

There are dozens of ways to apply these steps to bring past memories into focus. One method is to create a lifeline. Lifelines trace the major events and the people who influenced you in chronological order. They are easy to construct. You can begin at the present and work back or, as I'll demonstrate, start at your beginning and work forward. Use blank paper, or even better, get a roll of paper. Use different colors of markers, and have fun! Here's how to apply the steps of stop, look, and listen to a lifeline.

STOP and explore the past.

Our lives are made up of natural **seasons**. When you begin your lifeline, draw a long line across the paper and add hash marks to designate the different eras of your life, such as early childhood, school days, teen years, college, early years of marriage, young kids, careers, and so on.

Once you have your seasons on the lifeline, add **critical events**. I focus on four types of events: successes, failures, life changers, and painful events. All of these can help you see God in your past.

Here are a few questions that will help you remember critical events.

- “What memories make me smile?” List the times and events that made you feel blessed or successful.
- “What would I do over again if I had the chance?” Mistakes are often catalysts for change. Looking at past failures doesn't have to be awful; seeing how we have changed can be rewarding.
- “What got my attention so that I made a conscious change in my behavior or attitudes?” There are usually only a handful of these experiences in anyone's life. Focusing on them will show you how God was orchestrating events that would help you grow.
- “What memories stab my heart?” Looking back at painful events takes courage, but if we are willing to do so, we'll discover that deep beliefs in God, life, and relationships are forged in the crucible of pain.

Once you add critical events to your lifeline, it will look something like this.

The last ingredient in your lifeline is the **key people** who have had an impact on you—either positive or negative. (To avoid clutter, you may want to start with a fresh timeline for this step.) These sample questions will help you focus on the people God has used in your life.

- “Who has made a big difference in my life?” List people God has used to bless you. Look at the seasons of your life and ask, “Who was a key person during that era?”
- “Who has hurt or disappointed me?” It is hard to look at painful relationships in

the past, but we probably learn more than we realize from these.

When I was a new nurse, I worked with an older nurse who had a terrible attitude and complained about everything. I was young and ambitious; she seemed to throw cold water on all my ideas. I dreaded going to work when she was on duty.

Then one night, there was a critical situation on our unit. In my inexperience, I froze. But this older nurse calmly stepped to my side and whispered to me what to do. She coached me through the crisis, and I learned a new lesson about being a good nurse. I was also humbled that I had been so impatient and judgmental. After that, I looked for the good in coworkers. That difficult relationship was the catalyst for several essential life lessons.

Add your key people to your lifeline now.

LOOK at the meaning of events.

You are ready for the next step. Look at your lifeline—the seasons, the critical events, and the key people. In order to discover what these events and people mean, consider the following questions.

- “Why do I remember that?”
- “What did I learn?”
- “How did my life change?”

These simple questions will draw out the meaning that these memories hold for you.

LISTEN to discern God’s involvement.

The preceding questions serve as a link to the third step: seeing God in your past. Romans 8:28 assures us that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” *All things*, the painful events and relationships, the successes and blessings, all things work together. Look once more at your lifeline and ask yourself these questions.

- “What part did God have in the season, event, or relationship?”
- “What did I learn about Him?”
- “How is my life different?”

Last December, I was invited to the surprise 50th birthday party of a friend I knew years ago. I was delighted and drove 200 miles across frozen rural highways of Minnesota to join the celebration. With each mile I drove, my mind went back to my days as a nursing student.

I began college in incredible anger and rebellion, deeply cynical toward God and intolerant of Christians. But by my senior year, God had wooed me to Himself. By the time I graduated, I was as committed to God as I had been rebellious. That’s when I met the friend whose birthday I was about to celebrate. While driving, I had time to examine why and how certain events and people from those days had been so life changing. I soon found myself spontaneously praising God for giving meaning even to my rebellion, and for drawing me into His family.

Intersections and Inheritances

Constructing a lifeline always teems with meaning, but there are times when it is especially helpful.

- If you are going through a hard time and need to be reminded of God's continuous involvement in your life, look back to see how He was always there in your past. You'll be assured that He will be there for you now and in the future as well.

- If you are considering a career change, look back to discern your strengths and the situations that brought out your best. A friend of mine was at a Crossroads in her career and, with the help of a career counselor, reviewed all her work experiences. He instructed her to stop at each memory that was rich with satisfaction. He then guided her to analyze those situations to discern her God-given strengths. With that list in hand, my friend risked a different career path. Today she is in her niche, relaxed, creative, and productive. She loves her job and is a blessing to all around her. The catalyst for this courageous action was the time she spent looking for God in her past jobs.

- If you are part of a small group, use this exercise to get to know each other well in a short period of time. Celebrate your discoveries. Have fun!

To lose sight of our past—and God's involvement in it—is to lose a precious heritage. Take time to examine the “tree rings” of your life and the evidence they contain of God's unfailing faithfulness.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BECKY BRODIN is on staff with The Navigators. She teaches missionaries how to raise support and coaches them through the deputation process. She also disciples growing Christians and teaches at women's retreats.

Someday Becky would like to climb a mountain. For now, she claims to enjoy pulling weeds on her day off.

APPENDIX F

AN UNTOLD STORY: GROUP PROCESS AS A PILGRIMAGE

Richard L. Morgan¹

*In the midst of struggles, silence, and stress
We gather as pilgrims in a new land
to explore our stories
and the space /that separates us from one another.
The air is tense with anxiety
as the journey into the unknown begins.
We all have stories to tell;
Some we know, others locked within our hearts.
But we are our story.
We wonder,
Will all who sit here understand and accept my story?
Or will the episodes from my past
Not be heard. . . or understood?
I realize the group in which I move
Has power to create, reveal, and heal
all in a one-time unique way.
I am afraid and yet hopeful,
Alive in the presence of myself and others.*

¹Richard L. Morgan, *Remembering Your Story*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2002), 26-27.

APPENDIX G

A THEOLOGICAL TEMPLATE¹

Prepared by Wyatt E. Fenno

Theology is both a given and continuing task (12). There are initial understandings that we have grown into and, for the most part, taken for granted. This could be referred to as our *embedded* theology.² At the same time, there are efforts to seek increased understanding of faith. This could be referred to as *deliberative* theology.³

Our minds operate with certain indispensable structures or schemata that organize and discern data received by the senses. These structures of the mind, which can be called *templates*, are essential for organizing information into a manageable whole.

To view things theologically is to identify, correlate, and assess their meaning in light of their relationship to that message. Christians who engage in theological reflection operate with a theological template that sorts and organizes the data of life. In moving from *embedded* to *deliberative* theology, we become aware that our theological viewpoint functions as a *template*, not unlike those used in other disciplines or fields of study (39).

A theological template is not a rigid conceptual framework. It is simply a way to organize our reflections about what happens to us and to those around us. Correlating one's theology with one's personal ministry in concrete situations—with family, friends, church members, co-workers, even strangers—is a dynamic process of making our theology touchable in every moment of life (42).

Resources for Theological Reflection

¹These thoughts are collected from *How to Think Theologically*, by Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

²Christians learn what faith is all about from the formal and informal, planned and unplanned experiences of daily life. This understanding of faith, disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives, can be called *embedded theology* (13).

³This is the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions. Deliberative reflection questions what has been taken for granted. It inspects a range of alternative understandings in search of that which is most satisfactory and seeks to formulate the meaning of faith as clearly and coherently as possible (16-17).

- **Scripture**

Christianity is a history-based religion. Gerhard Ebeling, a German Theologian, wrote that “church history is the history of the exposition of Scripture.” Virtually all that is known about the origins of Christianity is found in the New Testament (44).

The Word of God is heard and mediated through the words of the Bible in the following ways: (1) propositions about divine truth; (2) symbolic expressions of faith experiences; (3) recitals of God’s identity; and (4) invitations to existential possibilities for new life (45-46). Related to this are two concerns: (1) the responsible interpretation of Scripture; and (2) the way one handles the diversity of views within the Scripture.⁴

- **Tradition**

This valuable resource serves as a check to guard against getting caught up in the implicit theologies of the present culture, or being blown here and there by the latest wind of doctrine. Tradition can be thought of as the sum total of what the church has passed down over time. Tradition is not only the content of the Christian message but also the teachings, writings, rituals, and customs of the church (47-48).

The dynamic process of passing on the Christian message involves an interplay of continuity and change. Tradition is a living, growing resource for theological reflection that provides a glimpse of the ongoing work of God in the world (49-50).

- **Reason**

This has to do with taking care in how we think about things. Reason is involved in interpreting Scripture, tradition, and experience. It also plays a vital role in every effort one makes to assess alternative accounts of the Christian faith in search of the one which is most adequate. Reason is essential in attempting to explain why one theological view is preferable to others. While unanimity with respect to the nature and criteria of good reasoning will never be achieved, theologians must not ignore this important rule: *Theology needs to be as clear, coherent, and well informed as possible* (50).

- **Experience**

Experience plays a vital role in theological reflection. All of life—and the life of faith—is a matter of experiencing. Every moment is a moment of experience with bodily, sensory, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. The life of faith embraces the totality of our life experiences (51).

The experiences of individuals as well as communities play a role in theological reflection. Experience often serves as a reality check against overblown and false theological assertions. Attention to the faith experiences of other Christians in different

⁴For example, the Bible is not *one* book; rather, it is an anthology of books written over many centuries. In addition, amid the variety of books is a diversity in the use of language—images, metaphors, poetry, historical narrative, cultic materials, legal and oral prescriptions, prophetic, sermonistic, and didactic passages.

social locations is one means to test the truth of theological understandings that one comes to hold (53). Doing theological reflection calls for Christians to be aware of the experience factor in their own understandings of the faith—as well as the understandings of the faith of others (54).

Resources for theological reflection are many and varied. Christian theologians are called upon to attend to the makeup of their own theological template. Does it draw upon the resources of Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience? Are these resources used responsibly? Each of us needs a template that will bring those resources to bear upon our interpretation, correlation, and assessment of the meaning of things from the viewpoint of faith in the Christian message of God (54).

APPENDIX H

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Wyatt E. Fenno

The Journey

The Christian life is a journey. We are on our “way” as Jesus is the “Way.” The journey is filled with its good and its bad, its joys and its sorrows, its mountains and its valleys, its victories and its defeats. Our journey is characterized by movement and discovery, challenge and change, uncertainty and hope. At times, our journey is difficult; it becomes what seems to be a long and arduous journey. We feel pressure from every side. We are confused and perplexed about circumstances. We may even feel abandoned and alone. With the difficulties, we easily become tired and weary. As we travel this journey, it becomes tempting to stop, to take a diversion off the path, or maybe even to give up altogether. There are some things that we wished would just go away. Yet, they relentlessly follow us on our journey. For one, our struggle with sin. Satan seems successful in laying his snares before our vulnerabilities. The same kinds of temptations haunt us and follow us around wherever we go. And, it seems too often that the guilt created by our failures consumes and imprisons us, instead of that guilt being offered to God in order to be redeemed and used for His glory. God says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Indeed, the journey is not even remotely possible for us apart from God’s grace.

The Christian life is a journey. And, thankfully, it is one that we do not have to take alone. We have a road map. God has revealed himself to us in Scripture to provide guidance and direction. In the Bible, we read of a great cloud of witnesses who trusted God and trail blazed a path for us. And, we also benefit from the shared experience of many Christians since who have taken the journey before us. They have now passed down their wisdom, experience, traditions, and words of encouragement. As we travel in our journey, it is critical that we remember these witnesses. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

The Christian life is a journey. The Christian journey is, and is meant to be, a communal and supportive pilgrimage. Our journey is marked in a special way by companionship, first with the One we seek to follow and second with those who also seek

to follow Jesus Christ. We need each other. We need each other desperately. Not one of us should ever dare to attempt to take the journey alone.

The Christian life is a journey.

Questions for Theological Reflection:

- What remembrances, reflections, and feelings do you have right now as you consider your story as a journey?
- In looking back to last weekend, what did you learn about yourself as you listened to the stories of others? As you have reflected, what have you discerned about the presence and work of God in your life as well as the lives of others?

APPENDIX I

TAKING TIME TO BE “HOLY”

- ▶ The lived experience of Christian spirituality is really an exercise in theological reflection.

“Theological reflection is a process of discerning where and how God is present and at work in our lives, against a backdrop of the biblical story, theological themes and concepts, and our church traditions” (Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups*, 37).

Johnson suggests we are theologically reflecting when we ask “Where is God in this?” or “What does God want me to learn from this?” Beyond asking ourselves, we can add other questions to deepen our reflection such as: “Where is God for others?” “What biblical stories or images come to mind?” Theology is alive and lively because it is a conversation arising from real-life situations.

Questions for Theological Reflection:

- ▶ What was the best thing about your day? Worst?
- ▶ How would you describe the spirituality of your parents and grandparents? What overt messages did you receive? What unspoken messages? What do you want to keep and what do you want to leave behind?
- ▶ Who would you say is one of the most significant spiritual influences in your life? Why?
- ▶ What do you perceive to be the most pressing need or concern in your spiritual life right now?
- ▶ When did “God” become more than an empty word for you? How did you experience God as a child? How do you experience God now?
- ▶ Have you ever really had an “aha” moment in an encounter with the living God?
- ▶ How do you recognize the work of God in your life?
- ▶ What temptations do you face in an ongoing way? What “sin” continues to plague you and follow you wherever you go?
- ▶ How do you distinguish the leading of God from your own willfulness?

- ▶ In what season of your life did you feel most restless, meaningless, or directionless?
- ▶ What difficulties or frustrations have you encountered? What joys and delights?
- ▶ What is your deepest desire? Your life's ambition?
- ▶ How would you describe your spiritual life at this present moment?
- ▶ If you were to die tomorrow, what would you do today?

APPENDIX J

SOME BENEFITS OF PRACTICING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES¹

Suggested by Kenneth Boa

- They encourage imitation of Christ and allow us to act in ways that are centered in God's will.
- They connect us with an ongoing tradition of time-tested ways of incarnating the spiritual life.
- They give us a rule of conduct that directs us in the path of growing skill in living before God.
- They equip us with resources on the three warfare fronts of the world, the flesh, and the demonic.
- They confer perspective and power, and they encourage us to embrace God's purpose for our lives.
- They bestow a controlled freedom to respond to changing circumstances in a more biblical manner; they allow our lives to be dominated more by the things above than the things below.
- They remind us daily that the spiritual life is a balance between radical dependence and responsible action; both grace and self-discipline are required for spiritual maturity.
- They are vehicles for internal transformation. Given enough time, an average person who consistently practices spiritual disciplines will achieve spiritual productivity and proficiency.
- They replace habits of sin by cultivating habits that lead to character (e.g., integrity, faithfulness, and compassion).

¹Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 80.

- They increase our willingness to acknowledge the daily cost of discipleship and remind us that whatever comes quickly and cheaply is superficial, while the insights that we learn from pain will endure.

APPENDIX K

CREATING “SPACE”: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Wyatt E. Fenno

The “space” created by the spiritual discipline of solitude is not necessarily isolation to a particular place away from people.¹ At the same time, this solitude is not to be understood as a certain kind of loneliness.² Instead, this solitude is an attitude of heart; it is a state of mind that is not restricted by time or place. The solitude of heart is an inner

¹Henri J. M. Nouwen suggests that solitude not only deepens our affection for others but also is the place where real community becomes possible. He states: “Without the solitude of heart, the intimacy of friendship, marriage, and community life cannot be creative. Without the solitude of heart, our relationships with others easily become needy and greedy, sticky and clinging, dependent and sentimental, exploitative and parasitic, because without the solitude of heart we cannot experience the others as different from ourselves but only as people who can be used for the fulfillment of our own, often hidden, needs” [*Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975): 43-44].

²Nouwen wrote: “The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play” [*Reaching Out*, 34]

In addition, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his classic book, *Life Together*, states: “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community.” Bonhoeffer notes the reverse is also true: “Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.” In summarizing this, Bonhoeffer wrote: “We recognize, then, that only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only he that is alone can live in the fellowship. Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in the fellowship. It is not as though the one preceded the other; both begin at the same time, namely, with the call of Jesus Christ. . . . Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.” [*Life Together* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954): 77-78.]

quality or attitude that does not depend on physical isolation.³

The choice to sit in silent solitude before God can create some extraordinary space. Solitude forces us out of our daily routines and rituals. Solitude challenges our pathological busyness, the myriad of things that distract us, and the pervasive restlessness which floods our souls. In the space of solitude, we escape our lethal environments; we suspend our desires to manage, manipulate, and control people and things. Instead, the practice of solitude forces us to be alert and to give attention to our inner self and discover the true source of joy, comfort, and security. The attention created by the space of solitude generates continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which never sleeps, and a constant tension between the longings and desires of our souls. Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, writes:

To take seriously the Discipline of solitude will mean that at some point or points along the pilgrimage we will enter what St. John of the Cross vividly describes as “the dark night of the soul.” The “dark night” to which he calls us is not something bad or destructive. On the contrary, it is an experience to be welcomed much as a sick person might welcome a surgery that promises health and well-being. The purpose of the darkness is not to punish or to afflict us. It is to set us free. It is a divine appointment, a privileged opportunity to draw close to the divine Center.⁴

The “dark night of the soul” experienced in solitude can help us to receive the peace that surpasses all understanding (e.g., Phil. 4:7). In the practice of solitude, we discover solutions that explain our emptiness and, at the same time, we learn how to redirect our desires so that we can be filled with God’s presence.

The practice of solitude forces us to look into the deep recesses of our hearts, acknowledge our emptiness, and then request the filling that only God can give. Solitude brings us into what Henri Nouwen calls the “furnace of transformation”⁵ where we have

³Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 37.

⁴Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th Anniversary Edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998): 102.

⁵Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981): 25. “Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.”

no choice but to pay attention to the inner self.

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump into my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces. I give long, hostile speeches to my enemies and dream lustful dreams in which I am wealthy, influential, and very attractive—or poor, ugly, or in need of immediate consolation. Thus I try again to run from the dark abyss of my nothingness and restore my false self in all its vainglory.⁶

The space of solitude can be compared to the idea of remodeling a room in one's house. You clear things out, contemplate what you plan to do, and then proceed with your agenda for change. In solitude, a real detachment can take place. The discipline of solitude opens the eyes of our hearts to find answers to what it is that is truly motivating us. The furnace of transformation, fostered by solitude, postures us in such a way that there is the real possibility for spiritual formation into an ever-increasing Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). In the practice of solitude, we learn virtue. The practice of solitude creates "space" that makes us attentive to ourselves and to the issues of life. The discipline of solitude grants us the wisdom to discriminate between what is true or false. In solitude, our thinking is clarified and we are able to think on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

In solitude, we begin to *hear*. . . and to *see* in ways we have not heard and seen before. Solitude prepares us to be attentive and responsive to others. The discipline of solitude creates space so that we might be instructed by God and then become an incarnational presence who not only listens but also responds to the needs and concerns of others in a way that God himself would listen and respond.

⁶Ibid., 27-28.

Solitude is thus the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter. Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world. Solitude is the place of our salvation.⁷

⁷Ibid., 31-32.

APPENDIX L

THE SHIELD OF ST. PATRICK (paraphrased)¹

As I arise today, may the strength of God uphold me, the power of God guide me,
may the word of God give me speech, the wisdom of God direct me,
may the eye of God watch over me, the ear of God hear my need,
may the hand of God guide me, the way of God lie before me,
may the shield of God defend me, the angels of God watch over me,
may Your grace, O Lord, always be mine, this day, and forevermore.

As I arise today may Christ shield me:
against the vices that gives temptation force; the natural lusts that war within,
against the knowledge that defiles and false doctrine of heresy,
against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul,
against the hostile men that deter my course:
 from every one, few or many, who shall wish me ill, far and near,
 alone or in multitude and in all hours against their fierce hostility,
against the snares of the evil one, protect me, Christ, until You return.


As I arise today, Christ be with me, Christ be within me, Christ be before me, Christ be
behind me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ be beneath me, Christ be above
me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ to win me; Christ when I lie down, Christ
when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ to comfort me, Christ to restore me;
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me,
Christ in the heart of all that love me, Christ in the mouth of all who speak of me.

As I arise today, may I have
 the faith of the starlit heaven, the hope of the glorious sun's life-giving ray,
 the pure whiteness of the full moon, the focus of the lightning free,
 the strength of the whirling wind's turbulent gusts, the depth of the salty sea,
 the firmness of eternal rock and the stability of earth.

Praise be to the creator of all nature and mankind,
Praise be to the God of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord! Amen.

¹This prayer is attributed to St. Patrick, missionary to Ireland and bishop (ca. 385-461). The source of this paraphrase is unknown.

APPENDIX M



Sisters of Benedict

Red Plains Monastery
728 Richland Rd. SW
Piedmont, OK 73078

405/373-4565
www.redplainsmonastery.org




Lectio Divina

Lectio.....
Listen to the Word of God
with the ear of your heart

.....Meditatio
Ponder God's Word
in your heart

Oratio.....
Let your heart
speak to God

.....Contemplatio.....
Rest in God



Lectio Divina

The monastic tradition of prayer called *Lectio Divina* is a method of reading and praying the Scriptures. It is a way of listening with our hearts to what God wants to say to us.

The essential steps for *lectio* are to

- ◊ find a quiet comfortable place to relax, and to quiet both your mind and body;
- ◊ pick up your favorite translation of the Bible and begin to read, listening for the still, small voice of a word or phrase that touches something inside you, that says to you *I am here for you*;
- ◊ remain with your word or phrase, repeating it slowly as a mantra, letting it unfold into your deepest self;
- ◊ read the scripture passage again slowly;
- ◊ again, enter into that quiet space where you can dialogue with Jesus: as you listen, be in touch with feelings, images, experiences, ideas which your word/phrase evokes;
- ◊ read the scripture passage again slowly;
- ◊ use this third period of quiet listening, to ask God what you are being called to at this time, today, this week: how does *the word which chose you* apply to your life right now;
- ◊ be alone with God while you *relax into the embrace of the One who loves you just as you are!*

This formally completes the cycle of the prayer called *lectio* but, in truth, *lectio* has only begun. We carry the fruit of our listening into our own personal rhythm of life, remembering our word, relishing it, embracing it. Devoting a few minutes each day to receiving God's word will gradually transform the way you look at your life and the lives of those around you.

The Rhythm of Lectio Divina

The rhythm in the spirituality of *lectio* alternates between going-within-oneself and turning-out-to-the-world. We turn within to find God and our own true selves and then turn outward to carry the work of discipleship into our broken and bruised world: the ministry of compassion, healing, making whole, reconciling, working for a just-peace while we dare to risk the Gospel call to love and to be loved.

Lectio is gently opening one's whole being to the saving Word of God. We allow the Word to nourish us as the words are read, not for information but for transformation.

Meditatio is a simple repetition of a word or phrase that captures our attention. It is not an intellectual exercise; through the repetition we allow the Word to penetrate more deeply into our being so we become one with the text.

Prayer is the response of the heart to God. Filled with the word or phrase, we make our response: praise, thanks, petition, sorrow or whatever comes to mind and seems appropriate.

Contemplation is being in the moment of presence with the One who is eternally present and always available to us. This dynamic of *lectio* is a contemplative awareness of God. It is pure gift, not a product of our work nor is it a reward.

Compassion is one of the fruits of prayer and contemplation. In this encounter with God, our whole being is opened up to experience the brokenness of all creation. We find ourselves united not only with God but with all that lives.

Action is our turning out to the world. Engaging in *lectio* enables us to see things differently. We may find that God invites and empowers us to act, directing our steps to empower others in the ways of a just-peace.

Above material is integrated from the writings of Marian Bellotti, OSB, Benet Hill Monastery, Colorado Springs, CO; Reverend Patrick Eastman, The Monos Community, Tulsa, OK; Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, Mt. St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA; & Miriam Schnoebelen, OSB, Red Plains Monastery, Piedmont, OK.

APPENDIX N

THE MOUNTAIN SURVIVAL PROBLEM

The Situation

Your charter flight from Seattle to Banff and Lake Louise (Alberta, Canada) has just crashed-landed in the North Cascades National Park area, somewhere near the United States / Canadian border. It is approximately twelve noon in mid-January. The twin-engine, ten-passenger plane, containing the burned bodies of the pilot and of one passenger, has completely burned. Only the air frame remains. None of the rest of you has been seriously injured.

The pilot was unable to notify anyone of your position before the plane crashed in a blinding snow storm. Just before the crash you noted that the plane's altimeter registered about 5,000 feet. The crash site is in a rugged and heavily-wooded area just below the timber line. You are dressed in medium-weight clothing and each of you has a top coat.

The Problem

Before the plane caught fire, your group was able to salvage fifteen items listed on the handout. Your task is to rank these items according to their importance to your survival. Write "1" next to the most important item, "2" next to the second more important item, and so on to "15" next to the least important item.

Question: What did you learn from this exercise?

Conclusion: Our collective templates of understanding function to integrate knowledge, reason, and experience in order to make informed judgments for particular situations and circumstances. Collective, communal actions serve as a check against my personal distortions.

THE MOUNTAIN SURVIVAL PROBLEM

<u>Individual</u>		<u>Group</u>
_____	Sectional air map of the area	_____
_____	Flashlight (four battery size)	_____
_____	Four wool blankets	_____
_____	One rifle with ammunition	_____
_____	One pair of skis	_____
_____	Two-fifths of liquor	_____
_____	One cosmetic mirror	_____
_____	Jackknife	_____
_____	Four pairs of sunglasses	_____
_____	Three books of matches	_____
_____	One metal coffee pot	_____
_____	First aid kit	_____
_____	One dozen packages of peanuts	_____
_____	One clear plastic tarp (9' x 12')	_____
_____	One large, decorative candle	_____

SURVIVAL PROBLEM SCORE SHEET

Items	Experts' Ranking	Your Ranking	Error Points	Group Ranking	Error Points
Sectional air map of the area	12				
Flashlight (4 battery size)	8				
Four wool blankets	1				
One rifle with ammunition	14				
One pair of skis	13				
Two-fifths of liquor	15				
One cosmetic mirror	7				
Jackknife	5				
Four pairs of sunglasses	10				
Three books of matches	3				
One metal coffee pot	6				
First aid kit	9				
One dozen packages of peanuts	11				
One clear plastic tarp (9' x 12')	2				
One large, decorative candle	4				

Total _____

Total _____

APPENDIX O

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen¹

Presence

1. We assume that God is self-disclosing and that God yearns for the created world and enters into a covenant relationship with God's people.
2. We assume that God enters into human existence with such vulnerability that people, in discerning the higher purpose of the divine will, are drawn into the vulnerability of God.
3. We assume that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the active and ongoing guide in personal and corporate discernment.

Practices

4. We assume that seeking God's will is the ultimate value in our knowledge and experience.
5. We assume the need to participate humbly in a faith community of grace.
6. We assume that people and communities need to patiently persevere in practices related to Scripture, prayer, and discernment until God's leading is known.

Posture

7. We assume that the willingness to change the heart and to make an appropriate response are preconditions of the gift of discernment.
8. We assume that God uses especially gifted people with skills and insight into the discernment process in the ministry of discernment.
9. We assume that the practice of discernment is ongoing—to discern God's will again and again and again.

¹Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997), 41-42.

APPENDIX P

LITURGICAL ACTIONS: THE REHEARSAL OF OUR FAITH Session 7

Intro.: “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch life” (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998], 158). The gracious actions of God are not only etched into human history, but also our personal histories. Worship is our human response to God’s gracious initiative to invite, accept and embrace us. The historical actions of God form the basis for worship. Robert Webber observes, “Worship should be seen as a climatic enactment of the relationship that exists between ourselves and God, a relationship with its roots in historical events” (*Worship, Old & New* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 97).

- ◆ **“Centering” Down:** Psalm 136 – How does this psalm invite us to “rehearse” our faith?
- ◆ **“Drawing Near” to God** (e.g., Heb. 10:19-25 – Liturgical language, the language of the Temple. Here, the full and free access that Christians have to the Presence of God).
 - ▶ *God’s Actions:*
 - (1) God calls us to meet with him.
 - (2) God invites us to enter into covenant with him and seals the covenant with blood sacrifice.
 - ▶ *Our Actions:*
 - (1) We respond to God’s gift of grace by ritual engagement in actions of covenant renewal. In worship, we retell and act out God’s story.
 - (2) In worship, we present ourselves to God (e.g., Rom. 12:1-2). Worship is an ordered way of acting and living that places us before God so that we are transformed by his presence.
 - (3) In worship, our greatest desire is to encounter and experience the life of God.
 - (4) The language of the gathered fellowship is not “I” but “we” (Foster, 171). There is the desire for God’s life to be encountered and experienced in the group, not just within the individual.
 - (5) In worship, we embrace holy expectancy, cultivate holy dependency, and respond with holy obedience (e.g., Is. 6:8).

- ◆ **“Rehearsing” Our Faith:** In what ways can the following contemplative actions / practices function as means that prompt, encourage, and invite us to “rehearse” our faith?
 - ▶ *Silence / solitude* – An opportunity to be present with God and be reminded of his love and presence. When distracted, we simply remind ourselves that God is with us and we are with God. Our desire is to be open to God and affirm our availability to him and his activities.
 - ▶ *Contemplative prayer* – For example, the “Jesus prayer” (or “Prayer of the Heart”) is an invocation addressed directly to Jesus and presupposes conscious, active faith in him as the Son of God and Savior. It’s aim is to bring us to a state of stillness (*hesuchia*) in order to feel and know the Lord’s immediate presence in a direct personal encounter. The spirit of the prayer, by constant repetition, is to permeate a person’s entire life and effect union between the person and the life of God.
 - ▶ *Divine reading (lectio divina)* – Intended to effect a conversion of life more than induce a state of active or passive contemplation. In holy reading, special attention is paid to what God might be teaching us through his living word. In sacred reading, we stand before the text and allow it to exegete us instead of standing over the text and exegeting it.
 - ▶ *Spiritual discernment* (Mt. 18:20) – Life happens. The community is a check against our personal distortions; our collective templates of understanding and the use of our spiritual gifts function to integrate knowledge, reason, and experience in order to make informed judgments for particular situations in the lived experience of Christian spirituality. Michael Gemignani wrote: “Christianity is, and always will be, a religion of community. Those who claim that they can get along without belonging to a community of faith are cheating themselves out of one of the most powerful spiritual aids that Jesus gave us” (*Spiritual Formation for Pastors: Feeding the Fire Within* [Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002], 117).

- ◆ **The Lord’s Supper** (Jn. 6:35, 53-57; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-26)
 - (1) A divine sign that re-presents Christ as the fulfillment of God’s renewing and restoring purpose.
 - (2) It is a meal we share in the presence of Christ who, as the risen Lord, sits as host of his table.
 - (3) For us, it is more than a time of proclamation; it is a time of participation as we relive his saving death and resurrection.

Questions:

- (1) In what ways does this ritual create and express meaning?
- (2) How does this rehearsal of faith function to remind us that we are not only created for communion with God but also with one another as the body of

Christ?

- (3) How does the Lord's Supper invite us to participate in God's life and remind us that we are collaborators with God in his ongoing story?

APPENDIX Q

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY – Session 8 “Collaborating with God in Our Future”

Introduction: Christian spirituality is an imitative faith (1 Cor. 11:1; Lk. 6:40; Col. 1:28-29). We are to seek a Christ-formed life (Gal. 4:19; 5:22-23). Michael Gemignani wrote: “We must not only say yes to God, but also place our hearts and minds and souls and strength at his disposal, humbly offering all that we have and are and do, asking to be drawn through Christ into God’s own divine life by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*To Know God: Small-group Experiences for Spiritual Formation* [Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001], 75).

Yet, the struggle we all face is the fact that we bring our humanness to the spiritual quest of living and participating in God’s life. For example, what in your life do you feel the most need to control? Over what do you feel the least control?

- **Two Classics on Christian Spirituality**
 - (1) *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a’Kempis (ca. 1380-1471) – Probably written between 1420 and 1427. Next to the Bible, it is the most popular of Christian classics appealing to Protestants as well as Catholics. It is regarded as one of the greatest spiritual books ever written and has been translated into more than fifty languages (This is supposedly more than any other book except the Bible). a’Kempis was an Augustinian monk who wrote in simple, direct language conveying practical advice on Christian spirituality. He connects Christian ideas with a Christian lifestyle. Due to its richness and depth, it is best read slowly, repeatedly, and meditatively.
 - (2) *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence (also known as Lawrence of the Resurrection, 1614 [?] - 1691) – Lawrence was a humble monastery cook. This book is regarded as a classic for anyone who has a heart hungry for more of God. At the heart of the book is the profound, yet simple teaching of continual attentiveness to the divine presence realized in the midst of everyday activities in the present moment.
- **The “Lived Experience” (Participating and Collaborating with God)**

Questions:

 - (1) If God calls every human being into union with him, why do so many seem unaware of this divine invitation?

- (2) What means can we use to make ourselves and others more aware of the invitation to live and participate in the life and activity of God?

- **A “Rule of Life”**

- (1) What is a “Rule of Life”?
- a. A framework of life designed for progress (e.g., 2 Pet. 1:5-9). The rule is intended to assist us in our lived experience of Christian spirituality.
 - b. A rule of life aids us by providing structure; the rule focuses our efforts and cultivates openness to God. Without a rule, we may simply drift, doing little to nurture life and cultivate theological reflection—the result being, we are tossed here and there by the latest fad or newest book.
 - c. While a rule of life is important, it is unlikely to be a rule *for* life. That is, the rule written today will undoubtedly change as we change—or, as God changes us.
- (2) Suggestions for Formulating a “Rule” (see Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:1–5:2; Col. 3:1-17)
- a. It is *your* rule. Your rule consists of actions and practices that you make a special commitment to carry out.
 - b. A good rule of life fits your circumstances and temperament.
 - c. Your rule should reflect that participation in God’s life is your highest priority.
 - d. Your rule is your response to God’s gracious invitation (Phil. 2:12-13). It is a way you are saying “Yes” to God, desiring union with him, opening yourself to his transforming graces, and making yourself available to collaborate with him in a partly-open future.
 - e. A balanced rule of life consists of practices related to prayer, study, and action (i.e., practical ministry).
 - f. A rule of life includes specific elements you commit to carry out in a regular and continuing basis.
 - g. Keep it simple. Your rule of life cannot—and should not—seek to encompass everything you do related to your practice of faith.

Conclusion: The Christ-formed, God-shaped life will not result accidentally. However, this life can result from our disciplined practice of contemplative actions that enable the spiritual transformation to be experienced with ever-increasing glory. The aim of a rule of life is to make actions of contemplative spirituality routine and ordinary. The practice of a rule of life can nurture a life of theological reflection where spiritual transformation is received as a gift from God. Thus, our journey is truly a lived experience with God as we collaborate with him in a partly-open future—looking forward to and longing for the new heavens and new earth.

APPENDIX R
GEORGE FAULK LETTER

August 25, 2004

Dear George:

It is a blessing to have you assist me with my Doctor of Ministry project this fall. Thank you for agreeing to participate and provide a means of evaluation for my project. I believe that your theological training, ministry practice, and life experience equips you to serve as an independent expert for the ministry intervention. In this role, I ask you to evaluate my project in the following ways:

1. In giving this “invitation” to contemplative spirituality, was the theological, spiritual, and historical content presented in each of the sessions adequate to make contemplative practices and actions understandable and accessible to the pilot group?
2. In giving this “invitation” to contemplative spirituality during each session, did I communicate information related to particular contemplative practices in an engaging way that encouraged and persuaded others to participate?
3. In giving this “invitation” to contemplative spirituality, did the practices, interactions, and times of theological reflection shared in the sessions conceive, birth, and nurture healthy group spiritual formation?

Of course, any other insights or observations you could offer are welcomed. Again, I am thankful that you are taking your time, training, and experience and sharing it with me. I look forward to receiving your report in November.

God bless,

Wyatt E. Fenno

APPENDIX S

TREY FINLEY LETTER

August 25, 2004

Dear Trey:

It is a blessing to have you assist me with my Doctor of Ministry project this fall. Thank you for agreeing to participate and provide a means of evaluation for my project. I believe that your theological training and exposure to practices associated with contemplative spirituality prepare you to serve as a participant observer for the ministry intervention. In this role, you will be able to help me in the following ways:

1. Things to look for:
 - a. Key words, emerging themes, and the first and last remarks in each conversation.
 - b. The role of silence and nonverbal behavior that adds meaning to the exchange. For example, is it critical thinking or non-understanding?
 - c. Other matters related to group dynamics. Who talks? Who does not? What kind of interaction takes place within the group?
2. Summary guidelines:
 - a. Be descriptive in your notes
 - b. Try to capture participants views of their experiences in their own words
 - c. Include your own thoughts, experiences, and feelings
 - d. Try to pull together a useful synthesis as the project draws to a close

Of course, any other insights or observations you could offer are welcomed. Again, I am thankful that you are taking time to participate in the ministry intervention. The notes you take will provide an important angle for qualitative evaluation of my ministry project. I look forward to receiving and reading the notes you record.

God bless,

Wyatt E. Fenno

BRIEF VITA

Wyatt Edward Fenno was born in Pampa, Texas, 9 April 1956. He graduated from Lefors High School in Lefors, Texas in May 1974. He attended Oklahoma Christian University and received his Bachelor of Arts in Bible degree with minors in Greek and History in April 1991. In April 1994, he received his Masters of Ministry degree from Oklahoma Christian University. He began the Doctor of Ministry program at Abilene Christian University in 2001 and completed his degree in 2005. After serving as a preaching minister for a number of years, he now serves as the Spiritual Formation and Teaching minister for the Quail Springs Church of Christ in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Wyatt began his ministry at Quail Springs in October 2001.