

Note: This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Stiles, Robert John. "Journeying Home: A Study of Christian Spiritual Formation Through the Interface of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and Lectio Divina." D. Min., Tyndale University, 2022.

Tyndale University

Journeying Home:

A Study of Christian Spiritual Formation

Through the Interface of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

and

Lectio Divina

A Research Portfolio

Submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale University

By

Robert John Stiles

Toronto, Canada

March 2022

ABSTRACT

This study grew out of my life experience. After decades of longing to belong, God led me first to the halls of 12 Step programs, then to Seminary where I discovered, spiritual formation, *Lectio Divina* and spiritual direction. In contemplating a model of spiritual formation, the interface of these two experiences came to life in the linkage of the final three steps of A. A. which I characterize as Confess (Step 10), Abide (Step 11), and Give (Step 12).

The research observed the spiritual maturation of lay people at various stages of their journey of becoming more like Christ. The project was designed to build a community of trust within a small group who met for seven weeks to practice *Lectio Divina*. I used the narrative inquiry research method with favorable results. Some participants self-identified both as having a deeper sense of the presence of God and experiencing a change in their approach to daily life while others either experienced movement in one of the dimensions or no movement at all. My conclusion is that, for some, the practice of *Lectio Divina* can effectuate deeper spiritual formation.

DEDICATION

Thanks be to God for every gift He has given to me,
including life with my wife, Arlene, whose steadfast love, belief,
encouragement and support have occasioned this writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paul Bramer who saw in me what I could not see in myself, and three times made it possible for me to stay in the Program rather than drop out.

Ouida Pihulyk who sat beside me on our first day of class, whispered along the way to pursue certification as a spiritual director and walked with me through the final writing and hearing.

Phil Predergast, Lead Pastor, and the members of The Meeting House in London, Ontario, for warmly welcoming us in their midst and endorsing this project.

EPIGRAPH

A seed of love is planted into each of our souls, a deep longing to be loved,

but it can only be awakened by being deeply loved.

Our deepest longing is to be loved by our Creator.

If we knew we were loved, truly loved by God, *as we are*,

our souls would be whole.

-J. B. Smith, *Hidden in Christ*

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
GLOSSARY	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: BECOMING A CHILD OF GOD: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY	13
The Early Years: Seeds Along the Path	16
The Prodigal Years: Seeds on the Rock	21
A Teenager in High School and University	21
The Adult Child Years	26
The Awakening Years	30
The Transformative Experience	34
Transformation to Life with Jesus	35
The Maturing Years: On Good Soil	41
Life Today in the Holy Spirit	44
Addiction and Grace: What is My Part in it?	44
We're Only as Sick as Our Secrets	46
The Gift of Journeying Home	46
The Gift of Cancer	47
Let your life tell you who you are	49
The Gift of Life-Coming Home	56
CHAPTER 3: DOING, BEING, BECOMING AND HOMECOMING: A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION	59
Moving Beyond the Doing Being Continuum	64
True Self vs. False Self	72
Human: True or False?	74
The False Self	75
Love and Sin	77
The Relational Soul: Attachment Theory	78
1 st Base : Doing - Mind Your Programs	80
Transformers	82

2 nd Base: Being - Emotion and Solitude	83
3 rd Base: Becoming - Manifesting God Rather than the False Self	85
A Journey into Paradox.....	85
Mind, Heart, Strength, and Soul	86
Step 10, 11 and 12: A Model of Spiritual Formation	88
Community: Missing in Action	91
A Ministry of small groups.....	93
Homecoming: Communion/Community	97
Prayer Reshapes Becoming.....	98

CHAPTER 4: FIELD RESEARCH STUDY: AN EXPLORATION OF LAY MEMBERS' GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION USING A COMPLEMENTARY FOCUS OF ASPECTS OF THE A. A. 12 STEPS TOGETHER WITH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF *LECTIO DIVINA* 102

Opportunity or Problem	102
Response or Innovation.....	103
Definition of Key Terms.....	105
Supervision, Permission and Access.....	106
Context.....	106
Models & Other Course Material	109
Background of My Model of Spiritual Formation.....	110
Other Literature and Cases.....	113
Project Methodology and Methods.....	115
Field	116
Scope.....	120
Methodology.....	121
Methods.....	122
Phases and Timetable.....	124
Ethics.....	126
Findings, Interpretation, and Outcomes.....	129
Findings.....	129
Interpretations	141
Exogenous Factors	142
The Collective Experience.....	144

Outcomes	149
Conclusion	151
Future Improvements	152
Implications for The Meeting House London Parish.....	154
Implications for The Meeting House At Large and Beyond.....	156
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	158
APPENDICES	166
APPENDIX 1: THE TWELVE STEPS OF A. A.	167
APPENDIX 2: FLYER FOR MINISTRY LEADER’S MEETING ..	168
APPENDIX 3: PARISH MEETINGS PRESENTATION SCRIPT...	170
APPENDIX 4 INFORMATION LETTER.....	171
APPENDIX 5: CONSENT FORM.....	178
APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	180
APPENDIX 7: OUTLINE OF <i>LECTIO</i> SESSIONS	182
KEY COMPONENTS EACH WEEK.....	182
WEEK 1:.....	182
WEEK 2:.....	183
WEEK 3:.....	183
WEEK 4:.....	183
WEEK 5:.....	184
WEEK 6:.....	184
WEEK 7:.....	184
APPENDIX 8: GROUP GUIDELINES	185
REFERENCES	186

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Definition of Key Terms.....	105
Table 2: Characteristics of the Participants	116
Table 3: Participants' Dominant Stream of Living Water.....	119
Table 4: Data Sources	123
Table 5: Data Source for the Tables	124
Table 6: Participants' Formation	132
Table 7: Addressing the First Research Question.....	139
Table 8: Addressing the Second Research Question	141
Table 9: Participants' Reflection on the Experience	145
Table 10: Participants' Secondary Stream of Living Water.....	147

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Model of Spiritual Formation: Doing, Being and Becoming.....	70
Figure 2: Model of Spiritual Formation: Confess, Abide, Give	111
Figure 3: Participants' Attendance	133
Figure 4: Participants' Response Rates	134

GLOSSARY

A.A.: Alcoholics Anonymous, the organization advocating the use of 12 steps to recovery from addiction to alcohol. A.A. and its hundreds of offspring continue to advocate the 12 steps.

AMP: The Amplified Bible (1987).

Big Book: *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Wilson and Shoemaker, 1986) is the core text of A.A. meetings and many of its offspring.

CEO: Chief Executive Officer. The leader of a large business corporation.

C.R.: Celebrate Recovery – a Christ-centred recovery group tying the 12 steps to scripture.

CRC: Christian Reformed Church

DMin: Doctor of Ministry.

LDARP: *Lectio Divina* Action Research Project. This acronym was used as the prefix to the number assigned to each participant.

MSG: The Message.

NRSV: Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical Citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (1989).

O.A.: Overeaters Anonymous, a 12-step program focused on recovery from compulsive eating.

TMH: The Meeting House.

TMHL: The Meeting House parish in London, Ontario, Canada.

TREB: Tyndale Research Ethics Board.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What I once wanted for me I now wish for others, that “our souls would be whole” (J. B. Smith, 2013, 132). If we draw near to God, He will become more evident in our daily living. So, like Henri “I pray that you will venture on a life with Jesus. He asks everything of you but gives you more in return.”

- Henri Nouwen *Letters to Marc about Jesus*

In the summer of 2012, I did not expect to be writing this portfolio. But then, I did not expect to lose my livelihood and identity to cancer. I did not expect to be studying spiritual formation at a Doctoral level. I did not expect to tell my secrets. I did not expect to be a spiritual director. And in February 2016, I expected it was quite possible that I would not live out the year.

This research grew out of my life and my life experiences. My early life was driven by uncertainty. The unspoken questions were, what is wrong with me and, how can I be good enough? Where can I belong and feel accepted? Even after a spiritual awakening in my thirties, the performance ethic drove my life until I was drawn by grace through my addictions into a secular world of listening and affirmation that simply felt good. Always searching for more, I sought higher education at Tyndale Seminary. Later in my studies when asked to define what I was doing the answer was I want to help one person at a time in the belief that one person can be a catalyst for one or even several others.

As this portfolio will reveal, my search was for belonging, for a sense of safety and security. Like the wanderers of ancient lore, I was searching for home. Indeed, we are each on a journey home. Not realizing it is a destination within, it is sought by striking outwards. Nouwen situates home in God's desire for relationship with us and the life of His son. "By his life and death Jesus announces the yearning in the heart of Love Divine, to be in relationship with each individual person. For you or I to engage this primal encounter is for us to return home" (Nouwen 2009, 93).

While home evokes many images, within this discourse it is a state of being rather than a geographic location. Home will be defined as three stages each representing characteristics of the journey. Firstly, as we journey towards home, we look for a place of belonging. This can include sanctity and safety, community and acceptance, love and peace, kindness and gentleness, generosity, and faithfulness. Secondly, home is where we freely receive and freely give love. Finally, home is simply where God dwells within us. When we observe these interconnected characteristics, we know we are at the place where we become our authentic selves. It is the place where love infuses our being and striving is replaced by rest, wholeness, and joy. To come home, the heart we have to change is our own rather than others. And as we trust Jesus to abide in us, we find our home in Him and His trinitarian relationship.

As a lay leader, I have no formal authority and so I was free to explore. A few years before this study, I led a small group of ordinary lay folk in Haliburton, Ontario using a *Lectio Divina* curriculum I had developed in partial fulfillment of

a course entitled *Engaging Scriptures: Spiritual Formation for Information & Transformation* (Wilhoit, 2018). These were neighbours who had various levels of commitment to worship and Bible study. After a few weeks, it was apparent they hungered for more. This sharpened my belief that the deeper journey I had taken was one that others would also be interested in making. I never expected to use the *Lectio* curriculum again but later that year I began training as a spiritual director and worked with Masters level Seminary students who were required to engage a spiritual director as part of a course in Spiritual Formation. Fearing they had no conscious desire or inclination to enter into direction, I once again employed the readings of my *Lectio* curriculum as a way of engaging them in the practice of contemplation and listening. Listening is part of our heritage as Christians. As I listened to my life in Chapter Two, I began to realize that the influence of A. A. which is led by amateur lay people with a secular tone was one of the seeds God had planted within me as I began my journey home.

One of the reasons that Christianity spread during the First Century was that it made sense in the context of the day. Apostles went from village to village sharing the Gospel in a context of everyday life which their listeners could understand. In the Babel of the twenty-first century where everyone has an instant opinion and organized religion is viewed as the enemy of the ideals of humanity, there are other villages where one-to-one evangelism still matters. The inhabitants of these villages dwell in a place where they can hear an elder speaking directly into their context. Rather than physical structures, these are villages of shared experience. It is to the village of the shared sufferers of alcoholism and its two

hundred plus antecedents that the A.A. tradition speaks of the restorative and transformative healing power of God. The practice of the 12 steps ([Appendix 1: The Twelve Steps of A. A.](#)) takes one through a process of accepting powerlessness, committing to a power higher than ourselves, listing and confessing our wrongs to that point of our lives, and making amends to those we have harmed. Recovery is sustained by continuing to promptly admit our wrongs, improving our awareness of God through prayer and meditation and sharing the experience of hope with other addicts.

As a result of entering a twelve step group, the fruit in my life sprang from unrecognized seeds. My experiences of alcoholism and addiction led me to witness the raw power of God to change the lives of those who in fact choose life. The fruit of the A.A. tradition is received in transformation by the Holy Spirit. More specifically, the transformation of the individual member's spirit is both initiated and conformed by the Holy Spirit together with the willing member's own participation. Both in the twelve steps of A. A. and in spiritual direction, I have witnessed God's power to move us from our attachments to a deeper walk of faith. I have never been what one friend calls a "Professional Christian." Instead, my involvement has been one of lay leadership. I served my church for a few years at first as a Deacon and then as an Elder. Prior to and during this service, I was in leadership in a twelve step program as a sponsor, a speaker and a regional representative and, in the Christian recovery movement Celebrate Recovery, as a group member and group leader.

What might a Christian without an addiction learn from A. A.? The first thing is that A.A. has unequivocal Christian roots. A.A. drew its first breaths from a Christian Evangelical organization known as the Oxford Group (B. 1998, 87). Nearly thirty years ago, I heard an A. A. speaker refer to himself during a meeting as a ‘human doing’ rather than a human being. That dichotomy stayed in my subconscious and emerged as I formulated my model of spiritual formation in Chapter Three. It is from my own lived experience of recovery, the study and practice of Christian spiritual disciplines that I developed a model of spiritual formation based on A. A. steps ten through twelve. These steps are referred to colloquially as the maintenance steps. In one sense, steps one through nine in one sense are the trade school and steps ten through twelve are continuing education. I revised these steps under the themes confess, abide, and give; all residing within the movement of returning home to God. That movement of spiritual formation represents the ongoing journey towards holiness. It is a lifelong process comprised of awareness of the presence of God, intimate relationship with God, and living in the love of God and love of others. The process is put into action by the practical expression of awareness, intimacy, and love in the everyday interactions of life. In effect, we increase our awareness of God and change the way we live.

In the third step of A.A. we “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over the care of God *as we understood Him*” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59). There is an adage in Twelve Step meetings that says I have trouble getting free of the imperious urge of my addiction because I keep taking my will back. I turn my

life and will over to the care of God only to snatch it back so that I can maintain my delusion of control. In Christian parlance, I neither wish to relinquish control of my life nor do I want to give up my sins. So begins a journey of dying to self. A painful, reluctant, and recalcitrant journey. It is a movement from the certainty of formation through the discontinuity of transformation to the excitement of reformation and for me it has been a continuous journey for the past thirty years. At times, it has felt as if I am repeating the same things over and over again.

The cycle of repeating things over and over reminds me of a friend who I have nicknamed “the closer.” He is a United Church minister who for many years would take on a new parish and broach the unwanted reality that the greying of the congregation meant that this particular congregation was preserving the institution over the message. Part of the institution is community and social good. Part of it is keeping alive an essential part of our personal identity rather than completely giving ourselves over to the lessons and example of Jesus. I have observed some other congregations where

perpetuation and survival becomes a main concern of the people associated with it. Discipleship to Christ is either dropped altogether from the basic objectives or is redefined as devotion to the institution. Spiritual formation then in some cases actually and explicitly understood as the process of conforming to the tradition. (Willard 2012, 243-244)

And I hold us responsible; the laity. We bring the culture of the world into the temple. I have seen congregations organize as corporations bringing an unseen power that shapes and affects the sanctuary, the pastor, the people and their mission. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) model of business corporations emphasizing acquisition and profit demands performance and accountability of

others without seeing the leaders' own biases, thus never realizing that "you are the man!" (2 Samuel 12: 7). Inherent in this as well, is the code of reducing liability rather than honestly admitting fault and quickly making restitution. Recognition, admission, repentance and turning away from behaviours are more the endemic culture of A. A. than the culture of the local congregation where we come for spiritual dialysis in the belief, we have already had a successful transplant. How might we then become more fully who we are called to be living the kingdom in everyday life? There is of course no easy answer. Jesus calls us to leave behind those people and possessions who encumber anything but following Him. And along the way it is appropriating our true selves in our inmost being and reflecting "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5: 22-23) in our everyday moments. Part of the tension I have felt in my life has been the unarticulated difference between the evangelical tradition which had adopted me and the more mystical contemplative tradition which I discovered was my more natural path to God. I was unable to articulate this before the reflection offered by the Doctor of Ministry program which led to the publication of this study.

From the early years of my studies at the Masters level, my unarticulated interest in spiritual formation led me to deeper experiences of knowing God first through *Lectio Divina* and then through spiritual direction. While I had no clear path in mind, my life was leading me to a model of spiritual formation that incorporated both the metamorphoses I had witnessed in Twelve Step programs and the profound experience of His presence in retreats and other spiritual disciplines. At first, in developing my model of spiritual formation, I pondered the

dichotomy between being and doing. Notwithstanding James' admonition that faith and works are one, I had seen many years of lay Christians racing about doing more and more; more programs, more evangelism, more seed planting without cultivating the soil, with the result that some are left with a rag-tag anecdotal belief that is stitched together in their own understanding. They cannot truly yield themselves to God because they really do not know their true selves as the core of their identity. And because of their formation by the world around them, the God of their understanding is not the God who is. This was my story when I first decided to enter a Masters program at Tyndale Seminary.

I was on the path "to know" and I wanted to arrive at conviction. Little did I know that I would instead discover paradox, mystery, ambiguity, uncertainty, and discontinuity. That quest reminds me of a scene from the *Three Days of the Condor*, where the CIA Director of Operations is reminiscing about the First World War. A case manager asks, "Do you miss that kind of action sir?" The response was, "No, I miss that kind of clarity" (Pollack, 1975).

The seminary journey led to the model of spiritual formation presented in Chapter Three. The model takes its life from the notion that we perceive ourselves as somehow incomplete. This vague awareness is brought to our attention as we examine the tension between thinking or doing and feeling or being. The genesis of the model began with an examination of the tension between Logos (or Reason) and Eros (Desires), a longing to understand "the gap between my intellectual convictions and my preintellectual desires" (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 60-61). Ironically, a tension between intellectual and preintellectual was my reaction

against the evangelical tradition of the word-centred life which took me in as a young Christian. As I pondered that tradition's teachings against those of Henri Nouwen I saw a division between head, defined as cognition, and heart or emotion.

In categorizing the head as “doing” and the heart as “being,” I began to ponder the dichotomy of being and doing as end points of a continuum. While talking through the continuum with a friend, I remembered Sue Mosteller's comment to Henri Nouwen, “you have to realize that you are called to become the father” (Nouwen 1994, 22). With this recollection, the continuum transformed into a triangle, with being, doing, and becoming as three points along a spiritual journey. The journey, of course, involves going home, “It is through constant forgiveness that we become like the Father” (Nouwen 1994, 129). And “living out this spiritual fatherhood requires the radical discipline of being at home.” (Nouwen 1994, 133). Now I was able to move beyond either/or. We are neither Mary or Martha nor doing or being but both/and. Becoming is the fluid state of the continuum of doing versus being in the journey home.

Becoming more Christlike is the action of progressively letting go of our idols through a process of confession of our wrongs, abiding in God and giving to others daily. One of the things holding some of us back is the confusion between who I am as a saint and how I live as someone requiring forgiveness for my constant missteps. I am born again, why do I still mess up? The answer lies in being attached to the culture around us and in our learned behaviours. This will be touched on in Chapter Three with a discussion of attachment theory, the learned

responses of childhood which unconsciously affect our adult lives. Spiritually, we sometimes are not infused with propositional truth because we believe many things about ourselves which hinder radical trust in an attachment to God. The contradiction between our true identity in Christ and our false selves is also touched on in Chapter Three. The things I learned at seminary and the experiences I had in 12 step programs continued a movement of self-knowledge and God knowledge that for me, made sense as a model of Spiritual Formation.

In my experience as a facilitator, I was able to present my model over the past three years to a group of lay people training to be spiritual directors through the Emmaus Formation Centre. A spiritual director is a loving witness to the influence of the Holy Spirit's influence in the directee's journey towards holiness. Spiritual Direction increases our awareness of God in everyday life, thereby allowing us to move deeper into our experience of God as the centre of our being. As we do, we move from a posture of self-determination to following the direction of God. The link between A. A. and Christian spiritual formation was evident in the students' written responses within their final papers. And when I did my research project, applying a piece of my model, I witnessed people drawing closer to God and experiencing Him in everyday life as shown in the research described in Chapter Four.

In conducting research, my intention had been to use my entire model, but I realized it needed to be abbreviated in order to fit the project into a reasonable timeframe. I concentrated on the Abide portion of the model which focuses on increasing our conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation. With

the benefit of hindsight, I can see the practices I used were in fact among my first experiences of spiritual disciplines – an introduction to silence and the practice of *Lectio Divina* while on a retreat as part of a course in Spiritual Formation. The focus on Abide proved an appropriate choice for it is from abiding that both the confess and give elements of the model grow.

Chapter Two presents my story in four parts using the parable of the Sower (Luke 8: 5-8). The first part is in my early years where many seeds were sown along the path, but I did not nourish them. The prodigal years of my youth saw seeds falling on the rock where I had neither eyes to see nor ears to hear. I was too busy living a life swayed by the secular values of others. I was busy doing, chasing, and achieving things. My middle adulthood I characterize as the awakening years where I came to believe in God and began to die to self but still the seeds had fallen among the many thorns of life in the culture of productivity in late twentieth century Canada. In trying to be more Christlike, I was paradoxically working at being. My later adulthood has seen the soil of my life cultivated to become richer. I call these the transformation years of a sinner redeemed in the not yet state of becoming a saint. I have had to die to myself many times in these years as the soil has been fed by the death of entrenched wrong ideas and the strongholds of addictions and personality.

Seven years ago, God spoke to me using my childhood name. I am categorically sensitive to using that name in this book. Yet, that is the name God has chosen for me. It makes great sense because as I have endured the many rocks rolling back downhill while using my chosen name. I have been taught that my

strength is not enough. Bob is the name I chose at age thirteen. Bob was both a bon vivant and, a man of serious intentions. Earnest and playful. A man of integrity and a man of secrets mistaking a false self as true thereby creating a lifetime of tension. Robert, my given name, is the name reserved for my parents' scolding and also used in the effort to be authoritative in dealing with call centres. Rob is a name only my family of origin is allowed to use. Robbie is my secret name. My faith is reduced to this; I am a child of God, and my Daddy calls me His child by my childhood name. No longer must I put on airs with Him. No longer must I bar Him from the secret chamber of my heart which he knew anyway. No longer must I be good enough to be with Him. I am enough. He fills in the gaps of my wounds with love. Faith is quite simple, it's just that I make it hard. Thus, knowing that the story both begins and ends in love, let us turn the page and see how it unfolds.

CHAPTER 2: BECOMING A CHILD OF GOD: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is quite true what philosophy says, that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other principle, that it must be *lived forward*.

- Søren Kierkegaard, *Volume 2: Journals EE-KK*

With the benefit of five years of extra time from a life-saving stem cell transplant, I have come to understand my life in a new light. I had previously thought of the parable of the Sower as an apt metaphor for my spiritual life and its attendant incarnate life. But that would characterize it more in sequential time than in God's. He planted the seed generations before I was born, led me to infant baptism, waited patiently through years of rewriting my testimony and frantic striving until finally it all came to a crashing halt as He prepared me for my homecoming.

Reviewing my life sequentially, I would characterize my childhood as seeds along the path. I went to church, sang in the choir, and attended Sunday school, but the seeds got snatched up. There was also much drama and chaos and through this, some important lessons taught both explicitly and implicitly. Money is important. Always achieve. Being at the top of your profession is really important. Do more. Be better than everyone else. Perfection is important. But the

unspoken lessons were the world is a dangerous place, stay quiet, be invisible and you have a chance to be safe.

The seeds fell on the rock in High School. Without a deep grounding in God, I sought activity and achievement. I was a golden boy. I became an Ontario Scholar, an accomplished public speaker, starter on both the football and basketball teams, performed in school plays and became Student Council President. But it was all external, I left High School at age 17 and at 19, when most were finishing High School, I started Law School. That was when it all started crashing down. Law School was the second in a chain that I now characterize as “if I failed, I bailed.” I had dropped High School biology in grade thirteen because it was too hard, and I wanted high marks. In Law School, I was way out of my depth, so I quit after two months.

Two years later I was the youngest in my class at the prestigious IVEY MBA program. My idols were career and financial success and I pursued them with vigour. Completely unmoored from God, I got married had two wonderful sons and sought to further my career, becoming a Vice President at the age of thirty. I was relentless, trying to do more and be a master of the universe. But all my restless striving left me with a wandering eye and a lust for more. The first fifteen years after graduation were years of self-will run riot.

I kept my habit of bailing, leaving three jobs out of fear and leaving my first marriage three times as well. Along the way, I was recruited by God through the evangelical leadership of businessmen and trying to rigidly follow and impose the rules. But I had all these secret sins getting in the way. Only after admitting

my addictions, failing at and bailing from both my job and my first marriage was my heart softened enough for the seed to fall in better soil. But thorns awaited them there. I had a transforming experience where I realized I did not have to be perfect in order to belong but still the childhood beliefs dominated. I began to realize that all my active doing was not reflective of being still in God. Now I was trying to be a good second husband and divorced dad while pursuing a successful career and being active in a vibrant church. So, I transformed my career doings to working at therapy and studying at a Masters level at Tyndale Seminary while holding down a very busy job.

My busyness also opened the way to the years of becoming more of my true self. Little gifts of grace were planted in my life and the lives of others. I was living my faith at a deeper level. In the years spiritual maturation, I began to understand that most of the rules I had believed and lived by in my younger years were wrong. With the benefit of hindsight however, I realize that everything I did led me here and I think it has the potential to be of benefit to others. In short, while I was learning the spiritual disciplines and living more in the awareness and presence of God, I was still largely relying on my own strength.

A diagnosis of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma requiring immediate treatment abruptly ended my business career. The first rounds of treatment took two and a half years. Then, after a few months of diagnosis, I had seven months of dramatic treatment that saved my life. It was in the stem cell transplant ward that the gift of cancer became manifest. I learned that God is not all I have until God is all I have. It is here that God heightened my attention to the belief that I can only rely

on Him, not my rigid rules and volition. My true self is as a child of God. And as His child, I can rely on Him. But to arrive here, I had to live through God's pursuit of me from an early age as, during the first four decades of my life, I ran from Him as He ran to me.

The Early Years: Seeds Along the Path

A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold. As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Luke 8: 5-8

With the aid of thirty years of introspection, I can see, looking back, that my childhood was filled with the chaos induced by my Father's rage, alcoholism, and depression. I was born in the year 1955 in London, Ontario, Canada at St. Joseph's Hospital, baptized at St. Paul's Anglican Church and named for my grandfather, Robert John Stiles who was born in 1870, at in a log house in Mount Pleasant, Ontario. He was the second youngest of nine children and his father died when he was a two-year-old leaving his mother, Matilda to raise the children. My grandfather married Mary Philinda Miller who family history records as a "beautiful brunette lassie," in the Queensville Presbyterian manse in 1899 (Stiles 1985, 7). They lived in Newmarket and grandfather was a farm equipment salesman travelling the county before buying a farm and becoming a subsistence farmer. He and Mary raised three sons and two daughters. The youngest child was

Douglas Carl, my father, born in 1917. I asked an older cousin if he had ever met our grandfather and his response was “no, but I imagine he was quite a tyrant.” That gave me insight to my cousin’s home life, my father’s upbringing and illuminated my own experience.

My mother’s family is a mystery to me. Born Hendrika Johannah Cator in 1920, she was raised in the wheat fields of Saskatchewan. Grandpa Richard (Dick) Cator emigrated from Holland in 1909 at the age of twenty-five. “The news of cheap land in Canada sounded great, although no one had any idea of the conditions in Canada” (Cabri History Book Committee 1984, 977). Marretje (Mary) Gerritsen, his sweetheart from Holland, arrived in the spring of 1910 and they were married. They raised two daughters and three sons. While we visited my father’s siblings often in Toronto and the farms around Newmarket, we went West but once when I was four years old to visit my Grandfather Cator and his second wife. My Grandmother Cator had died ten years earlier. We had a rich, oral tradition of the Stiles family narrated by my father, but my mother never spoke to us about hers.

A Stiles cousin’s husband once called depression the family disease. It was present in her life, in my life and I suspect in my father’s life too. In his life it manifested as ballistic anger at the dinner table each night. He would rage at my older brother about some indiscretion or other and I would hide inside myself fearfully waiting until the meal ended, and I could escape to the solitude and protection of my bedroom. Father was also an alcoholic. I suspect he came by it naturally having played poker over beer with the gold miners he worked with in

the nineteen thirties and then witnessing his friends disappear in bombing missions during World War II. In all, 119 Halifax bombers were lost from Tholthorpe the base where he was stationed as a dentist. Moreover, booze was the social lubricant of the 1950's and 60's. My Mother was emotionally distant. I suppose this was from living with an alcoholic. I remember her weeping at his drunkenness more than once.

I was lightly raised in the Presbyterian Church in London, Ontario. Church attendance was mandatory. For me however, it was an expression of the “functional style of church” with a focus on “doing the activities of church, and not on the fact that at their heart churches are meant to be spiritual communities” (Standish 2005, 7). We attended, we recited the Lord's Prayer but apart from grace at dinner, there was no talk of God or faith in our home. I went to Sunday school classes and acted in the Christmas pageant. The God imprinted on me in sermons was remote, and judgmental. The foundation of our family tradition was firmly cemented by my father's many aphorisms:

There's always room at the top.

The way you start off is the way you finish up.

Always be the first to arrive at the office and the last to leave.

It's not how much you earn, it's what you save that counts.

I can stand anybody but a liar and a cheat.

One night, when I was seven, my father was watching the Grey Cup Football Championship with a friend, and I was studying for a test in his den. I came out and said I was done. I had not done much studying, but I really wanted to watch TV with them. He quizzed me on the reading and of course I did not

know any of it. He thundered at me to get back in my room and “not come out until you know it PERFECTLY!” Thus began a lifelong fear of taking risks. Both his anger at the dinner table and this experience meant that I did not raise my hand in class for fear that I would get the answer wrong. Fear of risk taking extended to dating, course selection at university, career choices, playing sports, investments and even faith. I always made the safe, accepted choices out of fear of being wrong and being ostracized and ridiculed for it.

At age eight, I entered grade five joining “The Advancement program” designed for smart kids from across the city. Fourteen of us stayed in the same class through grade eight. Our family moved from an old house downtown to a brand new one in the suburbs that year. We had a big house at the edge of town and behind our backyard was nothing but country. Moving to the suburbs meant that I had to be driven to school each day, so I became disconnected from my former friends. When the weather was better, I played alone for hours in the dirt pile behind our home or went fishing alone in nearby Medway Creek. I also remember contentedly playing soldiers on my bed with dimes, quarters and nickels representing different kinds of armament. This was a good way to while away the hours when I was supposed to be studying.

In grade seven, two classmates had been stealing candy from a pharmacy and James Bond novels from Eaton’s Department store. They had invited me to join them as their “lookout.” We were caught stealing in the Department store. It was just like on TV, we were sequestered in a windowless room while our accusers railed at us. When I got home my mother was terribly angry! Never

before or after did I see her angry. She told me my father would be furious. Naturally, that completely destabilized me. Surprisingly however, he was quite calm and told a story about a transgression of his in childhood which did not seem as heinous. I experienced a wave of relief to be spared from his anger. I have always believed it was simply the benefit of the youngest child's free ride. But I wonder, did grace abound in the man of stone tablet aphorisms? The next year, a classmate accidentally hung himself. The adults of course gave us no information about it, so I was informed by the speculation of classmates left wondering what had happened. While Ian and I were not close friends, in looking back at the experience around his death I am perplexed by the lack of emotion from myself and others.

Later in that grade eight year, Joe Kadlecik, my teacher, entered a few of us in the public speaking contest at his Optimists Club. I came third and would compete for the next four years with Joe continuing as my public coach guiding me on composition and delivery. This training became the linchpin of my success in business. He also put my name forward for an audition to be on a local TV show called "Take Your Choice" where teenaged panelists would give answers to questions posed by a moderator. A contestant from the audience would then decide whether our answer was correct or not. If the contestant judged correctly their group would win five dollars. I made thirty dollars per half hour show in 1967 and my father made me put it all in a Guaranteed Investment Certificate at the main branch of the Canada Trust, which looked like a cathedral of finance. It was one of the many formative lessons he gave me on saving.

The Prodigal Years: Seeds on the Rock

My speaking coach Joe was a Baptist, and he gave me a copy of David Wilkerson's *The Cross and the Switchblade* as a graduation gift. It was the first of a chain of evangelical books in my life which failed to penetrate my heart. That summer a waitress at a summer resort observed that I might be smart enough for high school, but I would be behind socially. She was right. It took several decades to catch up. Throughout high school I was looking for a girlfriend to make the connection I felt was missing in my life. Grade nine started for me at London Central Secondary School at the age of twelve. I was a fat kid in a paisley shirt my mother had bought for the first day of school and wore heavy black framed glasses that were considered comical but became Chic some fifty years later. Once again, my heart proved impervious to Christ's calling as I attended a few meetings of the school's tiny Youth for Christ club lead by Tom McKenzie. It was boring. Tom was a teacher and played inter-county baseball for Kitchener-Waterloo. I was intrigued that such a good athlete was also a Christian.

A Teenager in High School and University

The next year, my cousin Dave moved in because he was living in a raucous situation in his first year at Western. He had done "post-graduate" studies for a sixth year in high school. My brother was away at school in Switzerland, so Dave became like a second brother giving me the first advice I received on dating

girls. He also showed me a playboy calendar in his room and that began a long, secretive battle of attraction to such images. One searing academic memory comes from grade ten when I scored 86% in Geography. The teacher said in front of the class, "Not bad, but your brother got 100%." That reinforced my belief that perfection was the standard and since, I could not be as good as him in academics, I focused instead on athletics. I started for the basketball team winning the city and district championship in grade eleven. And I started both on offence and defence on the football team. When I was playing high school basketball, I used to wait at the back door for a ride home after practice. Often, Mr. Budd the high school janitor would pause and talk with me and sometimes I would tarry in going out to the car. I do not remember what he said, only that he was a very warm and gentle man. My father once complimented me for spending time with the janitor. In essence he was proud because he believed that no one should consider themselves better than another. None of us knew it in 1970, but through the janitor, God was gently forming both me and his son who would later play a pivotal role in the transforming experience of my life.

I did not want to go to church so I would dawdle in getting ready. My family would be in the driveway with the car's engine running and my father would honk the horn to try and speed me up. The honking did not speed me up but it did make me feel like a reprobate. I continued to attend Sunday school at New St. James, taking confirmation classes with the Assistant Minister. I didn't absorb much and had no desire to be confirmed but my father took me aside and

said, “Do it for your Mother.” So, I did and that was the end of church for me. That was also the year I started drinking.

I had been elected student council president and, in the fall, I went on the coveted Exchange Trip. The student council president from 1945, known as “Doc” was a successful veterinarian in Indianapolis. Every year he would take the council president and an athletic leader, so they brought the captain of the basketball team, my friend Steve. We drove down in Doc’s station wagon, stopping in at a seedy bar in Detroit where Doc pulled over and came out with a “stay cold pack” of beer. He handed a beer to Steve and one to me, keeping one for himself, and said “Keep ‘em below the windows boys” and off we drove. I remember singing our school song together at 1:30 in the morning and an hour later I got up to vomit. When I woke up, I felt great. This would become a pattern in my drinking life.

The next day we got to drive the famous Indy 500 track in Doc’s station wagon at 60 MPH. I still remember how steep the curves were and the feeling we would flip over. And then we went to the Purdue vs. Iowa football game. What a spectacle! A hundred thousand people in one place with one purpose – to worship football. Then, we left on another booze cruise returning to London. I never remembered beer being available before but somehow it materialized at a lawn party on Monday night and never went away the rest of the trip.

An outcome of drinking at a young age was drunk driving in my late teens. Looking back, it was yet another unnoticed seed in my life; the proof that guardian angels exist, if not mine, then certainly others’. One morning, I did not

remember driving home at all. I phoned my pal the next day and asked him how I got home. When he told me that I had driven myself I was horrified and vowed to give up drinking, a vow I kept for an entire month. The next year I worked at a girl's camp on Lake Temagami in Northern Ontario. To ensure that we would not play hanky-panky with the girls' staff, the camp director would give us money to take a one-hour boat trip to a bar on Saturday nights. I left the girl's staff alone although I added drunk driving a boat to my resume.

That fall, I entered The University of Western Ontario at seventeen and regularly drank at the pub downtown although the legal age was eighteen. I also remember walking outside the Student Community Centre one day and feeling particularly dour. A girl I knew asked me what was wrong, and I said "nothing." Looking back, I recognize it was the first time I experienced depression. Believing the fault was in myself I frequently looked in the yellow pages at phone numbers for Psychologists but was unwilling or unable to call. In the subsequent decades I went to more than a dozen different therapists and was diagnosed as bipolar twenty-six years later. I also remember repeatedly cruising the University bookstore and looking at the Bible. I eventually bought a version in modern English (we had used the King James Version at the Presbyterian Church I grew up in). I bought it, but I never opened it. He continued to knock but I ignored Him.

Alarmed by my low grades in first year, I abandoned the plan to become a famous writer and switched to Math, Business, and Economics where I made the Dean's Honour List. After my second year, I went to the University of Windsor

Law School at age nineteen. I was wait listed but got in after my father called the Dean and schmoozed him. It was my first time living away from home and my first time living with a roommate in twelve years. I dropped out after two months overwhelmed by the amount of work. For the first time in my life, I couldn't get by without doing the homework. Once home, I went out drinking at night got home at 5 a.m. and then slept until noon. My mother would scold "you're supposed to be sick!" It was a reprise of something she had said when I was child. I inferred that she was saying that if you are sick, your job is to rest and recover. But if you can go out and play, then you are not really ill and you need to be at school or at work. But neither of us understood the depth of the illness caused by addiction to alcohol.

I used to say that my personality came out of little brown bottles. I was funny and engaging, the life of a party with extremely low standards since everyone else was drunk and or stoned. Drinking provided the kind of social acceptance that I had craved. Social drinking led to a place of community. I did not have to face any inner fears or insecurities. I could be the bon vivant. It also provided relief from one of my father's more demanding aphorisms, "There's always room at the top" which led to an internalized personal belief that there is first place and no place. It took many years to discover that this person was a false exterior projection to defend against crippling fear and to impress others. Indeed, as Brennan Manning wrote in his biography, "The imposter's life is a herky-jerky existence of elation and depression. The imposter is what he or she does" (Manning 2011, 56). Doing, or rather doing well was all important.

After a few months at home a friend from camp got me an interview at the TD Bank and I started work three months later. I was soon selected to go on an accelerated training program to Toronto where drinking was led by the instructor, and I was returned to my branch as a Senior Accounting Officer at the ripe old age of twenty. I started to finish my B.A. at night and became attracted to Business. The next year, two credits short of a general B.A., I applied to the MBA program at Ivey in London, Ontario and was admitted. Once again, I was the youngest in the class. In hindsight, I got in because my father asked our neighbour, the former dean of the school to put in a good word for me. It was a second instance of my father working in the background to what he perceived as my benefit.

The Adult Child Years

Rather than being formed by Christ, I had been formed by my community. It was formed by recreational drinking and a foundational interest in money. At Business School, we had ninety-minute classes all day Monday through Friday and got an assignment Friday afternoon that was due Saturday at Noon. That meant that Saturday night was drinking night. I had also been searching for the wholeness created by relationship with a woman since High School and that was about to come to fruition.

Each of the previous four summers one of my brother and cousins had all been married and I fell in love with the idea of being in love, so in 1977 I got married too. I had dated Laurie, a Roman Catholic girl, in high school and off and on in University and I proposed to her a few weeks before starting business

school. We did pre-marriage meetings with her cousin, the Priest who would conduct our ceremony. The conversations were always transactional rather than spiritually formative. He asked if I believed in God. I said “Yes.” He asked if I would promise to raise the children in the Roman Catholic faith. I said “Yes.” My parents invited the presbyterian minister over to the house to talk with us. He said “well, mixed marriages are not the issue they once were.” With that, we were married. My father paid our rent that first year because “when poverty flies in the door, love flies out the window.” For the next fifteen years I dwelled in a spiritual wasteland pursuing career, money, and meaningful relationships with both male and female coworkers. We spoke of financial strategies and market influences and literature and music. And it was intoxicating. The tiny seed planted in my youth lay very much dormant. Today however, I know that “even though we cut off the spiritual dimension, it is still there” (Standish quoting Adrian Van Kamm August 18, 2014).

In 1978, I graduated with my M.B.A. at the age of twenty-three and I accepted a job at TD at almost three times the salary I had earned just two years earlier marvelling at what a little education had done for me financially. When school ended, my wife and I went on a four-week holiday to Florida. Three weeks into the vacation Human Resources called asking if I would consider a job on a pilot project and come back a week early for interviews. I returned and he mentioned that my father had called. I told him I was embarrassed by that, and he said, “I thought it was a nice thing.” It took me nearly forty years to realize he was right. My father was just trying to help his son.

The job at the bank turned out to be a political football. The Chairman had wanted to implement a “Management by Objectives” program with the Senior Executive. They were passive aggressively playing along and resented the imposition. I had always maintained an interest in common stocks and when my friend Steve called from his new position as the branch manager of the investment firm McLeod, Young, Weir in London, Ontario, I quickly joined their six-month training program. I had scored 98% on the listed options exam which at that time was the highest anyone had ever scored. When the Director came to London with our institutional specialist, my father came to a meeting and asked him “What happened to the other 2%?” Everyone knew he was joking. He was proud of me. But somehow, I received it through his aphorism, “Many a truth spoken in jest,” that he really thought I should have been perfect. My father died of lung cancer in 1981 four months after his diagnosis. I remember telling him in those months that I would never quit again, and he gently said never is a long time. I started running both literally and figuratively.

I moved back to Toronto in April 1982 because I wanted to be a Vice President. I provided ideas and counsel to stockbrokers on strategy using listed options (the somewhat sanitized version of the derivatives that led to the financial crisis of 2008) and was appointed Vice President in 1985. I joined the research department successfully completing the first year of the C.F.A. designation but then my anxiety took over and I left to go back into sales. I had some success and after the crash of 1987 and subsequent recovery I believed that my peers and I

were the kind of “Master of the Universe” described in Tom Wolfe’s novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* only without the flaws.

In those years, my priorities were:

- 1) Career
- 2) Physical Fitness
- 3) Relationships

Family did not rate a named placing. Relationships were a catchall category including my peers, women friends, wife and children, mother, cousins, and brother. There was no question however that my wife and children were a very distant third in the category. But they fared better than God. He did not even make the list! In 1986, I separated from my wife moving in with my friend Steve. During the separation I took Vic, an acquaintance at work, out for lunch. I wanted to pick his brain on how to thrive in the business. He asked me “how’s your marriage?” and I confessed my situation. The next day, he gave me three books; *Born Again* by Chuck Colson, *What Wives Wish their Husbands Knew about Women* by James Dobson and *the Good News Bible* by Various Authors. A few months later I moved back in with my wife. Reading Colson led me to read C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* which shamed me in my lack of knowledge of Christian belief. I learned that Easter was the most important date on the Christian calendar. As a young boy, I had attended Sunday school for ten years and confirmation classes for six months but somehow, I had missed this important fact.

I then prayed the sinner’s prayer many times and I held certain three certainties: divorce is wrong, adultery is wrong, and homosexuality is wrong. It

was important for me to believe in absolutes. I was happy with the achievement of a fifteen-year marriage and two healthy sons. I had spent my work career from 1979 to 1989 focused on the mental dimension of life, achieving my ambitions, and getting my way. I also spent this time gratifying my physical self with socializing after work, booze, and food. Now, it was time to enter more deeply into the spiritual dimension of life.

The Awakening Years

In 1989, I left my commission sales job. Tired of the stress of starting each month at zero and generating trade ideas to raise my income, it seemed that a return to London and working for 3M would be idyllic, a life without stress. I gradually came to realize that I had been compulsively overeating for much of my life, but it really accelerated during the four months in which my father was dying. By the end of 1991, my eating was out of control, and I joined Overeaters Anonymous (O.A.). I remember a beautiful blond woman on the other side of the room named Arlene. She was wearing a cream-coloured pant suit. It seemed as if the lights had dimmed, and a celestial spotlight shone upon her. Everything she said was replete with meaning, replete with recovery. Her voice was mesmerizing, and I counted a meeting incomplete unless she shared.

In that first month, I read *Sick & Tired of Bring Fat: A Man's Struggle to be O.K.* (Alexander, 1991) and decided to commit to recovery. One thing the author had done was to quit drinking to help lose weight. A few years earlier drinking had begun to lose its appeal for me as it took fewer and fewer drinks before I started to vomit. It seemed to make sense that drinking, and eating were

connected so I decided to start my abstinence from both overeating and alcohol on January 1st, 1992. O.A. is an offspring of A.A. and like many offspring, uses the “Big Book” of A.A. as one of its few primary texts. I explored and found the “20 questions” to discern whether one is an alcoholic. To my great surprise, I qualified as an alcoholic. I have never gone to A.A. meetings unless an O.A. meeting was not available and while I have struggled with my eating habits, I have not had a drink for over thirty years. What I have since discovered however, was that I had merely switched addictions. And without facing them and completely surrendering to God, I could be a functioning addict living an outwardly acceptable life while inwardly plotting my next fix. Unless we address the internal state and change the focus away from external means to the true source of peace and healing, we are subject to continuing slips and relapse. As Gabor Maté says “All forms of addiction whether substances or not either soothe pain directly or distract from it. Hence the first question is not why the addiction, but why the pain? Addicts are trying to regulate their internal state through external means” (Chatterjee, 2021).

Recovery is lived in the depth to which one submits to the Spirit and serves others. Step eleven focuses on abiding in God, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59). All of the steps lead us from ourselves towards God but step twelve leads to service to others, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics,

and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 60). The fact is we need to die to self not just in the consumption of alcohol, food, or any idol, but in the false beliefs and emotional wounds we carry. Recovery is really a journey of sanctification and if the person does not change how they relate to others they become a judgmental “dry drunk,” someone who is sober but still wreaking havoc in their own lives and the lives of those around them. “This is the vicious circle of the will to power. It does not create happy people, nor happy people around them” (Rohr 2011, 20). Recovery begins and endures in surrendering our will to God, no longer trying to stay sober through the strength of our own willpower.

In O. A. I found the kind of loving, accepting community that I had not found anywhere else in my life. I began a physical, spiritual, and relational renaissance. These people understood me and became like family, a trusted circle. In those heady early days of recovery, I remember walking the streets of Toronto and excitedly telling a friend that I believed that O.A. was the first century church in action. The difference between the people in the church basement and the people in the sanctuary is that many of the people in the basement own their sin and need for healing while many upstairs either believe they are fully healed or have only an amorphous acknowledgement of their own sin.

About three years into recovery my attraction grew to the point that Arlene and I would talk for an hour after the meeting. One night I heard a raccoon scurrying about, and she said, “Don’t worry, I’ll protect you.” She has said that to me ever since and it continues to comfort me when she says it today. Week after

week, we talked of things that mattered and filled our emotional desert with torrents of living water. I knew my actions were wrong because we were both married, but I could not help myself. I told her about my feelings in July 1994 and I really thought she would say “that’s nice, but nothing is going to happen.” Instead, the next day her response was “I’m dealing with the implications of it.” In September 1994, I decided to leave my wife. I sat in the parking lot at work and sobbed for thirty minutes because I knew it was wrong. I asked God to stop me, but I did not mean it. I really wanted to do it anyway. I emptily asked for His forgiveness knowing I was in the wrong.

Early in 1995 I heard that Paul Henderson, Canada’s Hockey Hero, was speaking at a local Baptist church. I was unable to attend but I left a message on the church answering machine the next day asking if there was a copy of the speech. Two weeks later, a cassette tape was left in my mailbox along with a note. I listened to the tape while driving the next week and Paul said, “if you’re not ready, don’t pray this prayer. If you’ve got questions, get the answers. But if you’re ready, then pray this prayer.” I had prayed the sinner’s prayer many times seemingly without result. But this time, I was ready.

I phoned Arlene and told her, and she cried. At the time, my O.A. sponsor was involved in the Unity Church and Arlene had worried that I would go that route rather than being a Christian. I cried a little too. Somewhat unwittingly I had been seeking God’s will. Even though I was doing the wrong activities while travelling in the outskirts of the wasteland, God had me on the right road. As Thomas Merton said of God, “you will lead me by the right road, though I may

know nothing about it” (Standish, quoting *Thoughts in Solitude*, August 18, 2014).

The Transformative Experience

I decided to go see Merv Budd, the Pastor who had dropped off the tape. He was surprisingly young and hip. He invited me to go to church and I said I could not attend. When he asked me why not, I said, “because I’m a sinner.” He smiled and spread his arms wide and said, “we’re all sinners here.” Merv’s phrase was Christ’s presence for me in that moment. I still get teary remembering the love and inclusion, the cleansing relief of peace, safety, freedom and belonging that washed over me.

One of my O.A. sponsors used to say that coincidence is God acting anonymously. As I mentioned in my early years, when I played high school basketball, I used to wait at the back door for a ride home after practice. Often, our school janitor would pause and talk with me. Merv is the janitor’s son, and he presided over my marriage to Arlene at the end of 1996. I remember once speaking to him about the various “crises” in my life and he told me how his dad had suffered a stroke later in his life and could not speak. One day Merv was sharing his own problems with his dad who took a pencil and a pad of paper and drew two arrows. Above the ↑ he wrote “GOD” below the ↓ he wrote “Devil”. A profound statement from a simple man. Faith is simple, but my journey to acceptance had been hard; “yet, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22: 42b).

Transformation to Life with Jesus

The transformative experience with Merv represented the door to a journey rather than arrival at a destination. I had moved to Toronto and Arlene had joined me by September 1995, when she discovered a wonderful local church with multiple generations attending, great music and teaching. We joined a small group led by Ray and Fay Binkley. Every Friday night, it was like going home to Ma and Pa as twenty or more of us would gather in their home for a meal. We would watch a video of John and Paula Sandford teaching about overcoming various trials. Then the men and women would separate for discussion and prayer. Ray was my Spiritual Father. He encouraged me to go deeper in my faith through conversation, mentoring, books to read and most importantly, by how he lived.

The next month, a businessman at our church invited me to a Leadership Ministry breakfast to hear Paul Henderson. There were perhaps eighty other men there at 7:30 a.m. to hear him. I joined a small group that Paul planted a couple of weeks after the breakfast. I was raw with separation and divorce proceedings and guilty in my new relationship with Arlene. After the first small group meeting Paul told me, “one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3: 13-14). It seemed to me that the Leadership Ministry group stressed a brand of apologetics and evangelism combined with the underlying ethic that we could be both titans of industry and titans of the faith. I was trying to embrace certainty of faith, but it just wouldn’t take root in me. I had yet to learn that “God won’t allow a soul that is searching for Him to be

comforted anywhere other than with Him” (Lawrence 1982, 35). The experience of mystery and paradox needed to supplement study and rules.

As part of our wedding ceremony, Arlene and I confessed our responsibility in the failure of our previous marriages. In the Declaration of Forgiveness, Merv paraphrased Romans 8:34 reading, “Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us!” And, “Whenever our hearts condemn us... God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything” (1 John 3:20). Arlene and I thought we would have the perfect relationship, we both believed in God and in the power of the twelve step program, and we knew how to communicate, openly, honestly and with respect. What I learned, however, was that I take myself into each relationship and I still had a lot of pruning to experience.

In 1997, I was “re-baptized” as an adult in order to make a statement of belief I had failed to internalize at sixteen. I had returned to the investment industry. Money, acquisition, and power characterized the culture of upward mobility which was my workplace. Within the rush to acquire was encapsulated an unacknowledged search for affirmation and ultimately a search for meaning. For the lucky few, there came a time where the acquisitions tasted like dust and failed to satisfy. Left with an emptiness, they could now find the water that quenches thirst. In my case, the water was always there. In fact, it beckoned throughout my life, I was simply too busy to stop and quench my thirst, too busy to hear.

I left the Leadership Ministry a few years later when one morning I was expressing my feelings openly and one of the members said, “This is not a hospital ministry.” Perhaps it was not, but that is precisely the type of ministry to which I am drawn. The leadership members need to be wary of their attitude anchored in the canyons of success in downtown Toronto. Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick;” (Luke 5:31). I needed the kind of church Peter Wehner attributed to Pope Francis, “He views the role of the church not as a combatant in the culture wars but as a field hospital after battle” (Wehner, 2015).

Perhaps the fault was not in my teachers but in myself. I simply chose not to receive grace because I spent eight years mired in the guilt of my BIG SIN. I was an adulterer and I had committed divorce. I was still mired in the foundation of my rules-based belief. Somehow belief had not migrated from mind to heart and relational trust. It always seemed to me that we were impelled to action – share your faith, invite others to church, grow the numbers, go on short-term missions without any kind of deep and prayerful discernment. The issue for me was not “prayer without action” but rather “action without prayer” (McNeil, Morrison and Nouwen 1983, 112). I was a Mary stuck in a cacophonous ministry of Marthas (Luke 10: 41-42). I have since come to understand that prayer without action is just as incomplete as action without prayer. It is not either the way of Martha or Mary, but which belong to the body of the called ones.

After years of struggle, in February 1998, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I consulted a doctor who said I needed to try up to twenty-two

medications in varying combinations and dosages. At the same time, Arlene was diagnosed with heart valve failure. I was away in California for a course to obtain a professional designation in March when she was told she would need open heart surgery. For the first time in my life, I prostrated myself on the ground to pray. I was powerless to be with her when she heard and powerless to control her health. Our family Doctor told us that Arlene would be going to “the Wayne Gretzky of heart surgery.” Nonetheless, I decided to stop taking the trial-and-error bipolar meds. I knew how to deal with myself as I was and worried that I would not know how to deal with a new self that could be changing and unmanageable precisely when Arlene needed me most.

After her third trip to the emergency department, Arlene was removed from the waiting list and scheduled for surgery. The night before her surgery, our senior pastor came to the house and prayed. I can distinctly remember the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit hovering above us as we went to sleep that night. The next morning, just before they wheeled her off to surgery, Arlene said to me, “when I wake up, I’m going to be better.” She meant that she would either be in heaven or in Toronto General Hospital but either way, she would be healed. It was a time of fervent prayer. A series of friends came to the waiting room to sit in vigil with me. After six hours, I saw Arlene being whirled into I.C.U. and “Wayne Gretzky” stopped to curtly inform me that he did not have to do a valve replacement. The tear had really not been that bad, so he had repaired it. His comments made me feel as if we had somehow gamed the system to take the place of a patient in greater need. Perhaps instead, it was the work of the Great

Physician responding to the prayers of His children. Only immediate family was allowed at her bedside in I.C.U. however Ray asked the Nurse if he could go in to pray. I do not remember the content of what he said only its calming effect on me and the assurance that God heard him.

After Arlene recovered from her surgery, we discovered we had work to do in our marriage. We realized that wounds spoke to wounds in spite of our wonderful threefold love. And when one partner's wounds are healed, the other will be at odds with the healed stranger. So, the years of therapy continued, seeking relief from the pain of divorce and the guilt of abandoning my sons and now my conduct in marriage. I can safely claim that I hold the equivalent of two Doctoral degrees in being a counselling client.

Having been divorced, it was easy for me to think of marriage as disposable. I knew the first one was easy legally and recognized the false temptation that all my problems would be over. I told a couple's therapist that I am a Christian, and that meant divorce is not an option. This time, I was prepared to fight. I made the decision that I would not divorce a second time. However, I was stunned when he asked Arlene if she was prepared to leave me, and she said yes. I then sought the help of a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist to deal with my anger and we continued to go to a marriage counsellor.

A few years after Arlene's heart surgery, we were on a business trip to California and stopped in at Saddleback Church. It was after the sixth service and felt like we were at the fall fair after most of the exhibitors had packed up and gone home. We pocketed a couple of flyers about a twelve step program called

Celebrate Recovery (C. R.). It was a program for Christians with no ambiguity about who our “Higher Power” is. We entered with zeal into participation at Bramalea Baptist travelling two and half hours each Friday and Monday night to attend meetings. We then left Bramalea to import it into our church in Toronto where it petered out. The problem was I did not do it in humility. I did it with pride and judgment and I did not know my poverty of spirit. I had to fall from the pride of having it all figured out in C. R.

As a young man, I wanted to be a Vice President of my firm. Then, I wanted to be wealthy. I put career ahead of everything and everyone. In the last eight years of my career the schedule and pace of work pushed devotional time aside. Career survival had become the later life version of career success since my boss aggressively threatened to fire me in 2005 and then passively threatened in the succeeding five years saying, “if this project fails, I’ll be gone and so will you.” The threat of being fired is a visceral one for me. My father’s saying “you’ll never amount to much” lurked in my conscious unconscious. I had been fired at fourteen for being too slow picking strawberries. When I was at 3M, I was given ninety days to improve my performance, or I would be fired. I quickly exited after surviving that threat.

In 2005 however, I made the decision that I was not going anywhere. My boss was going to have to pay me to stay or he was going to have to pay me to leave but I was not going to help him by quitting. He came to love and respect me, and the project succeeded beyond anyone’s wildest imagination. The sting lingered, however. It meant that my spiritual life became an arid wasteland as I

threw myself into the project which lasted four years. I lost my ability to stop and minister to the person in front of me. My character brought a certain respect at work as I am regarded as a man of high integrity. To compound the stress at work, Ray Binkley was suddenly called home at the end of January 2006. How I loved him. He was always consistent, always energetic, and always faithful. He ran a healing ministry from his home. He was solid in his beliefs, and he gave me great hugs. Ray lives on in my heart and in his spirit. When he died, I cried uncontrollably, a grieving I never made for my own father.

The Maturing Years: On Good Soil

In 2001, I noticed that Tyndale, our local Seminary, offered a course called “Work, Vocation and Ministry” which was only available through an intense full-time program. I could not commit to that kind of load, so I enrolled part-time in the Master of Divinity program with a counselling major. In my mind, I was taking the easier, softer way because I did not wish to study Greek and Hebrew. Tyndale is the vine of my spiritual awakening and maturity. The next dozen years were the ones of becoming who God had always intended me to become. While I had a goal in mind, the path was somewhat spontaneous. Two years in, for example, I decided I would go to Tyndale fulltime after another negative work experience. As I completed more courses, it seemed that all my electives were in Spiritual Formation rather than counselling. This became my new reformation. Increasingly, I came to believe that each course was itself an exercise in spiritual formation, that is to say intimacy with God.

The shift came for me in my first retreat at Queen of the Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ontario in 2003. I did not know how I could possibly complete three hours of silence. There as I sat in isolated silence with two classmates, I watched the February shadows stretch across the meadow in the fading afternoon sun. To the left were the majestic pines on the edge of the ravine. To the right was the living, life-sized icon of Jesus on the cross a reminder that the story ends not in pain but in hope, not in sorrow, but joy. I saw that silence and solitude could unplug me from the urgency and exigencies of my busy life. That night, I experienced group *Lectio Divina* for the first time. It was a powerful revelation of a new way to experience scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who chose to share.

In May 2005 I took a course centred on spiritual direction once again at Queen of the Apostles. I picked up a copy *Life of the Beloved* (Nouwen, 1992). I had identified with Henri's tortured soul in those years, Am I good enough to be loved? Am I worthy to be loved? We shared a restless seeking hither and yon for affirmation and approval. Yes, I knew that only God could fill the God shaped vacuum in my heart, but still I sought. I cried when I read the story of John, the L'Arche attendant asking for a blessing as Henri was blessing the community members (Nouwen 1992, 71-72). Here was a "whole" person, in the context of those he served, admitting his brokenness and need. So too was I, in the eyes of the world, a whole, competent, accomplished, even powerful, being. Yet, in the eyes of God who sees into my soul I was broken, bleeding and needy. I still

struggle with my attachments to the world, but now live times of quiet peace wherein I know that I am the beloved child of God.

During the course, we met daily with an onsite spiritual director. He introduced me to a radical journaling technique. Right handwriting was me, left handwriting was Jesus. I would then read it to him, and he would validate the scriptural integrity of the words written from Jesus. It was during this process that Jesus called me brother. I continued meeting the spiritual director for about two years until he wound up his practice and referred me on to someone who was not really engaged in taking on people. I let it drop. Looking back, I would tie my subsequent years of spiritual wasteland to the years without a director. Through these years I was the chair of the Elders, a group responsible for fostering the spiritual health of the community within our church. I was also facing the time of trial with my boss. Mixing and to some extent separating sacred and secular, I was still relying largely on my own strength and praying for positive outcomes in both arenas rather patiently waiting for God's direction.

I wrestled with my maturing relationship with God alongside the integration of the material in each course. Henri Nouwen shared my anguished soul, yet he pointed with purity to Jesus in a new way, a spiritual way. Nonetheless, I still could not embrace that “the God who can punish us for our sins is also capable in His limitless mercy of absolving us from our sins” (Bouteneff 1998, 75). I had difficulty modeling the victorious life in Christ because I still wrestled with redemption, living with the tension of clamped hands rather than the relaxation of open palms.

Life Today in the Holy Spirit

Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. God alone is enough.

-Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*

I am acutely aware that my spiritual formation is far from a finished product. As mentioned earlier, I was shocked to discover that Easter, not Christmas, was the most important day on the Christian calendar. I was again “gobsmacked” upon reading “the defining moment of the Christian church was the day of Pentecost, a day too many Christians neglect” (Standish 2005, 29). How on earth, in all my study, in my attendance at an ecumenical, evangelical, and spiritual formation centred church had I missed this important truth? Especially since I had felt the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit hovering above us the night before my wife’s heart surgery in 1998. Well in my defense it may be that the abandonment of the liturgical calendar has something to do with it. The replacement of the celebration of holy days and the use of themes rather than the scriptural calendar for preaching could have been a factor. Anything but my own thick-headedness will do as an explanation. But as my friend who quotes Tony Dungy at me says, “No excuses, no explanations” (Dungy 2007, 106).

Addiction and Grace: What is My Part in it?

The challenge of recovery from addiction is no different from that of living in the broken world. We feel as if we are missing something. We feel as if we are victims and, “If we do not heal our grief, we will project our anger” (Bramer quoting Richard Rohr February 23, 2015). When one comes to a twelve-

step program, one loathes oneself and one's lifestyle. And if one has hit bottom with their behaviours, then one is "willing to go to any length" (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 58) to recover by attending multiple meetings, reading literature, writing responses to questions, going to step studies, telephoning other members when in crisis, adopting a mentor and eventually becoming a mentor to others. Then, when one gets some recovery, one is at risk of becoming smug, slacking off in intensity and judging others as pitiful. It is easy when we come in because we are desperate. Those who maintain their recovery discover a spiritual solution and are reminded by the stories of the newcomer that they are only one drink, one binge, one game, one hit, or one massage away from a return to destruction.

My years in C. R. taught me that it does not matter what perceived slight I have suffered or what justified retaliation I have made. The most important question is, "*My Part*: You need to ask yourself, what part of my resentment against another is my responsibility? Ask God to show you your part" (Baker 1998, 25- italics appear in the original). It always comes back to my part in the string of choices, actions, reactions, resentments, and outcomes. And God offers me the grace to step out of my own petulant outrage to see my role in the unfolding mess. "The transformation we're always called to is dying to self," (Standish August 19, 2014). As for me, I have had to die to self not once but many times including the self who yet believed he was unforgivable. And, in dying to self, I am regularly offered reminders to see my part.

We're Only as Sick as Our Secrets

I have carried big sins in secret for many years. For the better part of ten years, it was adultery. Having made amends and restored relationships as best as I could I was then given over to addiction to pornography for the worst part of thirteen years. As is the case with everyone's life, there are many interconnections. The great irony of addiction is that it is a flight from pain which leads only to additional pain. "The personality is actually a defensive structure that we develop as a way of dealing with our pain. So much of what we consider to be a personality is actually an overlay upon our true selves" (Chatterjee, 2021). However, the pain of the addiction obscures the pain of origin to the point where the pain of addiction is paramount and so the addiction intensifies to mask both the original pain and the shadow shame of surrendering to the addiction. The buried pain leaks out and the addiction intensifies until the shadow overruns the true self. But recovery is the evidence that in faith, the truth will set us free. And we are fed not by our power but by the power of God in the Holy Spirit.

The Gift of Journeying Home

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances...and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezek. 36:25-28

History is replete with the stories of saints who struggle, ordinary people called by God to do things beyond their understanding or ability. Sometimes we, the ordinary, are simply called to do the ordinary things of a life lived in faith. We are called simply to trust God. Peace is the refuge from the busy mind for it is the simple things which yield peace, breaking the bonds of the illusion of control. Having heard God's call, the context for my choices is altered. It is time to celebrate my relationship with God rather than bathe in guilt around it. It is time to focus on God's grace rather than my sin. God in all and God in me. Time to focus on Him instead of myself. To lose myself in God, is my way home.

The Gift of Cancer

In February 2009, we had a Family Day weekend vacation in Washington, D.C. It was the first time in thirteen years of marriage that our blended family of five was away together and, the best vacation ever with so many tangibly good memories. I was so happy the day I went back to work. I remember thinking, "God, you can take me now. I don't want to go, but if I did, I would go happy." Three and a half years later I received the gift of cancer in the form of a treatable, but incurable, form of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. I hasten to add that seeing it as a gift took a few years. In the immediate months after diagnosis, I could no longer hold my tongue when someone said "God is good" in responding to positive circumstances. He is good in the crappy ones too. Perhaps it was the youthful denial of the possibility of my own death, but I never went through a period of bargaining or anger. I often say I got the good kind of cancer because there was

no painful treatment and, apart from brain fog and physical exhaustion, few side effects from the chemotherapy. There have been many blessings.

This is how God saved my life-by killing my job, my identity, and my health. He had also helped me earlier to kill the attitudes of my ego in marriage and career that told me that I am the master of my destiny – the primary author of my success and hence my life. From November of 2012 until June of 2013, I could not do much more than simply be. I could not work, I could not exercise, I could not concentrate, and my thinking was cloudy. Around that time a friend invited me to retreat in daily life he was leading at his church. I thought, “I’m much too busy.” But that was my work mind talking. I had not been to work for three months. I was mostly lying around feeling listless. Through the retreat, I began meeting with a spiritual director who has walked with me since February 2013. I now know that spiritual direction was what had been missing in my life during the previous six years of strife at church and jarring career risk in the workplace. My director walked with me through illness, life upheaval, seminary courses, becoming a spiritual director and completing the DMin program with a listening heart. I would run the hamster wheel of my mind around the life stress of the moment and my director would simply ask, “Have you talked to God about it?”

After four months of chemotherapy, I knew I would never become a counsellor so, since I needed only one course to finish, I switched into a Master of Theological Studies completing it with a course on the spirituality of Henri Nouwen. Graduates are offered a free audit course and six months later during a

Prednisone fueled search in the middle of the night for something to take, I stumbled upon the new DMin in Spiritual Formation alongside a photo of one of my favourite professors. I applied. During the entrance interview, I knew I was in and that the less I said the better.

At this point I was a year into quarterly chemotherapy treatments which extended the cycle of inaction, feeling lousy, beginning to feel better from three weeks to three months in duration. The first three and a half years of living with cancer took me to a new place in my reflection. I wondered what was being born new in me through this time of suffering. When the physical suffering of the first year abated, I wrestled with when I would return to work. The culture of my peers said that a return to full throttle is important to show sustained life. Shortly after diagnosis, the hematologist told me the average relapse was six years and in the weekend of exhaustion between two weeks of courses in residency, I decided I would not return. I had spent nearly two years in treatment and thought I wanted to spend my remaining years with my family rather than my work. As it turned out, I had less than a year before a surge in my cancer.

Let your life tell you who you are

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

- Carl Jung, *C.G. Jung Letters, Volume 1*

After my final Rituximab treatment in April 2015, I complained about continuing exhaustion, and my hematologist sent me for a CT scan which led to a biopsy and the plan to do intense chemotherapy in preparation for a stem cell

transplant. One funny story of the preparation was a test where I was injected with radioactive dye. Arlene happened to see that if you were travelling outside the country you should get a letter. We had planned to go to Windsor to visit her brother so we could all go to Detroit to see my beloved Green Bay Packers play. I excuse my passion for them by explaining my theology of football. Their logo is a G on a field of green circled by a band of gold which clearly signifies God in everything in a new heaven and a new earth. Clearly the Packers are God's team.

At the beginning of this pilgrimage, we had a very long wait at the border. I could not understand why the car in front us was taking so long to clear. When we finally we got to the customs officer he asked, "has anyone in the vehicle had a treatment with nuclear medicine?" I answered I had, and he asked if I had proof. That is when we looked out and saw four heavily armed officers at each corner of our car. My treatment two days earlier had tripped their radioactivity sensors. We went inside and were separated. When asked the purpose of the trip I said we were going to see the Detroit Lions play. Then I sheepishly said, 'well really the Packers but I did not want to offend', to which he replied, "well they have to play someone." He took my letter and sent us on our way.

In November 2015, we had our third "Family Day weekend" in Toronto but I was too weak to participate fully. I had T-shirts printed up that said, "Attitude is Everything" and "#FDW2015" on the front. The message was that family is key and for me, the quote meant not that I would overcome by my strength but rather lean into Eugene Peterson's interpretation of Philippians, "Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends... Forget

yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand” (Phil. 2: 2, 4: MSG). I then began a three-week regimen of Chemotherapy with heavy treatment in week one, followed by a light treatment in week two and then a week off before repeating over the following three months. I completed all the necessary testing for a stem cell transplant and had my blood cells harvested for the procedure. However, in February 2016, I was told that the tumor had not shrunk enough and on the Family Day holiday Monday, I was admitted for seven consecutive days of intensive chemotherapy. On Thursday, March thirty-first, we were told that the tumor was at the maximum size for successful results from a transplant and that I would have to have six weeks of radiation treatment afterwards. I would be put on a waiting list, and it could take several weeks to be admitted for the transplant. We went out for a burger and while we were there I got the call that there was a bed if I could be there in two hours.

The Hospital’s cinder block walls reminded me of retreat centres. So, I took Phyllis Tickle’s *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Springtime* (2001) with me as a reminder to pray four times a day and Bob Mulholland’s *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (2006) as a study book. The first full day Dr. Tsang, the radiologist came to visit me. He explained what would happen and asked if I had any questions. I had none. But unlike most Doctors, he simply sat in companionable silence in my visitor’s chair for what seemed like a long time. I remember he exuded peace. I then had three consecutive days of chemo treatment and on Monday I had the stem cell

transplant which was a breeze. Two nights later, however, I was in considerable pain.

Just before I fell asleep, I was praying all these petitionary prayers from my place of physical pain when I suddenly called out “Jesus! Please help me!” I fell asleep immediately. The next morning at 2:07 a.m. I was thinking that at our next meeting, I would like to ask the radiologist if he is a man of great faith because he exudes such peace. I woke up to write what God had just told me. “I am going to heal through Dr. Tsang. I will radiate peace through him. I am going to radiate peace through him. I am going to radiate healing through him. Only follow ME.” I started to say, ‘is this really true?’ when I heard “Do not doubt, only believe.” At 2:33 a.m. while listening to Greg Kay’s Taizé, *The Sound of Sheer Silence* (2012), I remembered that the previous night I was trembling with exhaustion and worried I would poke my eye with the safety pin holding my tubes in place while I was asleep. I am convinced my 2:07 experience is the result of that prayer. Upon reflection, this experience informed me that God is not all I have until God is all I have.

At our next meeting, my Spiritual director said, “God isn’t done with you yet!” She was ebullient and I was suspicious. I am always suspicious of those statements; they sound a little too simplistic for my liking. But it was simply true. I still do not know what it meant but I have lived into it. Without planning aforethought, I became a spiritual director. I had no intention of becoming a spiritual director, yet God whispered it to me from the beginning of my DMin studies and at this writing I have over two hundred and ninety hours of directing

many different people. The first year after my internship, I told a friend, “For the first time, I feel as if I have a ministry.”

For the first three years after the transplant and subsequent radiation I was listless and uncertain whether I could continue my studies. In July 2019, Arlene and I attended a four-day retreat at the Abbey Retreat Centre, in Haliburton, Ontario for those on the cancer journey and their caregivers. I thought it was a bit of a waste as I was in remission. I was wrong for two reasons; it was the first time I heard the pain and fear that Arlene had borne silently over the preceding years. I also formed a spiritual bond with a young mother of two who died four months later from skin cancer. A month after the retreat, I was asked to volunteer my career gifts in service to others and that work has led to a new vigour and a new hope. I realized that after many, many “months of vigilance, I set my compass towards living life rather than evading death... walk out into today, unarmed” (Murray 2021, 79-80).

The passion of the Christ is an example of powerlessness. Death is the ultimate powerlessness, so we don't think about it. Physical and mental deterioration are to be avoided at all costs. We have to “win” while the battle we fight is already lost. It is the battle of the world, elevating self to the status of a god. Henri Nouwen has written about the gift of death as leaving our love with those whom we have loved and the assurance that that love waits for them (Nouwen 1995). Indeed, “the full meaning of Jesus' life was only revealed after his death” (Nouwen 1995, 40). Still, doubt tarries. I have always been afraid of new experiences, holding fast to the familiar out of fear of the new. Yet,

invariably, I have been glad to live the new. Despite the experience to the contrary, I still fear change and new surroundings. I have thought that death must be like this. So attached to this life am I that I cannot see the glory of the next. I imagine it to be like the infant fetus so safe and comfortable and not wanting to leave the Eden of the womb for the barren soil of this life and yet the child discovers it is a wonder filled life.

I have a living memory of riding with my brother in our father's 1965 Buick Le Sabre with the top down. We were flying through a dark night on a county road and during one hairpin turn I looked up at the canopy of stars as we hurtled along. I found myself thinking of heaven and wondered about the afterlife thinking perhaps it did not exist. Notwithstanding some powerful dialogues with God since, I have experienced fear of death, as a black void of nothingness, having no physical senses to experience the surroundings yet being conscious. An extinguished consciousness which somehow lingers. I wrote a paper some years ago on the verity of Heaven to convince myself. I read three mass market books testifying to the reality of Heaven to comfort myself. I have the scriptural assurance and still I doubt. Perhaps it is because I am so attached to this life. And, while doubt still lingers, my fear of physical death has been assuaged with the understanding that it leads to something new. "When we keep our eyes fixed on the risen Lord, we may find not only that love is stronger than death, but also that our faith is stronger than our skepticism" (Nouwen 1995, 111). We can come closer to who we are called to be if we can recover intimate relationship with

God, not just with our cognitive selves, but our emotions and choices, inspired by love for God transmitted outwards as genuine love for others.

For many of those living early in 2022, we are in a time where the shadow of death hangs closer than ever before. As C. S. Lewis wrote in one of his letters, “*Of course* the sword of Damocles still hangs over us: or, should I say, *we* are forced to be aware of the sword which really overhangs all mortals” (Lewis and Hooper 1993, 470; italics appear in the original text). Yet we live as if the shadow will soon lift so that our culture will return to hurry and worry as its main meditation. Indeed, as Dallas Willard said to John Ortberg, “Hurry is the greatest enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life” (Ortberg 2014, 20). The culture of hurried productivity is ignorant of the reality that death is not the end but the beginning. And whether our community is in person or virtual, the truth of our eternal destiny remains certain both now and in the future. The challenge then becomes how to live into that truth in a tangible way from our fortresses of solitude. A spoken word, a look, or silent companionship all speak to the presence of our Lord and Saviour.

I am so very grateful to God to have been given extra time to ponder and live into the question of how living well and dying well are so interrelated. Nonetheless, my fear is that this will be foppishly aspirational rather than real. While real life is always somewhere in between outcomes and aspiration, my hope is that I will live more fully into the life of discipleship I desire. The ember is glowing brighter within me. It is the desire to draw closer to God. It is the desire to live fully into the reality of what, in Jesus’ death and life, He has done

for me and for us. It is the desire to make this known to those in my circle not in a microphone in the town square kind of way but in a living reality. I desire that at my death my lived journey would form a natural descriptor so that for those who know me, I am a kind of Ambassador of love.

The Gift of Life-Coming Home

In the end, I received cancer as a warning. A warning that I am not fully present in this life and a warning that I have strayed too far from home. My slowed dying has given me “the opportunity to relearn what it means to die faithfully” (Moll 2010, 30). My family and I have been given time to adjust to the reality of death in this life. Cancer has been a gift because I have new eyes to see with. I am still here, and I don’t have a bucket list. My only wish is to spend time with my wife and our three sons, their partners, and offspring. My illness meant that at one point I could do very little but be. And I am lucky that I was able to choose to be – with God. I was able to connect with someone trained in holy listening, the practice of spiritual direction. And I have been able to deepen my side of the relationship with God.

It has been nearly six years since my stem cell transplant. My fear of physical death has been assuaged by the understanding that it leads to a new life. And I actively wonder what new thing God is doing in me in this one. I no longer think of myself primarily as a cancer survivor but as some one who is on a journey. And I have let go of my indignation, immediately after my stem cell transplant, at the thought of something other than cancer taking my life. I believe the key for me is to live into each day, modifying the final steps of A. A. Step ten

becomes daily examining myself and promptly admitting my wrongs, not going to bed angry (Eph. 4: 26-27). Step eleven: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59), fulfills the promise “draw near to God, and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8). And step twelve becomes having had a spiritual experience because of drawing near, we live into the truth of eternal life and so live for and with others in the truth of the Gospel. We live out the greatest commandment and the second that is like it (Matthew 22: 37-39).

The crucial question for me is, where am I with respect to faith in the principal articles of Jesus? I believe He came to save the world, redeeming us by His death to the Father living forever with Him in love. That is really what is most important. So, I continue to work out my salvation in life with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) that I might rejoice in the company of saints now and, in dying well, for all of eternity.

In the priesthood of all believers, I have witnessed many lay people both historically and in my lifetime who have been effective leaders. Nevertheless, it has taken some time for me to see myself as a leader. The key is that one size does not fit all. I believe that “for Christian leadership to be truly fruitful... a movement from the moral to the mystical is required” (Nouwen 1989, 47). I struggled on the final lap of my studies with where my ministry focus is to lie. But “before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen to the truths and values at the heart of my own

identity, not the standards by which I *must* live - but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life” (Palmer 2000, 4-5; italics appear in the original text). And that is the ministry, continuing my own healing journey in the hopes of speaking to others on theirs. All parts of my story contribute to who I am becoming.

In A. A., “serenity is directly proportional to my level of acceptance” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 452), of people, circumstances, and situations. Giving our lives to God means living into our true identity in Christ and all that means for others. “When we are rooted in true self, we can act in ways that are life-giving for us and all those whose lives we touch. Whatever we do to care for true self is, in the long run, a gift to the world” (Palmer 2004, 39). The gift of becoming one’s true self, developing a radical attachment to God and coming home through abiding in God is at the heart of my model of spiritual formation.

The model described in Chapter Three is an iteration that precedes the research project in Chapter Four. The reader will notice subtle changes in Chapter Four which are the direct result of presenting the model of spiritual formation you are about to read four times over the three years from first writing plus the benefit of further reflection over the past year on the research project in the preparation of this study, as well as additional background reading which also happened in that year.

CHAPTER 3: DOING, BEING, BECOMING AND HOMECOMING: A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen nor even touched, but just felt in the heart.

-Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Jesus came so that we “may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10: 10). Yet, the pressures of everyday life choke off that abundance. What prevents the laity from maturing in Christian Formation? In my ministry experience and observations, the answer lies partly in the format of attending the Sunday lecture followed by a mid-week small group meeting to parse the lecture with a short time at the end for petitionary and intercessory prayers for one another. In one sense, the model learned in spiritual adolescence is to do more of the same.

In order to form as disciples of Jesus, mature adults need the willingness to adopt a fulsome understanding of their true identity. This is done not only at the intellectual level but also through the affective and volitional dimensions of our being. Dying to the old self necessitates an understanding of its formative influences and attachments. Moreover, becoming the person God has called us to be needs new habits of practice. And the journey of becoming winding through dying to self is a dynamic model for continuing to sweep the house clean and dwell within God while living it out with others. One of the means of sweeping

the house clean is the sacrament of confession which has been lost by the protestant churches of my experience. Confession is part of the model of spiritual transformation that resides within the practice of the 12 steps of A. A. leading to a changed life.

Indeed, just as some embrace the Christian faith as a way to a richer or even changed life, so people come to A. A. out of sense of wanting leave a way of life behind. Since the A. A. Twelve Step program, was birthed by a Christian evangelical group (B. 1998, 87), it is unsurprising that A.A. is primarily an experiential model of embracing our weakness, seeking God's will for us, and trusting in His power to carry that out in everyday living. A cherished aphorism in A. A. is, you cannot think your way into better behaviour. We have to take action. The final three steps follow a cycle of Confess, Abide and Give. These are expressed as, Steps Ten through Twelve:

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59-60; italics are in the original text)

A.A. is a model of individual improvement while living and learning in community to change our approach to everyday life. We learn to shift the focus from our addictive habits to a radical attachment to God. As this unfolds, we gain a deeper relationship with God as well as healthier relationships with others and

with ourselves. For the Christian, one aspect of deepening maturity is the self-awareness to know what earthly attachments the false self leads us to cling to. The missing link of loving others as we love ourselves lies in whether we truly see ourselves as loved and lovable. We may know intellectually that our true self exists as the image of God, but the snares of the world around us and the lifelong grooves of attachment to people for their approval and things for their power holds us back from living into our true identity. Such attachments leave us prone to the tension of a power dynamic with others. All too often we consider ourselves to be either one up or one down to others.

There is plenty of controversy about the efficacy of Alcoholics Anonymous. However, this is not a study of participants of A. A. but rather the spiritual formation of people who have not disclosed any addiction. In that context, I believe that idolatry, expressed as disordered passions seeking disordered rewards, would fall within the addiction parameters defined by Gabor Maté, “All forms of addiction whether substances or not either soothe pain directly or distract from it. Addicts are trying to regulate their internal state through external means” (Chatterjee, 2021).

Jake Flanagin (2014) drawing on Dr. Lance Lodes 2014 book *The Sober Truth: Debunking the Bad Science Behind 12-Step Programs and the Rehab Industry*, characterized how A.A. is as much as anything a self-promoting body justifying itself with biased research and political lobbying in order to gain widespread acceptance. Flanagin’s review of Lodes’ book is largely a recitation of its key points, centred on A.A.’s so-called mythology and therapeutic failing,

offered entirely without criticism. His opinion is coloured by his own belief that there is an overreliance on God as he noted that court-mandated participation in 12-step programs was “deemed unconstitutional (thanks to items like the Step Six” (Flanagin 2014). Since Step six advises, “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59), Flanagin clearly believes that God is a stumbling block to many people.

Lodes’ contention that “folklore and anecdote are elevated to equal standing with data and evidence” has now been challenged by The Cochrane Collaboration which has done an analysis of twenty-seven studies involving 10,565 participants. “An updated review shows it performs better than some other common treatments and is less expensive...in the last decade or so, researchers have published a number of very high-quality randomized trials and quasi-experiments” (Frakt and Carroll, 2020). The highest rate of long-term abstinence was thirty-seven percent in A.A., versus a high of twenty-six percent for other treatments). The corollary is that sixty-three percent do not achieve long-term abstinence. Many still go to meetings and keep trying after relapse but many more just quit.

In A.A. people arrive in a state of desperation and learn to practice humility. Even those with years of recovery know they are only one drink away from returning to the life of ruination and so they practice their disciplines. I believe we too can practice disciplines secure in the knowledge that we never arrive in this life but that our experience of this life both with others and in our solitude is shaped by intentionally cultivating a deeper furrow on our side of the

relationship with God in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28).

Modern thinking under emphasises the notion of phases of the journey. There is a tendency to focus on intellectual understanding and discount the inherent mystery and ambiguity in the process of becoming more Christlike. While more churches are moving away from this approach, my experience has been that when teaching has been focused on information, the response to doubt has been more information. In the age of data analysis, renewal has often been expressed in terms of numbers (attendance, baptisms, conversions, small groups, tithing and more). For the individual, it became how do we plug into programs to build the numbers? But information alone does not allow for either the presence or the effect of mystery. We are spirit led beings and “if we become addicted to the external, our interiority will haunt us...with a hunger no image, person or deed can still.” (O’Donohue 2004, xvi).

In spiritual formation, it is the Holy Spirit who works within us guiding and accompanying through a continuous journey from the certainty of formation through the discontinuity of transformation to the excitement of reformation. But the journey is difficult because it is not linear. It is similar to the process of discernment in that “you’re always in uncertainty, always in discontinuity” (Standish August 22, 2014). Nor does it allow for nuance. We ignore this movement at our peril. Ultimately it comes down to trusting God in all circumstances, having faith in the face of doubt, temptation, and worldly attachments.

What keeps us from such radical trust in God? It is not just more knowledge nor is it purely mystical experience. It is letting the old die so the new can become. A portion of this is abandoning the old self-identity in favour of the new. Sometimes we are unaware of this. And sometimes we need a method. The method of study and rules-based application is insufficient because it keeps us operating primarily if not solely from our cognitive system. While for some, the model of knowing more and doing more is sufficient to affect their being. For others, a model of ongoing confession, abiding in God and giving to others represents a more wholistic approach to spiritual formation that is both centred both on loving God and loving others.

Moving Beyond the Doing Being Continuum

While doing and being are interconnected, I have struggled in the adoption of that principle. In my adult years I began anew as a disciple of Jesus. I was adopted into the Evangelical tradition's Word-centred life. This was a culture of certainty where truth leads to belief. I mentioned earlier that a friend had given me three books. The only one I read was Charles Colson's *Born Again*. In my pursuit of certainty, I was attracted by Colson's story of his introduction to C. S. Lewis "an intellect so disciplined, so lucid, so relentlessly logical that I could only be grateful I had never faced him in a court of law. Soon I covered two pages of yellow paper with *pros* to my query, Is there a God?" (Colson 1977, 121). Colson's affection for Lewis led me to read *Mere Christianity* in 1988. Information and proof became the implicit model of Christian formation for me which was reinforced by meetings with Christian businessmen. Re-reading *Mere*

Christianity thirty years later through my new contemplative lens made it a different experience. My abiding question was no longer do I believe in God, but does God believe in me? The evidence was clear as I saw the unseen hand in my journey from Colson through O.A., the study of spiritual formation and the practice of spiritual direction. Yet, for me, there was a tension between the doing birthed from the cognitive system and the sense that my being resided within my emotions which serves to “evaluate the environment with relationship to concerns that govern our sense of the significance of our relationship to that which confronts us” (Howard 2008, 85). The intellect, emotions and will are interconnected systems engaged in deepening intimacy with God.

One path that leads to intimacy with God is “The Contemplative Tradition or the prayer-filled life” (Foster 1998 [a], xvi). This path is evoked in the writing of Henri Nouwen, who shares his struggles with self together with a palpable belief in the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Nouwen validates our shared human frailty as he bemoans how his busyness displaces his solitude. As a Spiritual Director, I have worked with a number of young, self-avowed theologians and apologists whose path to intimacy with God follows “The Evangelical Tradition, or the Word-centered life” (Foster 1998 [a], xvi). Our time together showed me that we exist together in the body. My directees came to appreciate the contemplative aspect of spirituality while maintaining the evangelical tradition as their dominant spiritual path. Each an essential part of the body of Christ and is each called on to respect the unique characteristics of the other as we all journey to the same home.

Home of course is inside each one of us where the holy flame of Christ burns. In Nouwen's characterization of home, the call to follow Jesus is a call "to believe not only in the full communion between Jesus and the One who sent him into the world but to believe in *my* communion with the One who sent *me* into the world" (Nouwen 2009, 94. Italics in the original text). The conflict between our human nature (head) and our divine image (heart) then, is at once both real and artificial. Real, because we tend to live from one dominant perspective and artificial, because we are integrated beings. While all streams of living water flow from and back to the same source, Nouwen takes the integration to a more mystical level. It is a level of intimacy which is both aspirational and intimidating. We enter the heart, the place inside of us "where God dwells and we are invited to dwell with God" (Nouwen 1994 [a], 24-25).

Spiritual formation, then, pre-supposes two questions: Do I want to be who I was before, or do I want to be someone new? And do I want to be who I truly am or hold onto a form of who I have been?

Transformation hinges on the second question. Conformed by the adoption of the scientific method, there are some Christians who value knowledge over experience. They discount others' more affective "experience" of God because it is merely subjective. But isn't any relationship subjective? That is to say, each party to the relationship has their own construct of the nature of the relationship and while one party may have absolute faith that it is good, the other may harbour doubt. It is the same with faith. It is considered to be subjective. The object of faith cannot be proven. Ultimately, as Jesus said to Thomas, "have you believed

because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29).

Attachment theory research would support that on the affective side faith in a relationship is personal but not subjective (Johnson 2008, 22). Trust and safety have a measurable outcome within both a relationship and an individual in that relationship. For example, a research study at the University of Wisconsin (Coan, Schaefer and Davidson 2006) used brain imaging and subjective responses to measure the response to both threat cues where an electric shock was subsequently applied or absent, and to safety cues. Three blocks of tests were used. In one, the participant’s hand was held by their spouse, in another an anonymous stranger held the hand and in the third there was no handholding. The results indicated that less pain and anxiety was present when the participant’s hand was held and lower still when the spouse held their hand

Although both spouse and stranger hand-holding resulted in lower reports of bodily arousal, only spousal hand-holding provided the additional benefit of lowering subjective reports of task-related unpleasantness... individuals in higher-quality relationships benefit from greater regulatory effects on the neural systems supporting the brain’s stress response, including the affective component of pain processing. (Coan, Schaefer and Davidson 2006, 1037).

In other words, a loving relationship enhances one’s ability to endure stress.

Christians who actively turn toward God know this to be true.

Actively turning toward God is a lifelong process of learning, trusting and acceptance. We begin in Janet Hagberg’s “Stage 1” or “the discovery and recognition of God... accepting the fact of the reality of God in our lives” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 33). In my case this was experienced as the adoption

of immutable rules. Divorce for example was either right or wrong, dark, or light. I needed to adopt “the holy conjunction “and” (Foster 1992, 105). I needed to understand some relational truths to go deeper in Christian transformation addressing our humanity, twisted by prior sin. We are both sinner and saint. We are both redeemed and transforming. And we need both Martha and Mary, Father and Mother. They are interdependent. It does not matter with which one you begin; each one leads to the other and the other leads back. However, leaving the binary method behind leads to disorientation. It takes us to “the Wall” where “We decide anew whether we are willing to surrender and let God direct our lives” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 114).

For some, the path through the wall relies on God’s healing love as a means to deeper transformation. The choice becomes whether to be a prisoner of sin or whether to accept its existence, reframe it and continue to seek a deeper relationship with God. “If sin indeed made God unhappy, it was because God desires nothing more than our happiness and wills the healing of our disease” (Rohr 2011, vx). This changes the scale of justice. Now, instead of punishment and repentance as the path to our transformation, unconditional love fueling transformation leads to repentance (Rohr 2011, 42). And if addiction/disease as a metaphor for sin may seem to be too much of a stretch, consider Exod. 20:3-5a in the light of an idol being what we set our mind to in a form of worship. “The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.” (Matt. 6:21; MSG). I would extend the notion of treasure to include time. Where your time is spent, there lies your heart. Perhaps the answer is not so much

rationing what I give to God so I can get on with the day, but rather, like the widow putting in her mite (Mark 12:42), giving all that I am and all that I have in thanks for Him giving me all that He is and all that He has.

The difficulty of reducing the indivisible soul into divisions of heart and head is exposed when we insist that only one way is right. “Jesus gave central attention to the heart out of which flows the issues of life. When the heart is set right, then the actions that are good and true will flow naturally. External action is derivative not primary” (Foster 1998 [a], 91). Emotional and cognitive maturity demands taking “both/and” into daily living rather than an “either/or” approach wherein neither is “right.” That is an essential point for all of us who rush to judgement on one another. Operating as if everything is binary rather than interconnected is bound to catch us up sooner or later. It is imperative to remember that “our study of spiritual formation is the whole person, and the various basic dimensions of the human self are not separable parts. They are aspects thoroughly intermingled with each other in their natures and actions” (Willard 2012, 34).

While we live in the certain knowledge that living in God is a continuing process of self-emptying, it is necessary to recognize that, as Simon Chan writes citing Michael Polanyi, “systematic theology attends from the nonrational to the rational, while spiritual theology attends from the rational to the nonrational” (Chan 1998, 241). The latter is the direction of spiritual transformation.

In developing my model of spiritual formation, I initially categorized the head as “doing” and the heart as “being” plotting them as end points of a

continuum. I then pondered the paradoxical dichotomy of being and doing. While talking through the continuum with a friend, I remembered Sue Mosteller's comment to Henri Nouwen, "you have to realize that you are called to become the father" (Nouwen 1994, 22).

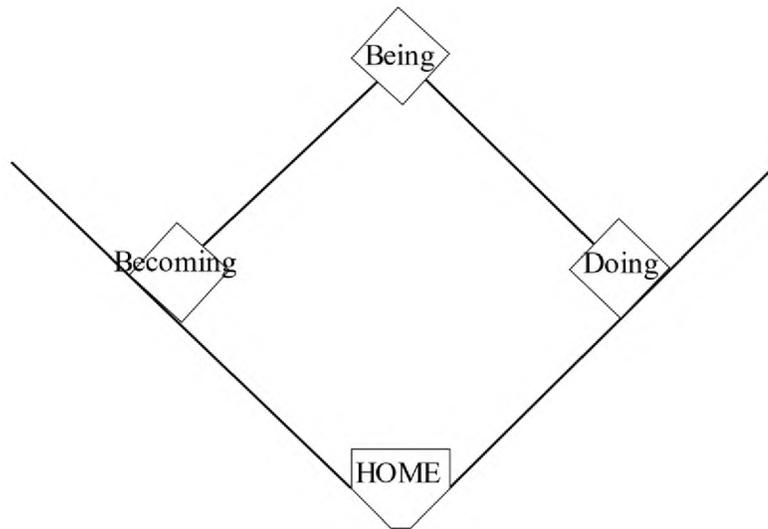


Figure 1: Model of Spiritual Formation: Doing, Being and Becoming

With this recollection, becoming transformed the continuum into a triangle, and there were now three points along a spiritual journey. The journey, of course, involves going home, "It is through constant forgiveness that we become like the Father" (Nouwen 1994, 129). Furthermore, "living out this spiritual fatherhood requires the radical discipline of being at home" (Nouwen 1994, 133). The triangle then became a shape with four equilateral sides with Home being the goal, but a box does not work as there is no implied motion. A box is static. A box is a trap. Turning the box so that it has motion it became a diamond and, for me, diamonds mean baseball where the object is to come home. I use baseball as an

analogy for life, in that we begin at home and then strive to return. In baseball, there is no clock. Theoretically, the game could continue indefinitely. Moreover, the diagonal sides of home plate become the lines of the playing field and when a baseball game is played on a diamond with no fences, the lines stretch out to infinity. The absence of time and borders evokes the experience of eternal life in heaven. In my model of spiritual formation doing, being, and becoming are waypoints on the journey home to God – which is communion with God or the unitive stage (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 181).

Janet Hagberg’s “spirituality of baseball” resonates very strongly with my model of spiritual formation. She writes:

The goal of the whole game is different from most other sport... the object is to hit the ball, but the goal is for the batter to come home, to get back to home plate.

In baseball one of the major ways to help get your teammates back home, around the diamond to home plate, is to sacrifice for them. A sacrifice play means that you don’t get credit for it but it advances the runner. So a key to this game is sacrifice. In my life, the most beloved people who I hold closest to my heart have sacrificed something for me or I for them. There is something about releasing your own need in order to help another, without martyrdom, that is deeply moving and life-giving for me. (Hagberg, 2010)

Jesus began a counter movement against the religious authority of the day. In their eyes he committed an offence. And so, he sacrificed his life for ours. As with any model, it is somewhat artificial to cover a dynamic process in a static diagram especially since our movement around the diamond is not sequential but in fact will retrace itself until Home encompasses the entire universe of the diamond. In this regard, I believe it captures a similar movement to Hagberg’s stages of the

“Productive Life” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 17), which I call Doing, the “Journey Inward” (especially in the movement to the next stage, letting go of self-centredness), which I have labeled Being, the “Journey Outward” surrendering to God in faith, which I have labeled Becoming and reflecting God in the “Life of Love” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 17), which I have called Home. The journey around the bases is informed by the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), a fellowship that grew from Bill Wilson’s conversion in a Christian fellowship known as The Oxford Group. It takes a lifetime to grow, and this growth occurs without attaining complete mastery. This is because, in both fellowships, Christian and A.A., “The longest way round is the shortest way home” (Lewis 1952, 83). To get home, however, we have to confront ourselves.

True Self vs. False Self

The deepest truth of our human identity is this: “You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased” (see Luke 3:22).

- Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Fundraising*

Let us have no ambiguity here. Our True self is the Imago Dei. “The central Gospel message itself [is] that *we share in the same identity as Jesus* (1 John 3:1-2; 2 Peter 1:4)” (Rohr 2011, 89). We are the beloved of God. We are created in the image of God. God is love and we are created in love. Our one true self is our identity in Christ. We begin with “a divine DNA... an absolute core that knows the truth about you... an *imago Dei* that begs to be allowed, to be fulfilled,

and to show itself. As it says in Romans (5:5), God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rohr 2013, 17).

All are welcome in the family and there is no price to pay in order to join. Jesus paid the cover charge for all of humanity. "The scriptures are very emphatic that salvation is a free gift of God, that it cannot be earned or merited by our good behavior" (Bloesch 2006, 181). There is perhaps a tiny cost for infinite love and joy, we must die to our false selves, and they are very clingy. The false self is "a mode of being in the world decentered from life in God, although seeing to retain God on its own terms; that creates its own structures of identity, meaning, value and purpose; and determines for itself the nature of its own being" (Mulholland 2006, 29).

The greatest tragedy of modern life in the cultural context of Canada and the United States is that through our inversion of meaning both in words and in thought, we have come to believe that the true is false and the false is true. "Modern people" writes Tim Keller, "have a 'buffered self,' a self that is bounded and self-contained. Because there is no transcendent, supernatural order outside of me, it is I who determine what I am and who I will be" (Keller 2013, 53). Moreover, the external search for insight, knowledge and self-worth is ultimately fruitless. "Your real, new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for him" (Lewis 1952, 190). In finding our "real, new self" we have to expose the beliefs and practices which obscure our sight.

Human: True or False?

We are at war with ourselves. Does self acceptance come first or is it preceded by acceptance of Grace? “There are two fundamental ways of being human in the world: trusting in our human resources and abilities or a radical trust in God” (Mulholland 2006, 23). On the one hand our true self, that is to say our identity in Christ, beckons and “an identity rooted in Christ has a restful center” (Calhoun 2015, 100). On the other hand, we prefer the world we taste, touch, feel, hear, see, and so construct in our minds the one in which we strive to thrive or survive. Yet there is the promise: “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). But how? “Only when we define ourselves by the truths of the Word rather than the thinking and experiences of the world can we discover our deepest identity” (Boa 2001, 35). It is a lifelong process of dying to self and embracing God as the centre from Whom our words and actions spring.

A. A. teaches surrender as a path to union with God. Ultimately, it is both action and will that must be given up. “The homemade self or the false self, as it is usually called, is programmed for human misery” (Keating 1999, 15). If we are to live as our creator desired, then the false self must be put to death. While we flee the hint of misery in our pursuit of happiness, suffering is part of human life. We accept but do not revel in it, as we fix our gaze beyond it to “the God of hope” who fills us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

The culture around us conditions us to believe we can do whatever we set out mind to. We can make our own way. To believe that sheer force of will leads us to a better way. Yet Paul admonishes

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Eph. 4: 22-24

But how do we put away the former way of life we have come to trust? What is it that binds us fast?

The False Self

When you see someone, all you see is what they let you see.

- Robert Crais, *The Last Detective*

The false self is intricately constructed by rules we have cobbled together consciously and unconsciously from those around us. Essentially it is a personality that is both driven by and motivated by fear and so develops intricate coping mechanisms. And “It takes major surgery and much of one’s life to get head, heart, and body to put down their defenses, their false programs for happiness, and their many forms of resistance to what is right in front of them” (Rohr 2011, 9).

The false self compensates for the prevalence of fear by seeking more and more performance (Mulholland 2006, 31). But because it can never be enough (there will always be someone with better performance or the potential of better performance). We have become a society of addicts in these behaviours. We tend to think of addiction only in terms of chemicals, but really it is about behaviours

and attitudes. “Addiction is one symptom of disordered cravings for *ourselves*.” (Calhoun 2005, 126). In attempting to satisfy this craving for ourselves, our false self mistakes sin for love.

The false self then adds extra protective layers to defend against the slings of others through the adoption of elaborate attitudes, entrenched habits of head and heart, default patterns of behaviour, and stylised structures of relationship (Mulholland 2006, 33-34). The false self takes its identity and value from possessions (Mulholland 2006, 35). It is self-promoting and self-indulgent (Mulholland 2006, 39-41). And the false self is intensely self-destructive with all kinds of addictions to money, sex and power (Gal. 5:19-21) in an unfulfilling attempt to bridge the void of fear. Robert Mulholland introduces the additional category of the religious false self which adds manipulation and division to the other attitudes noted above (Mulholland 2006, 46-67). These are deadly to the body. I have seen both sides in a church split who each believe they are wholly and holy right. There is the same kind of venom, gossip and backbiting that I have seen in non-Christian organizations.

Another manifestation of the false self is “Comparrogance” which “involves comparing, competing and eventually the arrogance of thinking “I am better than you are” or the envious thinking of “I will never be as good as you are” (Davis, 2012). And in this pursuit, we again can never win. Because we do not have a healthy definition of self, we are constantly measuring against a moving goal post. There will always be another who is better than me.

Love and Sin

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.

Q. How does sin have power over us?

A. Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted. (The Episcopal Church 1979, 848-849)

A recovering addict knows well the distortion of relationship wrought by pursuing his or her own will. And the desire to move apart from God explains sin's hold over us. Sin separates us from God, from others, from ourselves and from all of creation. Rohr equates addiction and sin. "Addiction is a modern name... for what the biblical tradition called "sin" and medieval Christians called "passions" or "attachments" (Rohr 2011, xxii). In describing "sin, like addiction as a *disease*, a very destructive disease" (Rohr 2011, xv; italics in the original text), Rohr releases us from the belief of sin as crime and punishment. He also avers that there can be addiction not only to chemicals, but also to behaviours. This does not release us from the idea that sin must be purged or in his metaphor healed. He offers the Twelve Steps as a Gospel-inspired mechanism of healing in showing others how they may become free. Rohr tells us that "in the Hebrew Bible there is really only one sin... *idolatry*: making something a god that is not God" (Rohr 2011, 117).

When we are addicted, that behaviour is the constant preoccupation of our mind. Thus, the difficulty of being in the world but not of it is the crossroads in

both modern living and ancient life. Forgetting that in God “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), the pull of our social culture and work life turns our attention to that which is not God and makes it the object of our desire to the exclusion of all else. But the community we seek through the behaviours and preoccupations of the addicted or sinful mindset have deeper roots than the ones we try to uncover in our adult lives.

The Relational Soul: Attachment Theory

We are all just prisoners here, of our own device.

- Henley, Frey, and Felder, *Hotel California*

We are created to live in community. “We come into the world neurologically wired to make connections, to attach to others” (Plans and Cofield 2014, 25). Nonetheless, the wiring often creates fires because the others we become attached to (in each generation) are in fact distorted in their ability to love. Consequently, we suffer from a deep, elemental absence of trust. “The quality of the connection to loved ones and early emotional deprivation is key to the development of personality and to an individual’s habitual way of connecting with others” (Johnson 2008, 17). Since emotional growth is compromised, we retreat from openness into wariness as we learn to read the cues of others and react from the defences we have built to defend and protect against our past wounding. The key types of attachment patterns adopted in childhood and unconsciously deployed in adulthood originally identified by John Bowlby are:

- Avoidant – “when the primary caregivers are consistently *unavailable*, a child learns to avoid trusting others... it is better to be distant than disappointed.” (Plass and Cofield 2014, 27)
- Ambivalent – “when the primary caregivers are consistently *unreliable*, a child learns to avoid trusting herself (or himself) ... There is an ill-defined sense of self and thus an over dependency on others for a sense of identity.” (Plass and Cofield 2014, 28; italics are in the original text)
- Scattered – “Happens when the primary caregivers are *both unavailable and unreliable*... the child can trust no one, not even him- or herself.” (Plass and Cofield 2014, 29; italics are in the original text)
- Stable – “develops in a child whose caregivers are *both reliably and consistently emotionally present*” (Plass and Cofield 2014, 30; italics are in the original text). When they grow to be adults, they “are comfortable with closeness and confident about depending on loved ones... better at seeking support.” (Johnson 2008, 22)

Distorted by the teaching of the world to produce, to acquire, and to be admired; the non-stable developmental attachments keep us mired in an essentially false self, fashioned from the world around us thereby preventing us from appropriating our true identity. “Emotional edicts as old as time dictate this dance [of negative interactions in relationships]; rational skills don’t change it” (Johnson 2008, 47). The mechanism to turn loose both from the ego’s hold on us and the death grip with which we hold onto our ego is not volitional but spiritual, not dominance but submission.

Nouwen has written that only God can fulfill our deepest longing (Nouwen 1998, xv-xvi). And while “Love... is a basic primary need, like oxygen or water” (Johnson 2008, 27), no person can give us the safety and stability we need. And so, we need self-awareness to fully embrace our God awareness and our relationship with others. Indeed, all relationship struggles are attempting to achieve something that can never be truly found because “underneath all other

desire is a desire for God, for love, for the true belonging.” (Barton 2010, 52). And still we substitute idols made of clay for God. We bargain unsuccessfully with others for a safe harbour of love because it is not the realm of reason but rather “an emotional response” (Johnson 2008, 46). And we will do anything, say anything to hang onto a warped love relationship because, the potential loss of intimate connection “is coded by the human into a primal panic response” (Johnson 2008, 46). Ultimately, our growth is impeded by our attachments to temporal life (Foster and Beebe 2009, 152). These attachments which spring from “the our early attachment experiences impact our attachment to God, how important it is for us to forge a secure attachment with God if we don't already have one (and many of us don't!)” (Malcolm, 2022). Strengthening our attachment to God is the mission of this model of spiritual formation.

1st Base : Doing - Mind Your Programs

Without the oxygen of doing and the mirror of approval, our feelings of being real and important evaporate.

-Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

In a very real way first base in my model is based on the strength of doing. God descends to humanity as the incarnate Jesus who heals the infirm. The things we are doing in service to others however, often become infected by a culture focused purely on outcomes rather than process. Even Christians focus on production. Most of our lives are spent in doing. We go to work, drive the kids to soccer and ballet and perhaps volunteer for community projects through our church. We are driven by propositional truth to complete programs designed to

spread the gospel through our actions and our words. While they are not inherently bad, these activities lead us to bump into burnout as we forge ahead in our own strength believing our wishes are God's will. Somehow, we have lost sight of forever in our activities here and now. Doing is the province of our will and our mind. If we live predominately from our rational mind, however, we miss part of our total being.

Production is not the same as growing. The important thing to remember is that Jesus did not adopt everything about the culture He was born into. Instead, He taught "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). When we observe how God nurtured us and how we nurture and mentor young people we realize that "some of us might be productive and others not, but we are called to bear fruit: fruitfulness is a true quality of love." (Nouwen 1986, 51).

Just as humility is a fundamental principle of Christlikeness, the wisdom of A.A. which begins with acknowledging that we are essentially powerless in a world that values power. The desire to change cannot be fulfilled on willpower alone, nor solely through the cognitive system, but rather allowing God to change us. "You cannot make this journey in your head, alone... You must be led" (Rohr 2003, 16). In the end, it is a matter of where we store our mental treasure, that is to say what and who are we thinking about most of the time. In life "it is what is contemplated that leads to everything else" (Sheldrake 2013, 91).

Transformers

The purpose of transformation is to restore our original relationship with God. “The whole purpose for which we exist is to be thus taken into the life of God” (Lewis 1952, 141). Yet, in some instances, we have appropriated a cultural self-image by creating corporations which form the local church into the Corporate CEO model. I am aware of congregations where the will and purpose of the dominant voices, whether strong members or the Pastor set the agenda based on who is right or wrong instead of seeking God’s will in silence and humility (Standish 2005, 8). We, the laity, have forgotten both our role and the pastoral minister’s role. We have at once rebelled against the authority of the Priest-in-charge and expected him or her to be a 24/7/365 multi-variate service provider. We expect them to be just as production oriented as we are, and, in our pell-mell rush to accomplish more and more in our daily lives, we have forgotten that the clergy are “those particular people within the whole Church who have been specially trained and set aside to look after what concerns us as creatures who are going to live for ever;” (Lewis 1952, 79).

Thus, we have lost sight of forever in favour of the immediate. The call to enter the Kingdom is crushed by the thorns of living within the limited liability corporation. Just as early Christianity was spread by trade merchants, it is the responsibility of the laity to live out our lives in service to the One who loves all others, living by his precepts resisting our own predilections. That is not to say that we live as closed communities but rather that we live in response to the One who first loved us. We are transformed by submitting to God rather than leaning

primarily on our own understanding. There is a gnawing sense that the efforts of the mind and the strength of our accomplishments are not enough. Our need then, is to stop and abide.

2nd Base: Being - Emotion and Solitude

We may be daunted by our own insignificance, but everything depends, not on the physical scale of the seed, [mustard seed Mark 4: 30-32] but on the life-giving power at work in it. We must not underestimate what God is able to do through us.

-David Foster, *Reading with God: Lectio Divina*

At second base of the model, we begin to understand that action is informed by listening prayer. While doing and being are not mutually exclusive, the model of Jesus is that going to prayer precedes action when He chooses apostles (Luke 6: 12-16), experiences transfiguration (Luke 9: 28-31), and submits to His Father's will (Matt. 26: 36-46). Ken Boa writes that "spiritual identity through outward action versus inward reflection" is not mutually exclusive. Rather, both are "crucial, since concrete doing should flow out of abstract being" (Boa 2001, 506). Jesus teaches a new way of doing and being. It is the call to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12: 2). Yet, while complaining how busy we are, we find "when we have been stripped of external distraction, we face the fact that the deepest level of chaos is inside us, at our very core" (Barton 2010, 98). We resist systemic change because the pain of the old ways of living in the world is less than the fear of living something new. One of the biggest roadblocks to change is that "we are still taking our natural self

as the starting point” (Lewis 1952, 167). We are called to “ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship, while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs” (Kelly 1992, 5).

Henri Nouwen illustrates this inward posture as he recounts the story of Abba Moses carrying a jug which leaks water to a council to judge a brother and says, “my sins run out behind me and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the sin of another” (Nouwen 1981, 22). Nouwen concludes that

solitude molds self-righteous people into gentle, caring, forgiving persons who are so deeply convinced of their own great sinfulness and so fully aware of God’s even greater mercy that their life itself becomes ministry. In such a ministry there is hardly any difference left between doing and being. (Nouwen 1981, 22)

The way to Being is to be still. The way to loosen the myriad distractions from their hold on us in times of silence is to be still. The way to be still is always to return to the God who loves us, focusing on the fruit of His Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23). In stilling our busy, doing self we descend to the place within us that God awaits. “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (Ps. 62: 5).

Being takes us within where we abide in the community of God in preparation for participation in the community of humanity. How then can we see who we are called to become? “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (De Saint-Exupéry 1962, 84). Moving to the deepest part of ourselves, the part where God abides, our manner of being and doing is transformed. We begin to manifest God.

3rd Base: Becoming - Manifesting God Rather than the False Self

You have to realize that you are called to become the father... who can welcome his children home without asking them any questions and without wanting anything from them in return.

-Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of The Prodigal Son*

As we arrive at third base, Being and Doing are knit together in Becoming, or what the Roman Catholics know as Union. “In Ignatian spirituality, union with God occurs in the decision to act in a certain way and in the action itself” (Barry 2001, 124). Becoming is a change in our state of being. “One becomes less conscious of self and more conscious of his or her connections with others and creation... Paul describes it as union with Christ, as evidenced by “living according to the Spirit” (Baker 2003, 151). And, by the Holy Spirit, we may “become sharers (partakers) of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1: 4: AMP).

A Journey into Paradox

Becoming is a state of movement. We are not who we were before nor are we who we will be. And becoming is a journey into paradox since we are accustomed to believing that outcomes rely on our own strength of will, ability and purpose when in reality “it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16). As we move from confession to forgiveness and more importantly acceptance of forgiveness, we learn that “the mystery of the grace of God humbles us more than our sinfulness, because grace teaches us to be

preoccupied with God, and not ourselves” (Boa 2001, 454). The lesson continues each day because each day is a life of its own.

The stubborn paradox is that we both want freedom and fear it. We want it on our terms. We cannot appropriate that the product of surrendering “to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3: 20) is actually freedom. Our false self is too desperate to let go and too blind to see that “To be born of the Spirit is to step into a freedom that we never imagined before. It is to trust that the Spirit knows us better than we know ourselves, and that we can therefore relinquish our smaller identities to become someone who is beyond our own understanding” (Nouwen 2013, xxi-xxii). Rohr encourages us to “struggle with the paradox itself, hold the creative tension until you see that two seeming contraries might not be contrary at all” (Rohr 2011, 56). Similarly, the prison of the false self opens as we appropriate our true selves. The loss of our false definition of paradise is in fact the gain of paradox.

Mind, Heart, Strength, and Soul

Long before our minds were able to exercise their potential, our hearts were developing trusting human relationships.

-Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Finding my way Home*

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The combination of humanity and divinity is lived out in our daily life. Rohr makes a profound statement about the human life of Jesus which sets the course for our life as embodied beings; “We are the religion of “incarnation” (enfleshment or

embodiment) not spiritualization. Once the Eternal Blueprint (“Logos”) became flesh, it is in the material world that we find God” (Rohr 2011, 71-72). While Lewis clearly acknowledges the incarnation of Christ, he focuses on the will. “Christian love, either towards God or towards man, is an affair of the will” (Lewis 1952, 117). Lewis is not dismissive of feelings, “psychoanalysis is not in the least contradictory to Christianity” (Lewis 1952, 84), yet feelings are not to be trusted; “emotions will...blitz...belief” (Lewis 1952, 123). Thus, he is careful to separate feelings from actions. However, the taming of the affect is not accomplished by the training of the mind but by surrendering to Love.

Ours is an ongoing conflict of sufficiency. The insufficiency of A.A.’s Twelve steps lies in the fact that it is based on the sufficiency of God, but we keep taking back our will which is rooted in the insufficiency of humankind. And our willpower alone is insufficient. Without radical trust in God, we continue to slip back into our own efforts. We surrender all but hold a little something back, just in case. Rather than living in trust, we cling to the perceived control that comes from our thoughts and intuitions. And Christian or not, trust is the essential element in interpersonal relations as well as corporate and community structures.

The divisions are removed when we cross through the threshold of becoming. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your [mind] and heart and with all your entire being [soul] and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5; AMP). And having gone all in on God, “You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself. These two commandments sum up *and* upon them depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:39-40; AMP-italics in the original text). We are

called to become like the father who models unconditional love for the prodigal son; called to accept that kind of love for ourselves and return that love with our entire being. And we are called to express that love in others as we go about the doing of daily life.

Step 10, 11 and 12: A Model of Spiritual Formation

I have adopted the final three steps of A.A. (known as “the maintenance steps”) into my model in order to illustrate Doing, Being and Becoming, not as a testament about the value and efficacy of A.A. but as steps that naturally advance spiritual formation. Just like the maintenance steps, doing, being, and becoming is

an ongoing process of reprogramming or *renewing of the mind*. (Romans 12) that involves many cycles of surrender and trust and of emptying and filling as the Holy Spirit replaces the lies we have believed with the truth of our identity in Christ (John 8:32). (Boa 2001, 510; italics appear in the original)

Indeed, the key contribution of these steps is to take a person further away from their false self and deeper into intimacy with God. And it is a communal rather than a solitary experience. Both the regular congregation “upstairs” and the sad addicts “downstairs” share a common pursuit, deepening our faith together and hence individually.

“The defining moment of the Christian Church was the day of Pentecost” (Standish 2005, 28). This was the day that the called people of God were fully empowered in their mission. Everything we do is in Him, everything we do is through Him and everything we do is by Him. And we live into this state of being each day as we modify the final steps of A. A. into the model of Confess (Step

10) Abide (Step 11) and Give (Step 12). “The soul wants to give us life and wants us to pass that gift along, to become life-givers in a world that deals too much death” (Palmer 2004, 34).

The model modifies A. A.’s Step Ten to become daily examining myself, promptly admitting my wrongs and making restitution. The Big Book speaks of the imperious urge of our addiction. And the step of Confess reminds us that “temptation isn’t just about bad ideas or wrong decisions...overcoming them requires more than just knowledge; it requires habituation, a re-formation of our loves” (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 54). Which, in turn, is nothing less than a re-formation of our lives. Step Eleven remains unaltered; “sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59), fulfilling the promise “draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). The model modifies Step Twelve of A. A. to: having had a spiritual experience as a result of drawing near to God, we live into the truth of eternal life and so live for and with others in the Truth of the Gospel. We live out the greatest commandment and the second that is like it (Matthew 22: 37-39).

Twelve Step meetings are lay led without accredited teachers, anyone who is immersed in the teachings and traditions of the program can teach. Five years ago, my enthusiasm to continue in the DMin program was rekindled while reading about the advent of lay movements, “in early Christianity lay spirituality pre-dominated. Jesus and his first disciple were laypersons” (Waaijman, 2002,

21). The impact of laypersons continued throughout the Middle Ages, after the reformation and into the twentieth century. I thought, ‘I can do that (contribute), I am one.’ Up until then I had wrestled with whether I belonged in the DMin program. So, partly out of reaction to not being ordained and partly out of a new energy as a lay person in this program, I began to introduce myself as a priest in the priesthood of all believers and a member of the holy catholic church. What began as a label to make me feel better about myself became a means of living into my identity in Christ as the next few years unveiled my model of spiritual formation and revealed my ministry as a spiritual director.

The kind of all or nothing thinking which undergirded my previous sense of not belonging in the DMin program is prevalent among addicts. We tend to think that we are either successes at giving something up or failures because we cannot. In discussing the holiness tradition, Richard Foster (1998, 95-96), says there are three steps: first we train (meetings, reading), second, we invite others to travel the journey (sponsor) with us. And third when we, inevitably “stumble and fall, we get up and start again” (Foster 1998, 95). The difference between our addictive (or false self) behaviour and recovery (or ongoing spiritual formation into our true selves) is that while “appropriate confession and restitution are always in order, we never spend too much time lamenting our failures and shortcomings” (Foster 1998, 95-96). The holiness tradition is not unlike the spiritual practitioner of the Twelve steps. Foster recognizes that “stumbling is part of growing... we are learning that by starting again and again and again something

firm and lasting is being built in us...fortitude builds habits, and habits build character, and character builds destiny” (Richard Foster 1998, 96).

Whether we are addicts or just plain folks who watch a lot of sports, the culture around us is drawing us away from God towards a multiplicity of golden calves. We are continuously “being covertly trained to hunger and thirst for idols that can never satisfy” (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 59). Baseball is a team sport. It is a game where a single superstar cannot win a game all by themselves. The players are each dependent on the others. Individual glory must be subsumed to the team. In the same way, we are formed in community.

Community: Missing in Action

Community is the place where God completes our lives with his joy

- Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Lifesigns*

We have a natural tendency to seek out a tribe where we find beliefs supporting our own. Part of the genius of A.A. lives in the recognition that we cannot recover alone and so maintains fealty to the call to persevere in Hebrews 10. Many of us in the pews have forgotten our original desperate need and desire to be changed by love. We are like the addict who stops at abstinence when spiritual transformation is needed.

How often do we find persons and churches who define the Christian life by abstinence from certain practices and behaviours? *Detachment* from these practices and behaviours becomes the primary focus of their life rather than an ever deepening *attachment* to God in love. (Mulholland 2006, 65; italics appear in the original text)

Worn down by the cares of the world or worse, believing we may in fact have arrived, we have forgotten that we need to drink from a flowing stream. In settling for our affection towards God we miss our complete acceptance by His love. The purpose of community is to “intentionally recalibrate the unconscious, to worship *well*, to immerse ourselves in liturgies that are indexed to the kingdom of God” (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 24).

Lewis declares God is Love and paints the community of Christians as “United together in a body...showing Him to one another” (Lewis 1952, 144). In *Mere Christianity* as in life, we either ignore or pay minimal attention to one another’s complexity. This tendency exposes the failure both in the local church, and the home. “All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual...backbiting; the pleasures of power and hatred” (Lewis 1952, 94-95).

Rohr is rightfully critical about the misconceptions and shallow faith that happens in the community of the church with its works-based and often formulaic approach to spiritual growth, whereas in A.A. everyone arrives distressed and stays because they know they cannot survive alone. However, Rohr also hints at something deeper as a catalyst to the continuing transformation we unknowingly seek; we need others. “*Only people who have suffered in some way can save one another*” (Rohr 2011, 123; italics appear in the original text). The model is that God suffered to save us, and suffering people can love and trust a suffering God therein appropriating His healing while offering it to others. “What is critically important for our growth is our willingness to admit how we have come to manage our lives where we need help” (Reese and Loane 2012, 120). Small

groups are inordinately important for the individual in both their transformation and the reinforcement of that new state. In *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg quotes a senior scientist at the Alcohol Research Group on A. A., “there’s something really powerful about groups and shared experiences. People might be skeptical about their ability to change if they’re by themselves, but a group will convince them to suspend disbelief. A community creates belief” (Duhigg 2012, 85). Small groups practicing *Lectio Divina*, contemplation, and group spiritual direction all propel us to quietude and in turn, to communion with God, a deeper sense of abiding in Him.

A Ministry of small groups

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.

Gal. 6:1

Being in a group, sharing in a group and growing in a group are all expressions of giving and receiving hospitality. People who are attracted to A.A. are distressed, despairing and anxious. They want to give up the all-consuming habit of addiction and are willing to explore a new avenue to that end. A.A. is really a ministry of small groups combined mentoring, or sponsorship, by someone with more experience in the program. Both new and long-time members have a common bond – the desire to abstain from alcohol. They attend meetings where people share their experience, struggles, strength, and hope. And they repeat phrases prayers and sections of the Big Book. For those engaged in

recovery it is not rote repetition. Each member experiences the meetings and the book from the perspective of their position on the journey to recovery. There are those who, like Christians in the pew, repeat the phrases from numbed habit, they are not formed and re-formed by God. They have lost the initial excitement from experiencing the fact that there is hope. This is the distinction between doing and being. They attend but still rely on their own efforts to change. As we immerse ourselves and realized we are to submit our entire will and lives to God, we come to realize that repetition “is how God rehabilitates us... there is no formation without repetition” (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 80).

The practices of A.A. consist of turning hearts toward God. Those who “work the program,” know that turning toward God is causal for recovery rather than a casual activity. The effect is a radical reorientation of how life is lived. Similarly, “the practices of the church are also a spiritual workout... that requires submitting ourselves to disciplines and regimens that reach down into our deepest habits” (Smith, J. K. A. 2016, 65). But we cannot do it alone. We need one another. “You need spiritual guidance; you need people who can keep you anchored in your true identity. The temptation to disconnect from that deep place in you where God dwells and to let yourself be drowned in the praise or blame of the world always remains” (Nouwen 1998, 70). The larger church community reminds us whose we are and points always deeper into intimacy with God while the smaller group reinforces our true identity.

As we will see in Chapter Four, some small Group Operating Principles helpful in this regard are:

Respect for one another. Listening to others without internal dialogue.

Maintaining confidentiality outside the group concerning what others have said.

No crosstalk: let someone's story speak for itself rather than commenting on it.

Do not fix another. Refrain from the natural tendency to offer solutions to others' issues.

The operating principles feed trust and provide the conditions to be honest, to reveal the ongoing repentance of our "doing." Step Ten, daily examining myself and promptly admitting my wrongs, also illustrates the importance of Examen.

Where have we noticed the presence of God today? Where have we been unaware of His presence? As we list the wrongs we have committed as well as the wrongs others have committed against us (and our responses) the question becomes, "where are you?" (Gen. 3: 9b).

Transformation and ongoing healing occur through "being" with God in the intimacy of Step Eleven: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59). Listening in silence and solitude we answer Jesus' question: What do you want me to do for you? (Luke 31-43). A spiritual director or soul friend can aid in discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Manifesting God, we submit our thoughts and actions to God out of reverence for him, living as we are called in Step Twelve; having had a spiritual experience as a result of drawing near to God, we live into the truth of eternal life and so live for and with others in the Truth of the Gospel. "Were not our hearts

burning?” (Luke 24: 13-32). Recognizing that all of creation belongs to God we practice, *Lectio Divina*, *Visio Divine* and *Natura Divina* secure in the belief that God is in all things. And we pray that the light of God’s love might shine from us and through us into the world around us.

Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually find him. He doesn’t play hide-and-seek with us. He’s not remote; he’s near. We live and move in him, can’t get away from him! (Acts 17: 27-28; MSG)

Alcoholics continue to go to meetings because they long for the light of wholeness in the darkness of their suffering. And Christians share a similar longing for both wholeness and a home of belonging. “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42: 1-2). For both the alcoholic and the Christian, “craving is an essential part of the formula for creating new habits” (Duhigg 2012, 55). As to the efficacy of A.A., I believe what I have seen, heard, and read about Twelve Step people whose lives of dissolution were completely altered and renewed. These were people who gave thanks to God for this reversal in their life’s direction and relationships. They gave thanks to the God of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Peter, John, and Paul. Those who have changed have had their passions altered and become filled with love for others. They have moved from desperation to abundant love, the love of their new family, the love of brothers and sisters, and the love of God in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17: 28).

And there is ongoing course correction recognizing that their dealings with others are tinged by their sinful desires and habits. They work at rooting out their misdeeds, they abide in God, and they offer themselves in service to others so that those too might know the freedom and love that God offers through “this simple program.” In short, we must also leave room for the mystery of faith. “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Our transformation into Christlikeness is a life-long process leaving behind an unfinished life on this earth. As Lewis notes “death is an important part of the treatment” (Lewis 1952, 175) of becoming our true self in holiness.

Homecoming: Communion/Community

God has promised that you will receive the love you have been searching for... So stop wandering around. Instead, come home and trust that God will bring you what you need... Home is where you are truly safe.

- Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*

The temptation as we round the base paths is to leave the narrow path straying into the attractive green fields that take surround us. As we draw nearer home, however, the plate gradually expands. It grows to fill the lines stretching the plate to eternity. All ground is Holy Ground. Rather than the apex of the diamond, the descending God is at the base of the plate from where the lines to eternity begin. God encompasses all. The book of James becomes operational as we return home.

Our being and our doing becoming united in Jesus who said,

Listen Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.' And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment that ranks with these. (Mark 12: 29-31 MSG)

In each day, in each moment we can choose to live in union with God and, being in union, we live like Christ. That is not to say it is a realizable ideal but rather a mobile transformation from the self-constructed person shaped in part by the fear of the world around us to the God-constructed person who lives in the eternity of divine love. Each day gives us an opportunity to see where God is present in our lives. The transformation is fuelled in silence and solitude. It calls for the commitment of time. It calls for living in the moment to come within the moment that is. In other words, living in the kingdom of eternal life as we traverse temporal matters. Jesus, the descending God, gave us the gift of freedom and yet some in our culture cling to the belief that we are not happy unless we are ascending, striving, conquering. The movement of Confess, Abide and Give leads us right where we are meant to be. It leads us home. In offering peace, healing, and love to one another each day, we are building a community for the kingdom of God.

Prayer Reshapes Becoming

Prayed visions show the holiness of everyday tasks. Intercessions restore disordered work and set it on its way again. Invocations interfere with the breakdown of cultures and systems and make *ora et labora* the motto that shapes our history.

- Eugene H. Peterson, *Earth & Altar*

Work and pray is also the motto that shapes our future. Having come home, the task is to remain there, not through our might but through yielding to God. We will continue to live out our orientation as defined by our current doing. Moreover, as imperfect beings, we will continue to experience the disorientation of being as the combination of humanity and divinity is lived out in the “both/and” of our daily life. “Once the Eternal Blueprint (“Logos”) became flesh, it is in the material world that we find God” (Rohr 2011, 72). And, finding God, we will continue to even deeper levels of reorientation as our becoming enables us to manifest Christ daily as we live and move.

Jesus in the flesh promised both to return and to remain encouraging us to remember, “I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion), to the [very] close and consummation of the age (Matthew 28:20 AMP). Both life in the here and now and the eternal soul are human and divine. The decision is to release our grip on our own strength and trust original love.

The work of God is to love Him. And, as we work and pray, we are called more fully into our true self and our relationship in the communion of love. In this communion, our action begets reflection and our reflection births response. As you will see in the next chapter, the shape of this model began to change over time both from further reflection and from applying part of it in a live research study. This is in part due to a change in focus from homecoming as an end state to the more incarnate state of a progressive journey. As we move forward, stumble, fall and resume we are increasingly living from our true selves and so the

transformation birthed by the maintenance steps becomes lived out as that which comes from within rather than which enters from without.

To distill all antecedent and component parts of this model into practice requires either a very long course of study and practice or focus on a key part. The actions of confessing and giving flow out of the practice of abiding. In abiding in God, our actions spring from the true identity. So, in applying the model to an actual research project it was necessary to focus on a singular practice drawn from a base of abiding in God.

As mentioned at the end of the preceding chapter, the model described in this chapter is an iteration that precedes the research project in Chapter Four. The reader will notice subtle changes in Chapter Four which were the direct result of presenting the material you read in Chapter Three four times over the three years following its first writing. Moreover, evolution of the model has benefited from further reflection over the past year on both the research project and the model in the preparation of this study as well as additional background reading which also happened in that year. While some of the language has been included, the model changed in shape and in name as you will see in Figure 2 which appears in the next chapter versus Figure 1 in the chapter now concluding (see [List of Tables and Figures](#)). Each time that I presented the model, I wished that I had the animation skills to show home plate expanding until all of the playing field and the movements of doing, being and becoming were engulfed within. Thus, you will see a graphic representation which captures more of the non-linearity of relationship as well as the interaction of the components of each of the three bases

with home in the [Response or Innovation](#) section of Chapter Four. Henri Nouwen describes our relationship with God as the “primal encounter” with the “heart of Love Divine” (Nouwen 2009, 93).

“To be *in* that relationship is to be home in the deepest possible sense of the word” (Nouwen 2009, 94).

CHAPTER 4: FIELD RESEARCH STUDY: AN EXPLORATION OF LAY MEMBERS' GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION USING A COMPLEMENTARY FOCUS OF ASPECTS OF THE A. A. 12 STEPS TOGETHER WITH THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF *LECTIO DIVINA*

The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.

- Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

The purpose of this project was to introduce a small group of lay people to *Lectio Divina*, a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the Biblical text in prayer, contemplation, and meditation (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 18), in the expectation this was a new spiritual practice. The hope was that it would change how they experience the vicissitudes of everyday life and experience a deeper sense of the presence of God in their lives. I observed no evidence either before or after the project that *Lectio Divina* was practiced by the larger body of the church.

Opportunity or Problem

My observation of discipleship in various evangelical congregations is that the lack of a reflective process concerning the nature of growth in one's relationship with God populates churches, "with religious doers, as opposed to disciples whose lives are transformed in and through the experience of God's love" (Davis 2017, 144). In my experience, the dominant conversation during

group prayer often centres on fixing a problem. It seems as if we are unable to locate the everyday issues of life into our part in the story of God's eternal love for us. Our woes overwhelm belief and assurance. This is not specific to the pandemic, as I have observed group prayer for over twenty years. What I have seen is that study is the primary spiritual discipline that is emphasized. Reflection is focused on information rather than formation. As a result, it is less apparent that "within the hearts of people there are other meaningful, more exciting, and promising yearnings for and knowledge of faith practice that represent the captive potentials of God's new story for them" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 79).

Response or Innovation

The primary vehicle to approach these "captive potentials" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 79) was to create a somewhat unstructured environment where participants could abide in Jesus in the practice of *Lectio Divina*. The overarching premise is that "God continually acts in the universe to draw all of us into community with the Trinity and with one another" (Barry 2001, 127-128). The intended purpose of my project was to observe a shift in a participant's experience of God in everyday life in response to systematic exposure to *Lectio Divina*. I did not expect participants to withdraw from active life in their faith community. Nor did I wish to change participants' sense of value of their existing community, worship practices, and small group involvement. While remaining alert to my own beliefs and preconceptions, the intent of the research process was to open my "eyes and ears to understand the ways in which people practice their faith"

(Moschella 2008, 4). I hoped that participants would experience an approach to their practice of knowing God that was complementary to their previous spiritual practices. Hence, the research questions were: Will participants experience a deeper sense of the presence of God following a focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*? And, if so, will they experience a change in their approach to daily life?

Definition of Key Terms

Table 1: Definition of Key Terms

A deeper level of intimacy:	The participant may experience a vision, a shift in perspective, a perception <i>within</i> of deeper understanding, a new sense of peace, or a movement along the Reveal study’s “Spiritual Continuum,” it could be from (or further within) growing in Christ through “close to Christ” or even “Christ-centered” (Hawkins et al. 2007, 37). The participant reports a change in their side of the relationship whether an affective response, or a different volitional or cognitive experience of God’s close Presence. Specifically, I watched for a transformation, “a marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2021).
Deeper sense of the presence of God:	Becoming aware that God is in all things, seeing both His creatures and His creation as imbued with His spirit. In this way we live more deeply into the fruit of the Holy Spirit with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22). And we continue turning from our false self more deeply into the new creation God has ordained us to be.
Lay people:	A non-ordained congregant member of the church.
<i>Lectio Divina</i> :	A Latin term that literally translates to divine reading. <i>Lectio Divina</i> is a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the text (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 18). The slow dwelling is a way of “responding to God’s Word with your heart and spirit, not just your rational, cognitive and intellectual prowess” (Calhoun 2015, 187).
Spiritual Maturation:	Represents the ongoing journey towards holiness. It is a lifelong process composed of awareness of the presence of God, intimate relationship with God, and living in the love of God and love of others. The process is put into action by the practical expression of awareness, intimacy, and love in the everyday interactions of life.

Supervision, Permission and Access

In May 2020, the Lead Pastor asked my wife and I to lead a Home Church in the summer. At that time, I asked for his support with the implementation of this project, and he expressed enthusiasm in approving it. I had informal accountability to him. The Executive Pastor confirmed the local Pastor's authority to approve the project and expressed an interest in seeing the final paper and attending the public presentation.

Context

Spiritual formation can be fostered in small groups when “interconnecting relationships transform” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 41). My own formation has been experienced in, and accelerated by, small groups including Twelve Step groups that were descendants of A.A., C. R., a Christian Twelve Step group, and church life small groups. I think of my own spiritual development as an expression of the four seeds in the parable of the Sower Luke 8: 5-8). The seeds on the path in Sunday school were snatched up by the birds of High School and University. The seeds on the rock were my effort to change on my own understanding and in my own strength without turning anything over to God. As my paid career was in business, the seeds among the thorns grew from forty years of being formed by the culture of money, power, and admiration that I was immersed in. The seeds in good soil began growing at age forty becoming more deeply rooted after a cancer diagnosis at age fifty-seven. To a large extent, the years since have been defined by living with cancer and sometimes dramatic

treatment. The gift has been learning God is not all I have until God is all I have. At present, I am a Spiritual Director in London, Ontario. For the past three years I have been a guest instructor presenting “Working with Addiction and Recovery in Spiritual Direction” for the Emmaus Formation Centre (which trains lay people to become spiritual directors (<https://emmausformation.ca/>)).

My ministry experience has been as a lay leader of small groups. In the past I have served as Chair of the Board of Elders responsible for the spiritual health of Spring Garden Baptist Church in Toronto, and held various service positions in both secular and Christ-centred Twelve Step programs based on A. A. This background is relevant to this project because I have led small groups of lay people. In terms of spiritual context, many of the project participants were in the first three stages of their faith journey: “1) Recognition of God, 2) Life of Discipleship, 3) Productive Life” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 17). The hope was to see them move toward “Stage 4, the Journey Inward” (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 17) and awaken them to the possibilities of manifesting God beyond their current stage.

In conversation with the Oakville-based Executive Pastor of TMH, I learned that it is part of a denomination called Be in Christ Church of Canada. There are twenty satellite congregations around Ontario each with its own Pastor and volunteers leading small groups, worship, and prayer. TMH adopted the term parish in the fall of 2020 as the name for the local congregation. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the parishes saw a service broadcast on a one-week delay from the main site in Oakville. Now, services are live streamed each

Sunday. Several times a year each parish will conduct its own teaching led by the local Pastor. The Executive Pastor said members typically come from some form of Anabaptist tradition however less than five percent would be from the Be in Christ denomination. Ten to fifteen percent only church attended in childhood and fewer than five percent have no church background. In London, I met participants who are refugees from legalistic evangelical denominations, and others who were burned out from excessive outreach demands from their previous churches.

In the past, there has been some exposure to spiritual practices at TMH in the Oakville location. For example, I participated in a Retreat in Daily Life there in February of 2013. I was assigned to a Spiritual Director from Tyndale Seminary who I have met with regularly ever since. TMH also distributed a self-assessment tool called “Growth Gauges” in 2019 which even in its relational aspects has a cognitive centre. However, there was no formal follow-up. More recently, TMH has had Sunday teaching on some of the spiritual disciplines but again did not offer structured follow-up.

The heartbeat of each TMH parish is its Home Churches where ten to thirty people gather to discuss the weekly teaching. Teaching is reinforced both in understanding and application in small groups. While the Home Church needs to be doctrinally sound, it is eminently more able to deal with the practical response to everyday life than the large Sunday gathering. My personal experience is that the bulk of these meetings are oriented toward Bible knowledge as opposed to immersion in an unstructured relationship with God. Thus, my bias coming into the study was that TMH was a word-centred life in the mode of other evangelical

churches. This exposes my bias against the Bible being used as a rulebook to correct wrong behaviour because “when the life of the mind alienates more than it connects, the heart goes out of things” (Palmer 1993, x). *Lectio Divina* invites the participant to enter the life of the love of God where presence supplants rules.

I contend that if we can recover intimate relationship with God, not just with our cognitive selves, but our emotions and choices, inspired by love for God transmitted outwards as genuine love for others, we can come closer to who we were, and are, called to be. In so doing, we are “constantly being transfigured into His *very own* image in ever increasing splendor *and* from one degree of glory to another, [for this comes] from the Lord, [Who is] the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 AMP; italics in the original).

Models & Other Course Material

In my view, the Sunday morning lecture hall is no longer the method that speaks into the broad culture around us. We need a reformation. It is my observation that young people and unchurched people crave authentic relationships. This points to the importance of small group meetings where relationship begets transformation. My model of spiritual formation has grown from lived experience in Twelve Step programs and the study of spiritual formation. There are cultural forces aiming in the opposite direction reinforcing a false self intent on either protection from or domination of other people. Transformation into our true identity in Christ and ongoing healing occur through being with God in the intimacy of relationship. Living faith is not simply a list of

principles and programs but rather a change of heart, a way of being and doing that is rooted in Christ who lives in us. And in our doing and being we are continually becoming our true selves in Christ. It is not a singular event but rather a process of progressive sanctification. “Our very zeal and success [in church expansion] may deflect us from an adequate emphasis upon the understanding and practice of growth in Christlikeness *after* conversion” (Willard 1988, 15; italics in the original).

Background of My Model of Spiritual Formation

Coming to faith and deepening in faith are sustained by grace. “Grace is the first and last word of the Christian life, and all of us are desperately in need of mercy and are deeply loved” (Warren 2021, 8). Similarly, arriving in A. A. and receiving recovery are initiated by grace and sustained by aesthetic practice. The final three steps of A. A. are often referred to as the maintenance steps and they resonate for someone reading them using a Christian lens. I have christened Step 10: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it”, as Confess, Step 11: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out” as Abide. And Step 12: “Having had a spiritual awakening a result of these steps, we tried to

carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs”
 (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59-60) as Give.



Figure 2: Model of Spiritual Formation: Confess, Abide, Give

The steps correspond with the spiritual movements of doing, being and becoming and all lead home to communion with God. The model is designed to encourage an encounter with the heart of God to transform our being and doing. The catalyst is abiding in Jesus (John 15:4). Jesus tells us “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (John 14: 16-17). He has given us the compass; we need only slow ourselves and listen. Owing to the short duration of this project, I wanted to reduce the number of variables experienced in the group setting, Therefore, I focused on the process of

divine or *Lectio Divina* reading as an agent to experience the revelation of the Holy Spirit, encounter the presence of Jesus, and abide in the love of God. In abiding, we receive guidance of both what to confess and how to give to others.

This model of spiritual formation rests within the doctrine of the Trinity. “The theology of spiritual transformation emerges from the Trinitarian nature of God-relational, loving, gracious, mutually submissive, and unified in will” (Demarest 2010, 225). In the Nicene Creed, we are called to a Trinitarian experience with God. And, in the Roman Catholic and Anglican calendars, Trinity Sunday is:

A celebration of the unconditional love that God has for humanity, which God manifests as the creating love (which is God the father), the saving love (which is God the son), and the sanctifying love (which is God the Holy Spirit). God therefore is love, and whoever lives in God lives in love and continues to manifest God’s love to other people. The Trinity is a perfect example for us of how love enables us to open up our hearts to others in order to bring them closer to God and that they might have new life in God. (Jesuits in Britain, June 2020)

Each member of the Trinity “participates in the activity of the other” (Bloesch 2006, 35) in calling us to community with God and with one another. Specifically, in the “Abide” portion of my model of spiritual formation, Jesus tells us “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them” (John 14:23). The incarnate Jesus calls us to follow and abide in Him, to be like Him. In abiding in Jesus, we are called to union with God who always calls us to communion with others (Matthew 22: 36-40). As we abide in Jesus, we change our hearts towards others living into the

promise; “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezek. 36:26).

Other Literature and Cases

Carl Savage and William Presnell’s (2008) *Narrative Research in Ministry* informs my methodology. Their work is primarily aimed at discerning the generally accepted story of a congregation and how an “alternative shadow story can bring change and healing.” For example, the dominant story might be that men are “the strong ones” when in reality they long for “a relational style that is egalitarian, relational, and free of gender bias” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 75). The shadow story can point to a new mission. This was an underlying principle in my engagement with participants. While the individual stories will be a component of the larger congregation story, I hoped that even at the individual level, we might see something new being born within. Similarly, the research methodology described in Mary Clark Moschella’s (2008) *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, while aimed at the congregational level from a research perspective, was useful in terms of observing participants. Tim Sensing’s (2011) *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* guided the basic structure of this chapter from introduction to conclusion.

The implementation phase of the project utilized a *Lectio Divina* curriculum. Background information for this curriculum came from Jim Wilhoit and Evan Howard’s (2018) *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into*

Ordinary Life as well as Adele Calhoun's (2015) *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, a concise yet dense introduction to *Lectio Divina*. In addition, Robert Mulholland's (2000) *Shaped By The Word* and Eugene Peterson's (2005) *Eat This Book: A Conversation in The Art of Spiritual Reading* contributed to the original development of the curriculum during the second year course entitled "Engaging Scriptures: Spiritual Formation For Information & Transformation" (Wilhoit, 2018). Written from a protestant perspective and informed by Catholic practice leavened by the reminder that we are the beloved of God, the best resource is unquestionably Wilhoit and Howard. Their teaching employs using the four movements of *Lectio* (Reading), *Meditatio* (Meditating), *Oratio* (Prayer) and *Contemplatio* (Contemplation) which form the teaching and practice of my first four sessions. To these I created a session on *Incarnatio* (living it out) and *Augeo* (reinforcing the practice).

I developed the latter two sessions based on my observation of myself and others during my career. The session on living it out was designed to address the fact that being together in a contemplative setting is different from the push and pull of everyday life. After all, we are meant to live and move in the incarnate world not the interior one. The session on reinforcement addresses the experience of going to a training session at work, a leadership seminar at church, or an exercise program at the gym and resolving to change how we do our daily work and within a week, returning to our old patterns.

Project Methodology and Methods

The project followed the spiritual development of a group of lay volunteers through an individual interview, prior to seven weeks of group meetings, and individual exit interviews after these concluded. The premise of the process of Holy Reading, or *Lectio Divina*, is to so engage with and within the living God that we are gradually yet radically transformed in our daily lives, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17: 28). In short, *Lectio Divina* is a formational process in responding for God with our total being.

The first few sessions began with a mindfulness exercise and the last three added a centering prayer exercise to practice. The purpose of these exercises was to let the participant’s mind rest and dwell in silence so that *Lectio Divina* would be experienced with fewer mental distractions. The abbreviated outline of the sessions is in [Appendix 7: Outline of Lectio Sessions](#). There was an ice breaker question each week beginning week one with “Where were you born? How long have you lived here? Why do you choose to live here?” and progressing deeper into their beliefs and lived experience each week. The first group meeting was an introduction to *Lectio Divina* and the subsequent sessions. This was followed by five weeks of spiritual practices centred on *Lectio Divina*. The practice of *Lectio Divina* resides in the Abide portion of my model of spiritual formation. Each week between the sessions, participants were given reflection questions on the *Lectio* reading and asked to journal their experience of the meeting. It was their choice whether to share some of this at the following meeting.

My authority to implement the project derived from the local Pastor.

Participants were assigned a code number, LDARP 01 through 08.

Field

I facilitated a small group of seven lay people ranging in age from approximately early thirties to early seventies. We met by Zoom for seven consecutive Sunday evenings. The project took place in London, Ontario, Canada. The parish has been in existence for seven years. Five of the participants had lived in London five years or less. One was born in London, England, another in Bermuda (both moved to Canada at a young age). The rest of the participants were born in Canada. There was only one person of colour in the group. There is no reference to LDARP-03 in any of the Tables because this person was not a lay person. Also, LDARP-03 missed two sessions and partially observed three others with both microphone and video off.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Participants

LDARP	Childhood Church	Age (Est.)	Formative Church	Years at TMHL	Intro. to TMHL	Years in London
01 (Male)	Anglican	70-74	Brethren	4	Friends	4
02 (Male)	CRC	34-39	TMH	5	Friends	5
04 (Male)	CRC	62-69	CRC	.75	Friends	0
05 (Female)	Pentecostal	35-45	Evangelical Non-denomination	5	Online	20
06 (Female)	Alliance	31-38	Alliance	1	Casual Friend	2
07 (Female)	Roman Catholic	45-55	Alliance	2	Friends	20
08 (Female)	CRC	35-42	Alliance	1.5	Friend	15

All but one spent a portion of their childhood years attending an evangelical church. The lone exception attended the Roman Catholic Church. Half of the participants had attended the London parish for less than two years. All but one were introduced to TMHL by a friend or an acquaintance. Prior to beginning the study, I had casual relationships with three of the participants. Two were in the summer Home Church led by my wife. They approached me after a Parish Zoom meeting. Two were referred by the Pastor. One heard via the grapevine and one from the information circulating through the Parish. One was invited by another participant.

None of the lay people were ordained and only one had formally studied theology after high school. For the others, theology and Bible knowledge were derived from Sunday sermons, small group discussion and programs such as Community Bible Study. The small group culture of TMHL made it easier for people to choose to participate especially since a disruption of Home Church groups was caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Three of the participants were not active in a Home Church at the time the project began. The Pastor noted that one of the participants had not really connected to a group meeting before. One participant who was active in a Home Church said that he would not have participated were it not for the reduced schedule of other activities owing to the pandemic.

Table 3 shows my assessment of the participants' dominant stream of living water as identified by Richard Foster (Foster 1998 [a]). All the participants

were socialized within evangelical theology, so it is not surprising that three participants (LDARP-01, LDARP-04 and LDARP-07) fell in the word-centred life. Foster calls this the evangelical tradition which address “the crying need for people to see the good news lived and hear the good news proclaimed” (Foster 1998 [a], 187). Three of the people attracted to the study (LDARP-05, LDARP-06 and LDARP-08) fell within the sacramental life of the incarnational tradition as their dominant stream. This tradition “focuses upon making present and visible the realm of the invisible spirit. This sacramental way of living addresses the crying need to experience God as truly manifest and notoriously active in daily life” (Foster 1998 [a], 237).

LDARP-02 resided in the stream of the compassionate life. The social justice tradition “focuses upon justice and shalom in all human relationships and social structures. This compassionate way of living addresses the gospel imperative for equity and magnanimity among all peoples” (Foster 1998 [a], 137).

Finally, it is important to note the researcher’s two dominant streams as these both informed the structure of the weekly sessions and reveal a potential bias in interpretation of the participants’ comments. The holiness tradition “focuses upon the inward re-formation of the heart” through “holy habits” (Foster 1998 [a], 61). The Contemplative tradition is “a prayer filled life, for a richer, fuller practice of the presence of God. The contemplative stream ... addresses the human longing for the practice of the presence of God” (Foster 1998 [a], 25).

Table 3: Participants' Dominant Stream of Living Water

Participant	Dominant Stream	Rationale
LDARP-01	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message -The Evangelical Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses as well as sharing in sessions and initial interview
LDARP-02	Compassionate Life: Extending compassion in every sphere of life -The Social Justice Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses and initial interview
LDARP-04	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message -The Evangelical Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses as well as sharing in sessions and initial interview
LDARP-05	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses and initial interview
LDARP-06	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses and initial interview
LDARP-07	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message-The Evangelical Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses and initial interview
LDARP-08	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	based on ice-breaker responses and initial interview
RESEARCHER	Virtuous Life: Responding with integrity – The Holiness Tradition and, Prayer-Filled Life: The Contemplative Tradition	Self-evaluation

The categorization of the participants' streams of living water was initially undertaken because I had expected all of them to reside in the evangelical tradition. My presupposition was that people in that tradition were less likely to experience a deeper sense of the presence of God and a change in daily life. Whereas I expected that those in the sacramental, holiness and contemplative traditions were more likely to experience a deeper sense of the presence of God and a change in daily life.

The Pastor attended with his video and microphone off during weeks two through four owing to family obligations and missed weeks five and six due to work commitments. There was no evidence that his presence inhibited participation either in the honesty and vulnerability of responses during sessions or directly in the private final interviews. I included him in the group because of his personal desired for deeper spiritual practice, however I excluded him from the results as he was not present for the majority of the sessions and the study was intended to focus on lay people. This is why none of the tables have a reference to LDARP-03.

Scope

One of the limiting factors was that participants were self-selected. This resulted in a different make up of the group than expected. In the two Home Church groups I have attended with a total of forty members, TMHL members typically present as having a somewhat highly developed Bible study muscle and

little concept or practice of contemplation. In this group however, there were four people with some prior exposure to *Lectio Divina* whereas I had expected no one would have any familiarity with it.

Delimiters included an emphasis on *Lectio Divina* with only a passing introduction to contemplative prayer and meditation. Also, participants were instructed to share only their own reactions to the reading, reflection on what others shared was discouraged because it was important that participants were not influenced by what others had to say about their responses.

Methodology

Because “the reality experienced by contemporary people is intentional, relational and storied” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 29), I studied the people as they were with the aim of reporting lived experiences in the reality of their everyday lives. The goal of the analysis was to explore the experience of regular church attendees’ growth in Christlikeness.

As a spiritual director, my guiding principle is listening with patience and my “God language” is metaphor, abstraction, story, and the Bible, all of which are looked upon with respect “as useful, descriptive particularities of an indescribable mystery” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 61). I have experience in both Christian and secular Twelve Step groups treating people with empathy, respect, and compassion. I believe that spiritual transformation is fostered by participation in numerous spiritual disciplines both in solitude and in small groups combined with reflection on the experience. While refraining from leading the participants, my

antennae were alert to their articulation of a sense of movement in their journey deeper into Christlikeness expressed as a heightened awareness of God in everyday moments and a renewed intimacy with the Trinity. Moreover, I endeavoured to foster a climate where there was an intersection of “the relation between the pastoral role of listening, observing, being with, and interpreting a community and the prophetic role of transformation” (Moschella 2002, viii). This background contributed to the methods selected.

The overall approach of the narrative inquiry research method was to let them tell their stories in their own fashion while allowing them to disclose only that which made them comfortable. I saw myself as a feature writer rather than an editorial writer.

Methods

The research consisted of observation of individuals rather than aggregate trends. While there was some quantitative data such as attendance and amount of sharing, the bulk of the data came from the narratives collected in my notes during the sixteen individual interviews and seven group meetings. I also recorded all twenty-three events so that I could compare my in-situ notes with more careful review of the sessions and observe the participants more closely on the recording than was possible in the moment. I developed a set of pre and post research interview questions using open-ended questions. The intent was to note each participant’s starting state and whether they experienced a deeper sense of the presence of God and/or a change in their approach to daily life following a

focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*. Both sets of interview questions are shown in [Appendix 6: Interview Questions](#).

The initial interviews provided a baseline narrative of the participant’s spiritual biography. The sessions revealed how they processed the scripture and further revealed their dominant as well as secondary spiritual streams. To provide additional narrative data, I observed the participants during the meetings and wrote field notes, recording my feelings and reactions, quotes of interest regarding their spiritual maturation and practices as well as any insights and interpretations. I also made notes of sharing that was particularly moving or insightful.

Table 4: Data Sources

Data Collected	Method of Collection	Originated By
Individual Entrance Interviews	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher
Field Notes of group meetings	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher
Icebreaker Questions	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher
Observations	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher
Individual Exit Interviews	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher
Verbatims	Contemporaneous Notes and Video	Researcher

Table 5 lists the Tables in this report and source of the data used. After the final interview I began organizing the data by reviewing the recordings and making more detailed notes to create a verbatim of both the sense of their responses and, in some instances, precise wording. I reviewed all the raw data

with an eye to identifying each individual's starting point more clearly within Richard Foster's streams of living water.

Table 5: Data Source for the Tables

Table	Table Name	Data Instrument's Source
2	Characteristics of the Participants	Individual Interviews prior to starting group meetings
3	Participants' Dominant Stream of Living Water	Responses to ice-breaker questions, initial interviews, and sharing in response to <i>Lectio Divina</i> readings
7	Participants' Formation	Individual Interviews prior to starting group meetings
8 & 9	Addressing the Research Questions	Individual Interviews after conclusion of group meetings
10	Participants' Secondary Stream of Living Water	Responses to ice-breaker questions, initial interviews, sharing in response to <i>Lectio Divina</i> readings and exit interviews
Figure		
1	Participants' Attendance	Field notes from <i>Lectio Divina</i> sessions
2	Participants' Response Rate	Field notes from <i>Lectio Divina</i> sessions

Phases and Timetable

This Research project had three phases beginning with preparation in April 2020, followed by a period of execution between September 2020 and January 2021 and concluding with interpretation between January and April, 2021.

Administrative Phase

- April 2020 to September 2020: Developed research project through an iterative process with course instructors and submitted project to TREB on September 22, 2020.
- May 2020 phone appointments with TMHL Parish Pastor and TMH Executive Pastor requesting approval to conduct the project.

Execution Phase

- September 3 - October 17, 2020: Soft recruitment of participants; handed out flyer shown in [Appendix 2: Flyer handed out to Ministry Leader's Meeting](#) to Parish leaders. Zoom Presentations at Parish meetings using script in [Appendix 3: Basic Script for presentations in Parish Meetings](#)
- October 23: Received approval from TREB.
- October 25: Advised interested participants I was ready to begin and sent them the Information Letter [Appendix 4 Information Letter](#) and Consent Form [Appendix 5: Consent Form](#).
- October 28-31: Recorded "Intake interviews." These were held with each participant. See [Appendix 6: Interview Questions](#). Recorded each interview and wrote contemporaneous notes.

- October 26 – November 13: Obtained written participant consent forms. Two participants gave verbal consent and returned their forms after the group sessions began on November 1, 2020.
- November 1 – December 13: Conducted *Lectio Divina* 7-week Curriculum as modified group spiritual direction, each session was 90 minutes on Zoom. The process appears in [Appendix 7: Outline of Lectio Sessions](#).
- November 20: Submitted Amendment to TREB explaining my decision to include the Pastor as a participant.
- December 8 - January 4, 2021: Completed post-session interviews with each participant [Appendix 6: Interview Questions](#). Recorded each interview and wrote contemporaneous notes.

Interpretive Phase

- January 5 -April 15, 2021: Completed Data Evaluation reviewing all contemporaneous notes and recordings and revising themes. Report submitted April 19, 2021.

Ethics

I had no formal authority over the participants. Participants were unconstrained in their choice whether to participate during the opportunities to share. However, there was an implicit power relationship given that I was both the project researcher and *Lectio Divina* teacher, as well as a person having higher

education which sometimes causes people to doubt their experiences. And while I did have a dual role as both group facilitator and researcher, I tried not to influence but merely read my speaking notes and the readings as well as praying before and after the *Lectio* readings. After each reading, we sat in silence for two or three minutes and then I spoke a reflection question as an invitation to share. I simply said thank you after each participant shared. While it was not a formal role, I did see my role as pastoral in terms of encouraging others. To create comfort for the participants, I gave them my short autobiography in session one and gave the first response to the icebreaker question. Not wanting to colour future responses, in the final six sessions, I shared only after all had responded.

Any information that could identify participants is kept in a locked filing cabinet. Written electronic files and recordings are kept on a password protected computer. Paper notes will be securely shredded after one year. All the participants granted permission to record interviews and sessions. These are kept on a password protected computer and will be securely erased after three years.

To help ensure the group was a safe experience for each member, I pre-arranged for a different participant to read [Appendix 8: Group Guidelines](#) aloud each week. This reduced the more dominant responder to a single reading and gave the shy responder a voice. The Guiding Principles feed trust. The key tenets are:

1. Respect for one another.
2. Attentive listening to others quieting internal dialogue.
3. No crosstalk: let someone's story speak for itself rather than commenting on it.

4. Do not fix another; refrain from the natural tendency to offer solutions to others' issues.
5. Maintain Confidentiality outside the group concerning what others have said.

TMH has strong policies of inclusion and peacemaking. There were no incidents of racist or misogynistic comments.

I did not identify any expectations for the participants beyond what was written in [Appendix 4 Information Letter](#). I made it clear that they were not required to share anything after the readings. Prior to the sessions, I set a general outline of what would happen in the sessions and explained that this was a way to experience scripture. I left it vague until the teaching each week so that they would not come in with a bias. I received approval for the project from TREB on October 23, 2020 and began confirming the study participants.

On November 2, 2020, I informed the TREB that the Pastor opted to participate as he has a keen desire to nourish his soul. I decided to include the Pastor in the *Lectio Divina* group for two reasons. Firstly, in response to a direct question during their initial interviews, none of the participants had any reservations about the Pastor being in the group. Secondly, while there may have been an implied power imbalance through the Pastor's position and pastoral role, none of the participants expressed this concern in their private interviews. I also had a candid conversation with the Pastor about the nature of his involvement specifying that he was to maintain all of the group guidelines and that he would only be included if the other participants felt it would not inhibit their responses.

The TREB approved an amendment to the project containing this information on November 13, 2020.

Findings, Interpretation, and Outcomes

The research project aimed to ascertain whether lay participants would experience a deeper sense of the presence of God and a change in their approach to daily life following a focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*. In the final interviews, three participants self-identified both as having a deeper sense of the presence of God and experiencing a change in their approach to daily life. Two participants experienced movement solely in a deeper sense of the presence of God. And two participants reported no movement at all. However, despite their self-assessment, the comments of one of the participants who reported no movement showed some growth in moving closer to God as did the one who reported only a change in their daily life.

Findings

The first interview was useful in ascertaining the primary formative experiences of childhood doctrinal formation and concept of God. This was enhanced by learning about their formation at a more mature age both in terms of their spiritual practices and doctrinal influences. Even after an in-depth hour together for the initial interview however, there was more to be revealed in their relationship with God and others. Observing them in the weekly *Lectio* sessions, together with the final interviews, I discovered that people were more variegated than they first appear. Attendance was much higher than I expected, and

individual participation rates were uneven during *Lectio* sessions. From the final interviews, I determined that there were people who felt closer to God after the seven weeks of *Lectio* participation. There were also some who identified a change in their daily life.

A baseline of their formative influences was derived from the initial interviews. The data is shown below in Table 7. The first four columns were derived from the first three questions in the initial interviews (Tell me about your tradition/denomination in your young formative years. How did you view God then? How did you communicate with God then? [Appendix 6: Interview Questions](#))

The intention was to get a sense of their formative tradition and spiritual practices and how they viewed God at that time. Questions regarding the length of time they have been in Home Church and how they communicate with God now were designed to capture any effect Home Church participation and the years after their initial formation may have had on their spiritual practices at the time the study began.

Table 7 notes there were only two participants (LDARP-04 and LDARP-06) whose childhood denomination was also a primary source of their spiritual formation as an adult. LDARP-02 was the only one who had experienced a significant change in belief as an adherent of TMH. He started attending in High School, declaring himself to be an “agnostic/atheist.” After years of Home Church, he shifted from wanting proof to accepting ambiguity in his faith journey.

Since all the participants came to spiritual maturity in evangelical denominations, it is not surprising that most of them listed either prayer, Bible study, or both as their dominant way of communicating with God during that phase of their life. All had some exposure to study in groups and most continue both practices to some extent. However only two had been in TMHL home church groups for four years or more and two had been in home church groups for less than a year. Years or decades into their journey of spiritual maturity, all but LDARP-04 have adopted different practices.

Table 6: Participants' Formation

ID	Childhood Tradition	View of God then	Communicate with God then	Formative Tradition	Communicate with God now
01	Anglican	Fear, follow rules, say the right thing	Talked, prayed, ask questions, “largely intellectual”	Brethren	Recent course in healing prayer – intellectual/emotional/physical connections
02	(CRC)	Wanted to do the right thing	Prayed, read the Bible	TMH	Reflect on own compilation of everything Jesus said about love in the Gospels
04	CRC	Saviour	Bible study, daily prayer at meals	CRC	Read The Message” side by side with the NIV
05	Pentecostal	Safe, warm and love	Prayer	Unknown Evangelical	Seeing God in nature. Being still and centering
06	Alliance	Real. Involved in our lives. Some rules-based perspective	Memorized, journaled, corporate prayer	Alliance	Journal, pray in the car
07	Roman Catholic	To be feared, powerful, scary	Prayed at meals and nighttime. Confession	Alliance	Meditation, walking and talking, daily Bible reading, talking to God but not aloud, saying thank you in my heart
08	CRC	Spiritual force.	Mid-week classes	Alliance	Chat to God, pray, worship, more of a personal relationship

Figure 3 catalogues the attendance of the participants. The white spaces on the bars show the four occasions when participants were absent. Three participants attended all seven sessions. Forty-five out of forty-nine opportunities were attended for a 91.8% attendance rate. Most participants made a visible effort to stay engaged during the weekly group reading and reflection meetings.

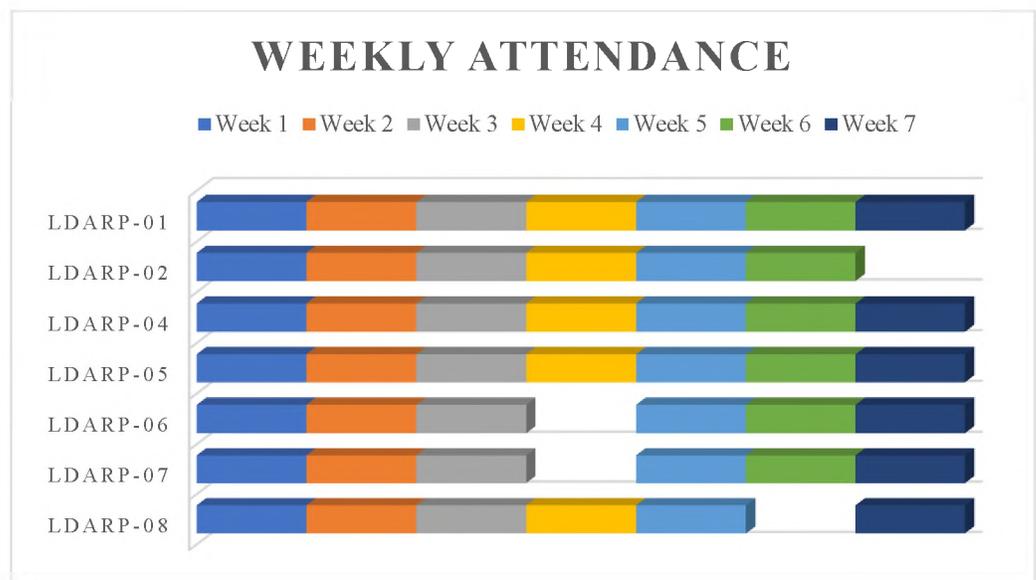


Figure 3: Participants' Attendance

There were thirty-two total opportunities to share a response with the group including *Lectio* readings and reflections on the previous week. Figure 4 shows the percentage of opportunities taken to share. The men spoke more often than the women. This does not include the fact that two men shared twice during the same reading (one double-shared after five of the twenty-four readings). In contrast, there was only one woman who shared double-shared. Based on my business experience In general, during the sessions the men tended to respond

from a cognitive bias whereas the women tended to add a more emotive and, in some cases, mystical element to their responses.

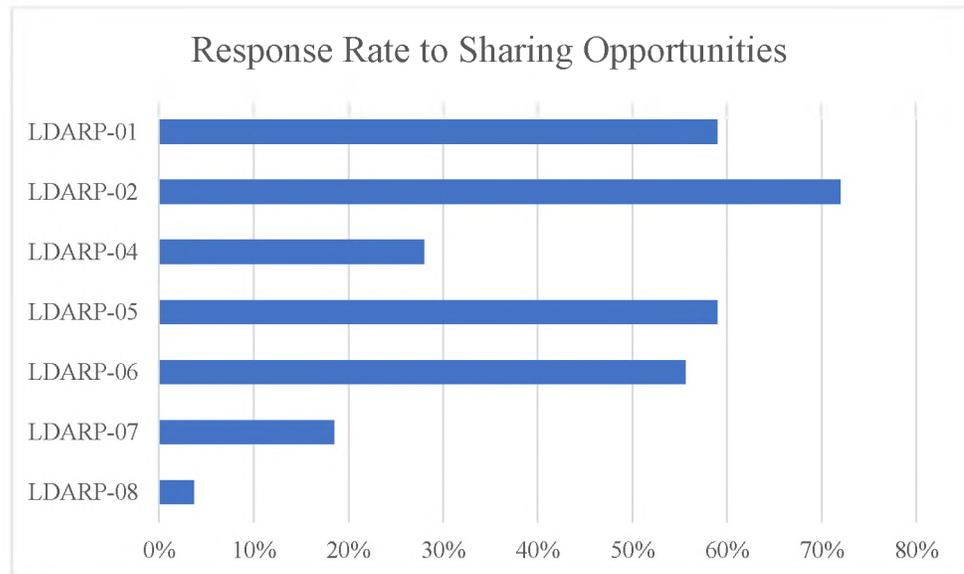


Figure 4: Participants' Response Rates

Everyone answered the opening ice breaker question at the start of each session. The intent of these was simply to build a sense of safe, shared space in community. To my surprise, their answers to the ice-breaker questions in weeks two through seven (included in [Appendix 7: Outline of Lectio Sessions](#)) became an important source of data contributing to both the interpretation of their streams of living water and the sense of deeper intimacy with God.

There was a deepening that took place among several participants as the weeks unfolded. In session two the sharing came more naturally. The reading of John 8: 1-11 (“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery”) drew the most moving and visceral reactions of any week. This came from the females in the group, LDARP-06 noting after the first reading “the

image of the accusers dragging her so harshly, then Jesus saying neither do I condemn you.” After the third reading, LDARP-05 said she would like to ask Jesus “How do you just write in the sand?” and then she asked powerfully “What would be my stone? What would be the things I do?” During the initial interview it became clear that while LDARP-07 was primarily formed in the evangelical tradition, she also has a heart for the social justice tradition from both her short-term mission experience and involvement with local compassion organizations. This came to the fore as she exclaimed after the fourth reading,

They were active in humiliating her... was she caught in the moment of the act? Or was she previously caught, and they wanted to humiliate her over and over? Jesus dismantled an angry mob peacefully with just one sentence. They couldn't refute it and He completely changed the situation.

She picked out the injustice of the power imbalance between men and women and identified the power of the living word of God to quell the angry mob.

By session three (Mark 10:17-22: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”), participant response was more spontaneous and richer in content moving in the main from interpretation into a more meditative experience of the text. At times though, LDARP-01 almost sounded like an instructor saying, “that is where God wants us to be - trusting and obeying.” Some deeper comments came in week six in response to the icebreaker question, “When was a time that when someone showed you deep compassion/love like Jesus? Tell us what they did and how it affected you.” LDARP-01 concluded his response saying simply, “I wept.” Similarly, LDARP-02 left behind his tendency to analyze and said movingly, “after a messy breakup, family travelled to me each night for weeks and they just sat with me.”

In session four (John 15: 1-9 “abide in me as I abide in you”), I could see LDARP-02 working through the study to application. Speaking in general terms about an incident the previous weekend he said “I find the pruning process interesting– the pruning is coming to me because of conviction. I know what I did was wrong.” Living in love for others was a common theme for him throughout the study. Similarly, LDARP-04 while he mainly showed a hermeneutic bent, would often turn his comment to a practical application in his own life. In week six however, after the fourth reading of John 20: 19-29 (“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe”), he modified his usually cognitive approach with a rare experiential sharing:

If I were there I'd be freaked out. Two times the door was locked and then all of a sudden, He's there! There'd be a bit of a struggle- what is He? Then Jesus has to be clear – here are my hands, here is the hole where the sword went into my side. He made it clear for everyone even Thomas who initially doubted and then affirmed his belief.

Session five was deeper still. During the opening reflection on the previous week, LDARP-02 offered a reflection illustrating the embrace of mystery. His had always been a quest for certainty. He expressed trouble distinguishing his thoughts from God's promptings. He clung to the certainty that he knows and trusts Jesus. Still, he said there was “Some sort of mysterious mingling of my thoughts and His will and my will. It's difficult to analyze and decipher but it's a beautiful journey all the same.” Responding to the *Lectio* reading on Mary and Martha, LDARP-06 said, “Jesus came into their home – how personal it was that Jesus came into her space and reminding myself that He wants to be that present here with us in our space, in our home in our every day.”

Session six saw more of a pause. There was a bit more teaching at the front than there had been in any session after session one. However, the pause may have been as a result of the icebreaker question “When was a time when someone showed you deep compassion like Jesus? Tell us what they did and how it affected you?” The depth of stories shared was profound. Even though I had either a little or no prior relationship with the participants, and many of them had no prior relationship with more than one or two of the others, they were willing to be open. Participants had also shared intimate details of their lives in the initial individual interviews. There, I heard stories of personal addiction, mental health struggle, divorce, and an extra-marital affair causing a rift in a church community. Each of these stories were offered without prompting as matter-of-fact biographical details yet showed an unexpected depth of honesty. Similarly, in the group sessions stories were shared of a suicide death of a close relationship, the problem of evil in peoples’ behaviours and a suicide attempt in the immediate family. These three were recounted with genuine trust in the group and we processed these revelations in silence.

Session seven was designed more for closure and reporting impressions and reflections. I opened with two rather than four readings. After the first, LDARP-01 and experiential response. “I imagined them walking along the road getting drawn in more and more, not wanting the story to end.” We transitioned to a time of reflection which I opened asking if there was anything that came to mind from the past seven weeks together, maybe that spoke to them or something they found helpful or something that might have been more helpful. We began in

silence and I closed with a prayer and benediction when I sensed there was no more to be shared. LDARP-06 offered, “The theme week two [Who are your accusers? John 8: 1-11] and three [What is Jesus calling you to give up? Mark 10:17-22] What are your worries? What are your fears? Connecting that to the theme of idolatry and what are the things I put before Jesus that connects so much to those worries and those fears.” LDARP-05 also commented on session three;

I wondered what question would I run up and ask? And I had a question that I talked to you Bob in the initial interview. This question is still really hard for me and so I just imagined asking Jesus that question. I really sensed the Holy Spirit giving me a different answer than I was thinking.

In the other weeks it was seeing how personal and how loving Jesus is with each person that comes with their different questions or concerns. And how He takes time just to be present with them. I want to carry that in my day to day so that was very powerful and helpful.

LDARP-07 also had a rich closing reflection.

All the readings were familiar, but to read them over and over again and to slow your heart and mind and breathing - and stepping into the story. It's like you can stay there until you recognize Jesus, until you sense Him, and I think you just get so much more out of His word.

And the fact that you can read it one time, a second time, a third time and it even has that much more impact each time. I really appreciated that. That just literally he stays with them [on the road to Emmaus] until he is recognized. And he continues to do that for each of us. He is so intentional about relationship. It's a beautiful reminder for myself and for a way to live my own life with the people that I'm called to love.

The interviews after the group sessions were designed to notice any movement in their sense of the presence of God and changes in their daily life from a spiritual standpoint. The first research question, “Will participants experience a deeper sense of the presence of God following a focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*?” was specifically addressed in the final interview answer to

“Would you say that you are closer to God today, further away, or about the same?” I believe they were quite clear in showing their ability to discern a change as illustrated below in Table 8. For example, the three participants who indicated they felt closer to God were explicit in expressing their belief for how they were closer to God. LDARP-02 gave a very practical answer, while LDARP-05 had a unique, almost mystical experience in this regard which was telegraphed in her reflection noted earlier in the closure of week seven. Similarly, LDARP-07’s very genuine experience was also elucidated in week seven.

Table 7: Addressing the First Research Question

LDARP	Final Interview: Closer to God, Further Away or Same?
01	Further away: “if I haven’t read [the Bible] I feel a strong urgency to make it right. I don’t want to have it habitual that days go by.”
02	Closer: “Because of the dedication. Two days a week of just <i>Lectio Divina</i> .”
04	Same
05	Closer: She received “pivotal insights.” The questions had “taken barriers down.”
06	Same (Leaning to Closer): “It’s always hard to measure. “I’m leaning to closer.” I felt I’ve been going through the motions, not being in group not feeling that spark. There was some [spark with this group], but don’t know if it was more [than before].”
07	Closer: “I’ve had this opportunity to have closeness with not efforting (sic). It’s one of those things I don’t know I would have discovered on my own truly”.
08	Same

LDARP-01 was unique in his experience of feeling “further away” from God. Having missed his daily Bible reading for a few days, he “sensed a distance.” Had it been a spiritual direction appointment I may have asked him,

what is God saying to you in this experience? On the other hand, LDARP-06 said, “the same but moving closer” and made a concerted attempt to specifically address whether she felt closer to God, but in the end was uncertain on the magnitude of the change. For both of these participants, their sense of struggle indicates an element of growth despite their interpretation of the question.

The response to the second research question (will they experience a change in their approach to daily life?) was more pronounced with five saying they had detected a change in daily life as shown in Table 9. While each was different in its expression, all five reported some degree of greater peace with two, LDARP-01 and LDARP-02, expressing this peace as a function of being pruned. In saying she was clinging to God from assurance, LDARP-08 stated that she was calmer than at the start of the sessions when the pandemic’s effects on her work were causing such uncertainty. And that is an important nuance of exogenous factors which we will delve into in the next section. There is of course the possibility that participants were answering with a view to making their experience look favourable. I would discount that however because the responses were quite unique. LDARP-01 is certainly responding from a common theme that came up in the final few group sessions. LDARP-02 was clearly working this out in real time both in the group session and in home church meetings. In both week three and her final interview, LDARP-05 mentioned a breakthrough in how she processed her work experience. LDARP-07 was deeply reflective before responding in the final interview. And like LDARP-01 appears to be someone who is not predisposed toward ingratiating herself but rather speaking honestly.

LARP-08 acknowledged the important point that her participation was a piece of her life experience so may not have been causal.

Table 8: Addressing the Second Research Question

LDARP	Final Interview: Change in their Daily Life.
01	Yes: “more submissive to obedience, less frustrated and more accommodative.”
02	Yes: “Meditation. And the number of sacrifices being requested.”
04	No
05	Yes: “more peaceful at work even when hearing difficult stuff from clients.” She stated that she could feel compassion but not take on the heavy stories she hears.
06	No
07	Yes: attributed this to the practice of silent reflection noting that “He’s more in the quiet than in the doing.”
08	Yes: “less clingy to God from stress- now clinging in assurance- I would not say this is due to <i>Lectio</i> per se, but it was a piece in combination with renewed devotion and learning anew rhythm of daily life.”

In sum, I found that the individuals were committed to participating both in the study and the practice of *Lectio Divina*. This was evident in the high attendance rate, the depth and frequency of sharing in response to readings, and the readiness to participate in initial interviews and final interviews within a fairly short timeframe. The findings also showed that immersion in *Lectio Divina* had an effect on the spiritual maturation of the participants.

Interpretations

In ascertaining whether participants would experience a deeper sense of the presence of God and a change in their approach to daily life following a

focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*, I drew inferences from their participation in response to the *Lectio* readings and reflection on previous sessions. It was clear from their adherence to meetings, participation, and completion of the pre and post interviews that these people were both willing to commit to a process and to draw closer to God. One might postulate that there were other reasons each participant got involved in the group, but the level of engagement in and participation through the entire nine sessions showed there is a benefit of growth in spiritual formation through participation in *Lectio Divina*. There was no quantitative way to ascertain the effect of *Lectio Divina* on the participants' approach to daily life, but they did self-report differences from before. And I observed differences in their approach. LDARP-02, for example, shifted from his focus on rational answers to greater comfort with ambiguity, openness to mystery and awareness of not living out of love as noted above.

Exogenous Factors

Four of the participants had prior exposure to *Lectio Divina*. Upon reflection, I realized that in an open invitation, it is more likely that people with some exposure to a practice are likely to participate even though the facilitator was unknown to them.

I had no prior expectation that people would experience a deeper sense of the presence of God following the seven weeks. In fact, I expected they would be the same. And so, I was genuinely surprised by the final interviews where three participants expressed that they felt closer to God and one the same but moving to closer. It is indeed possible that feeling "closer to God" was influenced by

exogenous factors. For example, LDARP-06 was meeting a spiritual director throughout. LDARP-02 was in a small Home Church together with my wife and I and his fiancée. My wife and he shared the leadership and I refrained from saying anything that might sway the conversation, but he occasionally referenced his experience in the study. In the final interview, he noted that the reflection enriched his experience bringing *Lectio Divina* into Home Church and vice versa. This illustrates that one cannot isolate a factor from a qualitative study as definitely causal, but it is an ingredient that contributed to the result. I believe the result would not have occurred without that ingredient. After all, they were asked a question in the final interview they had not considered. Most were surprised by the question and took time to process before answering whether they were closer to God.

I also had no expectation that people would experience a change in their approach to daily life yet five indicated they had. While not solely affected by participation in the study, this was likely enhanced by spending additional time in reflection. LDARP-08's work life and gym life were partially restored which no doubt contributed to her response. On the other hand, the pandemic may have assisted others to experience of a change in their approach to daily life. There was less inherent busyness without travel to and from work, travel for work, ministry meetings, social commitments, Christmas preparations and such.

I would posit that my role as an experienced spiritual director contributed to the outcome. When I presented my findings publicly, one retired academic pointed out that the way I led the group had a strong pastoral component. This

likely contributed to the sense of community within the group as did the tendency of people who spend time together to develop in intimacy, connection with and trust in the other members of the group.

The Collective Experience

The sections for the seven weeks of *Lectio Divina* readings is seen in [Appendix 7: Outline of Lectio Sessions](#). The readings have an intentional narrative arc tied to my model of spiritual formation. The first three weeks centred on the “Confess” (A.A. Step 10) component of my model, what do you want Jesus to do for you? What hold does culture have on your total immersion in Christ? The next three weeks dwelled within the “Abide” (A.A. Step 11) portion of my model. We are called to abide in Jesus. We are both acting and receiving. Where do you abide? Our faith is Deepened. The final week rested within the “Give” (A.A. Step 12) portion of my model. Having seen the Messiah, our hearts are burning. Abiding in God’s love, we receive our inspiration to act. We desire to share this gift with others, compelled to tell what we have experienced.

The final interviews confirmed that the participants experienced the intended effect of creating a sense of connection, fellowship, and community for the group. This type of affinity is common in A.A. groups where people come together with a common prompting and purpose. Their responses to an open-ended enquiry in week seven appear in table 10 below.

Table 9: Participants' Reflection on the Experience

LDARP	What would you like to share about your experience of <i>Lectio Divina</i> over the past 7 weeks?
01	“Confirmed I learn better in community than on my own.”
02	It was a good experience, liked the approach of a different direction/reflection question prior to each reading.
04	Said while it was not his preferred method the experience, it provided fellowship and he learned something from it.
05	“Wish I could continue.”
06	A good homing beacon. Provided more community in a period of life transition. The Mary and Martha reading “you are worried about many things” stayed in her consciousness for three weeks after session five.
07	“Even though the group was not together physically there is still a connection there that is very unique.”
08	Would accept an invitation to participate again.

And, as noted above, the level of sharing by these participants both privately and in the group demonstrated the participants willingness to trust one another.

For LDARP-07, the study also achieved the benefit I had suggested in the Information Letter.

The intentional slow way that you spoke, and even let us all kind of hang there in quiet. At first, I didn't quite get it. Honestly by [the] last night I was ‘this is so great.’ It really was a retreat. It became obvious to me having spent time in *Lectio* format how rushed my usual Bible reading and reflection time is.

Over time, as the stories of the participants unfolded, I discovered that the living water within the members flowed from many different streams. My initial

assignment of a dominant stream, that is, the tradition in which they tend to relate to God, came from how they described their formation as an adult and current spiritual practice during the initial interview. My presupposition that people in the evangelical tradition were less likely to experience a deeper sense of the presence of God and a change in daily life than those in the sacramental, holiness and contemplative traditions did not materialize. I learned it is wise to observe rather than predict the effect of immersion in scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit to influence others.

Moreover, as they revealed themselves more fully over the ensuing eight sessions, it became apparent that they also had a strong secondary stream noted as recorded in Table 11. Some of the secondary streams seemed complimentary to the dominant stream while others appeared to be somewhat independent. Drawn from ice-breaker questions, sharing in response to *Lectio Divina* readings and exit interviews, I learned that the participants had more than one tradition impacting how they both related to God and lived out their belief. For some participants, the secondary stream played an equal or stronger role in the way they chose to live and move.

In either case, the two taken together revealed a more complete image of the participant and the perils of judging a person at first glance, even it is during an hour of focused conversation. I would not change the research questions but rather believe that more is revealed in impromptu sharing over time together. This is true in any relationship. More is revealed over time. It may be in the language of poetry, or the language of music, or the language of art, or the language of

nature, or the language of silence, or the language of the heart, but, like the bewildered crowd gathered by the Pentecost, “in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2: 11b).

Table 10: Participants' Secondary Stream of Living Water

ID	Dominant Stream	Secondary Stream
01	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message -The Evangelical Tradition	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition
02	Compassionate Life: Extending compassion in every sphere of life - The Social Justice Tradition	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition
04	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message -The Evangelical Tradition	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition
05	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	Prayer-Filled Life: Our heart’s steady attention on God– The Contemplative Tradition
06	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	Prayer-Filled Life: Our heart’s steady attention on God – The Contemplative Tradition
07	Word-Centred: Living the life-giving message-The Evangelical Tradition	Compassionate Life: Extending compassion in every sphere of life – The Social Justice Tradition
08	Sacramental Life: Encountering the invisible God in the visible world - The Incarnational Tradition	Compassionate Life: Extending compassion in every sphere of life – The Social Justice Tradition

And as we grow to know others, the secondary streams of water feeding their souls flows into greater balance with the dominant stream of their life with the potential of renewing and replenishing them.

Much of my early experience in spiritual direction was with Seminary students who were solidly in the evangelical tradition. They were taking spiritual direction as part of a course requirement. The consequence was that they primarily experienced direction from an intellectual rather than emotional standpoint. My perception of TMH members was that they would have a similar background and hence experience the study in the same way. The fact that some came with a different dominant tradition and that two of those who were word-centered had strong secondary traditions meant that they were more likely to experience a change in their daily life. One of those two also felt closer to God after participation. In her case, I believe it was because her secondary stream was more dominant than in the other case. I am not claiming this in any way as statistically sound, but rather that people who by their nature are primarily located within the contemplative, incarnational, holiness, and social justice traditions have more touch points from which to have a total being experience combining heart, mind and volition. Nonetheless, these do not replace but rather complement grounding in the word-centred life. The stream is a pathway. It is the practice of immersion in God which leads to a deeper sense of the presence of God a change in one's approach to daily life

Outcomes

In my sample group, people participated who were willing to try different ways of communing with God. There was also an appetite for short-term commitments with an identified purpose. Prior to beginning, I expected that consistent attendance would be a problem with at least two dropping out. Furthermore, I doubted there would be much movement on the research questions as I mistakenly assumed most would be entrenched in their ways thereby neglecting the power of the Holy Spirit. This group, however, shattered both of those expectations.

I discovered that almost no one spent time with the reflection questions each week. My preliminary reaction was they need not have been included. The principal benefit of *Lectio Divina* is meditation, contemplation and dwelling within the scriptures. It is likely that not everyone will pursue additional written reflection. In some cases, however, the questions floated near their consciousness as participants either pursued their existing practices or the demands of everyday life precluded written reflection. Exchanging activities for new habits is hard in any life endeavour.

While it is possible that participants were predisposed toward a positive outcome based on what they had heard in my verbal presentation [Appendix 3: Basic Script for presentations in Parish Meetings](#) or read in [Appendix 4 Information Letter](#), I believe it is unlikely for two reasons. Firstly, the final interviews were conducted three months after the verbal presentations and secondly, no one paraphrased anything from the Information Letter in any of the

group or individual meetings. After the final interview, I sent many of the participants a link to the “Pray as You Go” daily reflections (Jesuits in Britain, December 2020). It is a short *Lectio Divina* exercise. It was quite rewarding to have LDARP-08 write me three weeks later, that the exercise was helpful.

It has been a pleasure for me to use and I have been using it consistently for the last month. I love how they place us in the scene [with] Jesus, and it's been so great to go there with Him. This has been a blessing in my life and a chance to slow down each morning before tackling the day.

This was an extended example of change of approach to daily life.

Adopting a new spiritual practice, her participation resulted in a “change in activities, habits, stories told” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 124)

Going into the project, I had prejudged the parish as being composed of word-centred evangelicals who would give answers from the mind to questions of the heart. Consequently, I expected no movement of closer to God or a change in daily life. Instead, I discovered a group of people within what I had previously viewed to be a homogenous culture of Bible study and proclamation who were willing to try something different. I learned that there were people predisposed towards engaging in other spiritual practices and I was reminded that an inquiring mind is more fruitful than a closed heart. We are each complex with various shades of practice and belief.

I have become a more visible and valued member of the London TMH community. I did not undertake the project with any thought of developing a spiritual direction relationship with the participants. In January 2021, one of them

broached the idea of entering a spiritual direction relationship with me and I sent some information to reflect on. They contacted me to indicate their interest and we met for several months beginning in February 2021.

The more we set ourselves aside and abide in God with neither an agenda nor a clock, the more we are open to transformation. Ultimately it is about living daily into someone greater than ourselves. We are called to “guard your heart with all vigilance...for out of it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23: AMP). As we abide in God through patient spiritual discipline change does occur.

Conclusion

We are called to an ongoing conversion of the mind and the heart. “Ideas rarely convert, interconnecting relationships transform” (Savage and Presnell 2008, 41). Growth occurs in the relationship of community. *Lectio Divina* is both a communal and a private practice, one of many disciplines available to us from the history of discipleship in spiritual formation. The project was an awareness exercise expressed within a deepening understanding of the unconditional love that God has for humanity. The participants expressed an awareness of the intimate picture of Jesus in the *Lectio Divina* scripture passages which lead to a deeper awareness of the presence of God and a change in daily life. I entered each interview and each session with no planned agenda but instead let the Holy Spirit prompt participants’ reactions. I entered this project without any formal ministry within the local parish. This project heightened my awareness of the Holy Spirit’s leading in my ministry of spiritual direction as well as recognizing the wisdom of

the spirit and the love of Jesus in everyday encounters with participants and those outside of the project. Thus, I hope that I, too, will continue to become more Christlike.

Future Improvements

If I were to do a study of this nature again, there are some things I would do differently. The first would be to engage participants in a non-directive way to unpack their responses a bit more. I would also do a follow-up a few months later to see what remained of the experience. Have new habits been continued? If not, what are the obstacles? Perhaps it is a session with Margaret Silf's concentric rings. Where am I spending my energy? Is it on the circumstances of life I cannot change? How am I making daily choices? Am I stuck in old habits or am I willing to make choices for truth and maintain my integrity and the integrity of others? Who am I at the centre? Is it possible to trust that "the transcendent God who touched us will join with the immanent God locked up, like a seed, in our hearts, and something new will grow from that union" (Silf 1999, 23)?

Another thing I would do differently would be to stick to the script for the final interview rather than editing out questions that were not relevant for them or letting them dictate the flow of the interview thereby missing out on some of the template. It is possible that more data could have been obtained if I had probed a bit more when someone seemed unresponsive. I would also ask for permission to go back to them later with follow-up questions after reflection on their responses. For example, "you said that from your experience in Bible study groups you

prefer questions. How did you perceive these reflection questions as differing from those?”

Because TMH is an evangelical diaspora, I wish I had asked what led them to come to TMH and what prompts them to stay. Seven weeks is too short a period to show lasting change especially when the process is only touched once a week. In Twelve Step meetings, the advice was to try coming to six consecutive meetings before you decide whether this is for you. I also took a sponsor who led me through the first three steps answering a question each day for thirty days. Thirty years on, I have never forgotten the question for Step 3 “Made a conscious decision to turn our will and our lives to the care of God *as we understood Him*” (Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59; italics in the original); “What is the difference between spirituality and religion?” After six weeks of hearing people testify about the changes in their life as they were no longer ruled by their addiction, I was drawn to learn more from sponsors whose faith in God was undeniable and deep. Relationships are the transforming agent and the sustaining element. We learn to have relationships with God through and with one another.

This translates to the spiritual formation of Christians. In *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith writes of being shaped by Dallas Willard’s belief in “the necessity of a curriculum for Christlikeness” (Willard 1997, 315). Smith went on to create a thirty-week course which he taught at his church. Years later, at the halfway point of leading twenty-five people through the course, he came to believe that “Dallas was right all along. Genuine transformation into the character of Christ really is possible” (Smith 2009, 13). Smith goes on to say that

the target audience for this material is “Anyone who longs for change-young or old, new Christian or mature Christian, male or female, it doesn't matter” (Smith 2009, 14). So, the catalyst is the Holy Spirit rather than church programs. Programs and practices are the vessel not the goal. Smith repeated the course three times, and it became the source for his *Good and Beautiful* trilogy.

Implications for The Meeting House London Parish

As a result of this project, I developed great affection as well as the intimacy of shared experience with some among the group and become more deeply involved in the leadership group of the community. No matter our level of informational knowledge and formational practice, we can all lean more deeply into God. Sometimes we just need to release or remodel some of our old spiritual formation practices and adopt new ones. It may be either a seasonal change or permanent, but the motivation is always towards a deeper communion with God.

I have realized that the model of Confess, Abide and Give is important beyond my spiritual direction ministry within the context of small group sharing and small group leadership. When we resumed our Home Church meetings after the study, another young couple joined us. It activated my awareness of the exigencies of daily life for people going to work in the middle of a pandemic. As such, I have tried to slow my mind and turn my thoughts and words to God as we listen to the struggle and turmoil of their lives and in a loving way point us all to God's steadfast love.

In the broader London church, the Pastor said he would endorse and promote any spiritual practices I wanted to invite other to in the future. I suggested I may bring forward such practices as group spiritual direction and a retreat in daily life. I also intend to offer shorter sessions of other spiritual disciplines selected from Tony Jones' (2006) *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* and /or Adele Calhoun's (2015) *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*. In the near term, I plan to take a group to a labyrinth in the area and explore this form of bodily prayer and journey toward God amidst the vicissitudes of life. These shorter sessions may have more participation given it is a shorter commitment and prompt those who want to go deeper to seek out additional guidance.

I could see going back to the research group and offering *Lectio* and *Visio Divina* in a group spiritual direction session. There, we would open it up to what the Spirit might be revealing to someone for another in response to their sharing. The group members would be counselled to be careful to prayerfully test themselves before responding asking, 'Is this the Holy Spirit's message or my conviction and bias speaking?' In that way, we would not be straining against the group guidelines. In all these plans, the aim is not to increase numbers, but fruitfulness secured by the knowledge that one changed life can influence many. This indeed is the legacy of Bill Wilson the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous that has endured for nearly eighty years, a movement originally drawn from the legacy of Jesus of Nazareth the founder of the way which endures for eternity.

Implications for The Meeting House At Large and Beyond

Since June of 2020, the broadcast teachings at TMH have adopted more use and teaching of spiritual practices beyond understanding the Bible and intellectually applying the teaching in everyday life. A comprehensive session on spiritual practices was broadcast by one of the teaching Pastors. Due to the sheer volume of information in the teaching notes, there was no practical way for a novice to pursue these without some guidance. During Advent that year, the teaching included live video with a Christian artist to stimulate another sensory node of the body. During Advent in 2021, this practice of *Visio Divina* was supported by having mid-week sessions to enhance the discipline. Thus, I not only see an opportunity to offer follow-up in the London parish, but for similar follow-up in by leaders in other parishes.

After my public presentation of this report, I was approached by another TMH Parish to pilot my model with a small group of men. Beyond TMH, there are opportunities for members of congregations from other denominations to embark on a deeper journey using aspects of the model and focused *Lectio Divina*. For example, I was also approached by members of other denominations to offer my model and approach to small groups. In addition, a Pastor from another denomination asked for my curriculum of *Lectio Divina* for both personal and professional use. One retired Professor suggested I write a book exploring the interface of Twelve Step wisdom and Christian faith and life.

I am brewing a list of workshop ideas including spiritual autobiography, True Self, Attachment Theory, and the model of Confess, Abide, and Give. These

may be offered either in a retreat setting or multi-week meetings. All of this encourages me that there are many ways of learning and many parts within the body whose living stream flows in different paths from and to the main source.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Spiritual Formation is a process over a lifetime for the glory of God, for abundant life, always for the good of others.

– Dr. Barbara Haycraft, *Nurturing Spirituality*

As is the case with all stories, this one is unfinished. This journey was seeded with an intention to help others and without a specific ministry context. The research grew organically. Both the model and the research project grew from the mystery of inspiration rather than the focus of intention. The research project showed that, after a focused series of sessions employing *Lectio Divina*, lay people will experience a deeper sense of being closer to God and a change in their approach to daily life. This is unsurprising. The more we focus on and abide in God, the more we will “be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8: 29). We are both called to and formed in relationship. The more we devote ourselves to God in ordinary life, the more we live and move and have our being in Her.

Over the years, a model of spiritual formation grew out of my life experience and seminary formation at Tyndale University. I have learned to embrace all parts of my life. Whether I wish I had done them or not, the things I have done have become my unique story and it is my life that speaks to others. The seed God planted in my life has largely grown without my conscious attention. From my spiritual awakening, through involvement in Twelve Step

groups and introduction to spiritual formation especially spiritual direction and *Lectio Divina*, the divine weaver was creating something which now makes sense to me. I have come to have a deeper appreciation and understanding of the place of spiritual disciplines in my life as well as the lives of others.

I have a deeper respect for the disciplines not only as a personal and communal practice but as a part of loving God. “A spiritual discipline is something we offer to God...to be used for God’s purposes in our lives...control is yielded to God” (Mulholland 2000, 114). The use of *Lectio Divina* had elements of group spiritual direction and the theology of group spiritual direction matches that of A.A. They are places of transformation, a spiritual community that “makes real our seeking and it supports us in the seeking” (Dougherty 1995, 14). And in both cases, it is the sanctifying love of the Holy Spirit of God who is the agent of change. In both A.A. and group spiritual direction there is an experience of a caring, loving community, a union of souls without losing the individual. The members grow together with everyone hearing the message together and sharing it with one another. We enter A.A. because we seek healing of ourselves. And in both A.A. and the local congregation, there is still something that clings to the self. However, the Christian community “is characterized by a single-mindedness, a love of God that encompasses and directs our love of others” (Dougherty 1995, 14).

As I continue to journey with others rather than interpretively assessing their dominant traditions, or perhaps in addition, I will add the use of Gary Thomas’ (2010) *Sacred Pathways* in discerning another soul’s path to God.

Knowing my reductionist and apophatic bias, I will also withhold my assessment of others until I know their stage of the journey better. I may also do some work as a director to match Thomas' pathways with the spiritual disciplines Adele Calhoun enumerated in her handbook. It is my intention to learn other spiritual director's practices so that I can refer where a match between a seeker's stage of their journey and a director's process is likely. I further intend to research adult learning styles which would me allow to shape tools during *Lectio Divina*. Apart from the use of music this is something I have not explored other than displaying a painting of Jesus at table with the disciples at Emmaus as I read during the final group session. Of course, these are merely my plans. I have also been approached to consider a few opportunities that I am taking under consideration. These include leading small groups in other cities, guest speaker at a Christian University in Western Canada and the outrageous suggestion that I write a book. Only through solitude and prayer will I discern where my ministry in consolation with God will live.

The DMin program was a surprise. It has both given me life and saved my life. It has deepened my faith and been my companion through illness and recovery and it has opened my eyes to the saints living and preceding, those recondite and those profound in the living simplicity of everyday life. I am no longer who I was, yet I have become more of who I am. The seed rooted in good soil is becoming fruitful. While I applied for entry to the DMin program with the vow that I wanted to give back what I had so generously been given, I really did it for me. Taking courses had become my avenue to spiritual formation for the

preceding nine years. Courses shaped my thinking about God, let me play out my doubts and fears and deepened my understanding. Most importantly, study did not dampen my hunger for God. My hodgepodge course selection was based on what interested me rather than an end goal. And when I saw the ad for continued studies in Spiritual Formation, I wanted it. I wanted it to combat the brain fog that chemotherapy had wrought. I wanted it to fill the crater formed in my identity by my inability to work. And despite my selfish desire, God led me on a path to do precisely what I had professed as my aspiration, to give to others. “DMin students are ambassadors of God and servants of the gospel of Christ. The gospel calls you to a virtuous life of kindness, compassion, generosity, peace, joy, faithfulness, holiness... and above all else, love” (Sensing 2011, 31). This is what I wanted for myself and for others.

In my studies I was able to work out my past and understand it in a new light. I was able to dig into concepts my spiritual director had introduced to me but not really pursued such as true self, rule of life, Ignatian contemplation, and indeed the practice of spiritual direction. I had no expected outcome for my studies because I had no express path and no express ministry. A quarter of the way through the program, I had the experience of utter weakness which occasioned a profound experience of God. And more and more God was urging me to care for others. The seed which He had planted before my birth began to grow and break through into the surface of my life. “He made us holy by infusing his sacred self into us. We are his beloved. This is our truest identity” (Smith, J. B. 2013, 133).

The question that people have been asking throughout my life including entry into and near completion of the DMin has been, “what are you going to do?” The answer is whatever God is drawing me towards as I continue becoming my true self. The result of my unforeseen entry into training as a spiritual director was the belief that for the first time in many years I felt as if I had a ministry. The challenge remains to filter out my biases, my preconceptions, my intuitive conclusions and listen without judgement. The antidote is silence and solitude.

My life should teach me never to begin an answer with “one thing I am sure of...” However, I am sure that I am not someone who is an initial catalyst to faith in Christ. I do not have the gift of evangelism. Still, if the best sermon is living out a good example, I shall continue to Confess, Abide and Give. I believe my future holds a similar rhythm to the last twelve years of my working career, where I saw three distinct movements. The first was as a “missionary” to those in a firm I had previously worked at to lead them to a new model of serving their clients. Busy doing, I took courses, went to seminars, and criss-crossed the country trying to change how people thought. Headstrong and full of ideas, I left to form an entirely new platform with the intention of attracting people from other firms. While the platform was built, no one came. The gambit had failed, and I left the firm over the tensions I had observed. The next phase was with a different firm where the model was already in place but in disrepute. Over time, my doing moved into being as I decided to disciple the willing rather than fight the battle of the entrenched mindset. I quickly realized that a renewal was needed and so I created a project that had an even better and more flexible model of client service

which, largely after my departure, has delivered unprecedented results. In this final phase I was becoming who God intended me to be in the workplace, a pastor to others with a clear-eyed vision that listening not telling was the way to best serve both internal and external clients. Therein lays the parallel with how to serve others. It is to the willing that I find the greatest confluence of energy and desire.

Today, I do not necessarily see my calling to be a formal director with a bustling practice but to be present in every conversation. And in my good moments, I find myself hearing a still call to slow down, listen to what this person is saying. It is a call to hear as the Holy Spirit hears, with the ears of love, the heart of compassion, the spirit of love, the gift of understanding and the fruit of patience. Letting silence be the friend who turns back the temporal urgency which separates us from God. It is simply turning off the clock and being present, just as the radiation oncologist was when he waited at my bedside. He eliminated hurry. To be sure, there are still times of performance anxiety. But more and more, I turn to the presence of God among us as the presence of peace quite distinct from the “foxhole” prayer I would lob up prior to entering a business meeting where anxiety was gripping me. All ground is holy ground everything is grace, and my calling is to welcome the person in front of me with the heart of Christ. Four years ago, a dear friend and my former Pastor introduced me to his father, a Roman Catholic, as his priest. That is who I have become, a priest in the priesthood of all believers who continues to seek God, loving and encouraging others in their journey, deepening our trust in and love for God secure in the belief of whose we

are as the determinant of who we are. It is the gift of Jesus who “became one of us to reconcile us to God, to remind us that Love itself has created us and calls us home” (Smith, J. B. 2013, 133).

Relationship is improved by listening. Early in my marriage, I told a friend that my failure in my first marriage was that I talked about my wife rather than to her and I would not repeat that mistake. What I have learned however, is that what matters is listening not talking, listening to the other without an agenda or a solution therein “creating and protecting a space where everyone’s soul can feel safe” (Palmer 2004,77). It is also thus with our relationship with God. *Lectio Divina*, silence and solitude, retreats, contemplative prayer, and spiritual direction are all about listening. I share my experience with directees of the tool of writing out my woes, my anger, my desolation until the whirling thoughts stop because they are all captured. And eventually, I am left only with God in hope, in trust, and in love.

As the bride of Christ, we are the called ones. While there is a movement from courting to marriage in the end, like all good marriage, the bride and groom continue the work of loving one another. The nature of their love together changes. It moves from desire (eros) through affection (storge) then friendship (phileo) to everlasting unconditional love (agape). We learn to move as the bride into the agape of the groom leaving behind the false self and embracing our true identity as little Christs. Ultimately, “Love alone is credible... believe that there is such a thing as love, absolute love, and that there is nothing higher or greater than

it; to believe... against every “rational” concept of God” (von Balthasar 2004, 101-102). Love deepens. Love matures. And Love does not stand still.

All spiritual exercises help us to empty ourselves so that we can make space for God to be filled more completely by God. It is in the light that seeds grow.

And it is in the light of love that relationship grows. “Love begets love” (Nouwen 1992, 62).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE TWELVE STEPS OF A. A.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

(Wilson and Shoemaker 1986, 59-60)

APPENDIX 2: FLYER FOR MINISTRY LEADER'S MEETING



FALL 2020

*Would you like to respond to
God's Word with your heart
and spirit,
not just your rational
cognitive and intellectual
mind?*

*Zoom group facilitation
by Bob Stiles, D.Min (Candidate)*



**7 GROUP SESSIONS
2 INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS**

Admission is free, but pre-registration
is required.



7 CONSECUTIVE WEEKS TO EXPLORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPIRITUAL MATURATION

Learn to:

- receive slow and careful reading of the text
- savour the words
- pray to God for understanding
- rest in God's presence through the scriptures
- practise
- share with each other



This group is part of Bob's fulfilment of a Doctor of Ministry degree at Tyndale Seminary.

Bob Stiles, D.Min. (Candidate)
call cell
or house
email at

APPENDIX 3: PARISH MEETINGS PRESENTATION SCRIPT

A Spiritual Adventure going more deeply into knowing God.

Join me for 7 weekly zoom meetings where we will practice a respectful slowed down method, of seeking Spiritual peace.

In this introduction to *Lectio Divina*, which means a slow and careful reading of the text, we will learn to savour the words of the bible.

Praying to God for understanding and then resting in God's presence.

“in whom we live and move and have our being.”

Ours in an incarnational faith – we both pray and act and this impacts the everyday moments of our lives with the living, present, Spirit of God.

You may experience a shift in your spiritual connection from mind to heart, as we experience the living word of God together. There will be a brief teaching each week and then we will settle into a quiet rhythm.

It will be like a retreat from daily life we pause, we are still with God and we listen.

I will also meet individually with each participant before the 7 weekly group meetings start and after they end. This can be scheduled at your convenience. The weekly meets will be held Monday evenings starting -----as soon as I get the go ahead from Tyndale Seminary. We know Him with our minds, let's experience God together with more of our total being.

APPENDIX 4 INFORMATION LETTER

Research Taking Place in group meetings between October and December 2020

INFORMATION LETTER

Researcher: Bob Stiles

Research Focus:

An Exploration of the Development of Spiritual Maturation of church members using *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina literally means divine reading. The practice of *Lectio Divina* will occur in a series of group meetings as a variation of the spiritual discipline of Bible study.

Project focus:

These meetings are part of a research project in fulfillment of a Doctor of Ministry program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale Seminary. The purpose of this project study is to introduce *Lectio Divina* as a form of Bible Meditation.

Lectio began as a Monastic practice in the sixth century. At that time, Christianity was very much an oral tradition of sharing and remembering Scripture. *Lectio Divina* is a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the text (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 18).

This slow dwelling is a way of “responding to God’s Word with your heart and spirit, not just your rational, cognitive and intellectual prowess” (Calhoun 2015, 187).

This is not a course. There are no “right” answers. It is an opportunity to experience God in the Scriptures in a different way.

Proposed procedure:

I will do a pre-research background interview with each participant in the study prior to the group sessions. The aim will be to get a sense of your spiritual journey and influences. The interview will take about 1 hour.

We will **meet for seven consecutive weeks** while I would like to meet in person, the presence of Covid-19 means that we will do this over Zoom.

Each weekly meeting will take up to 90 minutes

Week 1 will be an **Introduction** to *Lectio Divina* (a slow and careful reading of the text).

Week 2 will focus on **Savouring** the words (*Meditatio*).

Week 3 focuses on **Praying** to God for understanding (*Oratio*).

Week 4 will focus on **Resting** in God’s presence through the Scripture (*Contemplatio*).

Week 5 focuses on **Embodiment**- how the living Word informs the everyday moments of our lives (*Incarnatio*).

Week 6 will focus on **Reinforcement** (*Augeo*).

Week 7 will begin with *Lectio Divina* and then focus on **Sharing** what each person experienced over the time spent together.

After the group sessions, I will do concluding research interviews with each participant to complete the process. The interview will take about 1 hour.

Participants:

I intend to have 8-10 members of the Meeting House participate. While there are no specific requirements, I expect their ages to range from 25 to 70(plus). They will be included regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic background.

Participation is completely voluntary and everyone will be able to withdraw from the study at any time they may choose.

In the event of withdrawing from the study, they can elect to continue in the group without staying in the research project.

Benefits:

Each week will be a mini-retreat from the structure and pressures of daily life. The participants will experience Scripture as God's "love letter" to us.

Participants will experience a contemplative encounter of spiritual formation through a deeper, more varied and reflective experience of scripture.

In participating in and reflecting on the experience each week, participants will encounter God in a new way. They will experience Peace and Shalom, the Blessing of God.

It is likely that the shared experience will create a deeper connection with the members of the group.

Risks:

The researcher acknowledges "the possibility of duality in the role of group leader and research facilitator which raises the potential for undue influence. I pledge to always seek the participant's best interests" (Chan 2021, 166).

“Should participants wish to withdraw at any point, there will be no negative consequences regarding our relationship” (Chan 2021, 166).

While participants will not be directly induced to disclose intimate or sensitive information, it is the nature of spiritual formation that participants reveal deeper issues and concerns in their lives. Should participants experience psychological or emotional discomfort, this will not be probed in a group meeting.

However the group has to be a safe experience for each member so we will have a set of Guiding Principles designed to foster a community of trust. These will be read at each session:

Respect for one another.

Attentive listening to others quieting internal dialogue.

No crosstalk; let someone’s story speak for itself rather than commenting on it;

Do not fix another; refrain from the natural tendency to offer solutions to others’ issues.

Maintain Confidentiality outside the group concerning what others have said.

Bearing in mind The Meeting House's strong policy of inclusion and peacemaking:

Any racist or bullying remarks will not be tolerated.

Such remarks will be called out with the promise of being dropped from the study if there is a second violation.

“Otherwise, there are no known direct or undue risks associated with participating in this study” (Chan 2021, 166).

Confidentiality:

Participants will be assigned a code number, such as LDARP 01, and their identifying information as well as responses will be held in a password protected file. They will not be identified by name. Only the code number will be used for data analysis. An interpretative summary of data will be submitted to a group of three faculty members who will assess the project. All written records will be held in a locked filing cabinet.

Recordings will not be used unless consented to by all group members. If video or audio recordings are used, they will be in a password protected file.

Paper research records will be shredded by a confidential professional shredding service one year after the study concludes.

Within three years after the study, a similar credentialed service provider will be used for destruction of electronic and audio/video recordings if the latter are made.

Despite group members being referred to by number in the final report, specific comments may be attributed to them by code number, gender and decade of age (e. g. F- 30's). It is possible that the Pastor could interpolate who said these comments knowing who he suggested for the study.

While that is unlikely to happen, the Pastor will be asked not to approach a person or to speculate on who made various comments.

Any personal journals will be solely for the participants' purposes. They will not be reviewed or collected by the researcher.

The total anonymity of participants **WILL NOT BE VIOLATED BY THE RESEARCHER.**

However, it is contingent on each participant not to disclose what is said by other participants.

The only exception to disclosure of a participant's identity would be the researcher's professional duty to report if someone indicates they may harm themselves or others.

Publication:

Upon completion, the findings of the study will be available to all participant who request to see it.

At the completion of the Doctor of Ministry program, the researcher will publish the report as part of a broader portfolio of work. The portfolios will be placed in the Tyndale library. No other publication of the research data or related studies are planned at this time.

I expect the research project is finish by the end of January 2021. It will be handed in to the professor in April, 2021.

As part of the fulfilment of the Doctor of Ministry requirements, there will also be a presentation of the report and its findings later in 2021. This will be attended by two or more observers from the faculty at Tyndale Seminary, and members of the general public. Pastoral leaders from The Meeting House will also be invited to attend.

Once again, the identity of participants will be protected. Participants will however be welcome to attend if they wish to observe the presentation.

Accountability:

The project will be reviewed by the Tyndale Research Ethics Board before it may begin. Tyndale Seminary requires all research to conform to its Research Ethics Policy Manual. Also, the project must follow the Canadian research ethical guidelines stipulated in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

The project is also under the direct supervision of Doctor of Ministry faculty members at Tyndale. These include the Project-Thesis professor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Interim Advisor Dr. Narry Santos, and the faculty advisor for spiritual formation, Dr. David Sherbino.

Next Steps:

If you have any questions at all, please contact me by phone at 416-291-1111 or email mark.chapman@tyndale.ca

You may also contact the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board (TREB) by email at _____ if you have any concerns or questions about the ethical nature of this study.

Please contact me if you are willing to participate in this research study. Once the TREB has approved the research project, I will send you a consent form for your review and signature.

Peace be with you,

Bob Stiles, MTS, Doctor of Ministry (Candidate)

Project Researcher

Some elements of structure and terminology were adapted from (Chan 2021, 165-167).

APPENDIX 5: CONSENT FORM

An Exploration of the Development of Spiritual Maturation Using *Lectio Divina*

Consent Form

I understand that:

- 1) These meetings are part of a research project in fulfillment of a Doctor of Ministry program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale Seminary. The purpose of this project is to introduce *Lectio Divina* as a form of Bible Meditation.
- 2) Reports that result from these meetings will be analyzed and reported back to the course director. This analysis will also be presented at a public seminar and distributed as a part of a published research portfolio available to other researchers subscribing to the Theological Research Exchange Network.
- 3) My participation is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from this project at any time for any reason by notifying Bob Stiles the researcher who is conducting the meetings.
- 4) I understand that there are no known risks in participating in this project.
- 5) Only the researcher will know my name. My name will not be used in any public presentation of this research. All information given, conversations recorded, and comments made will only be communicated publicly as aggregate data. While individual comments may be attributed to someone identified by a numeric code, no individuals will be identified unless specific permission to do so is given.
- 6) All documents or files related to this research will be stored in a locked cabinet or a password protected computer.
- 7) I understand that the researcher cannot guarantee that other meeting participants will keep what I say confidential.

- 8) I Consent _____ or DO NOT Consent _____ to recordings of the group meetings.
- 9) In rare cases it may not be possible to ensure confidentiality because of mandatory reporting laws regarding harm to oneself or others.
- 10) Permission to the researcher to analyze and report on these data does not waive any legal rights.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please direct any questions related to this project to:

Bob Stiles, D.Min. (Candidate) (_____) or,

Dr. Narry Santos, Interim Instructor
prior to December 31st, _____ or,

Dr. Mark Chapman, Course Director
after December 31, 2020.

APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PRIOR TO THE 7 SESSIONS ON *LECTIO DIVINA*:

1. Tell me about your tradition/denomination in your young formative years.
2. How did you view God then?
3. How did you communicate with God then?
4. When did you come to The Meeting House?
5. What brought you to The Meeting House?
6. How long have you been in a Home Church?
7. How has it shaped your experience with God?
(Follow-up: How do you communicate with God now?)
8. What are your prayer practices? (Intent is to determine whether they limit themselves to Bible study, petitionary and intercessory prayer.)
9. How would you describe your relationship with God at this juncture of your faith journey?
(Follow-up: Who is God for you today?
How are you aware of God in daily life?)
10. Finally, do you have any objection to the Pastor participating in these sessions?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AFTER THE 7 SESSIONS ON
LECTIO DIVINA:

1. What would you like to share about your experience of *Lectio Divina* over the past 7 weeks?

2. Before our 7-week series started, you described your relationship with God as.....

3. Would you describe it the same way now, or has it changed?

(Follow-up, IF Yes: What change or changes have you experienced?)

4. Would you say that you are closer to God today, further away, or about the same?

(Follow-up: How are you closer to God today? (Or in what sense are you closer to God today?) Or how farther are you from God today? (Or in what sense are you farther from God today?).

Who is God for you today?)

5. Have you noticed any change in your daily life over the past weeks?

(Follow-up, IF Yes: What specific changes have you noticed?

What change or changes have you noticed in how communicate with God?

What change or changes have you noticed in your prayer practices?

How are you aware of God in daily life? (Watching for any changes in how she/he spends their time and any new spiritual practices)

6. Did you use the weekly reflection questions?

APPENDIX 7: OUTLINE OF *LECTIO* SESSIONS

Each session lasted 90 minutes. Here was the basic Pattern for each Session:

1. Begin with a centering exercise (3 Minutes)
2. Ice Breaker Question to build community and trust (5-10 Minutes)
3. Explanation of the topic covered that week (5 Minutes)
4. Group Guidelines read aloud by a different participant each week
(3 Minutes)
5. Taizé Selection (3-4 minutes)
6. Prayer (1 Minute)
7. 4 readings of the passage and reflections by those who choose to speak
(60 minutes)
8. Closing prayer (1 Minute)

KEY COMPONENTS EACH WEEK

WEEK 1:

Ice-breaker Question: Why do you live here?

Taizé: The Lord is found in the sound of sheer silence

Teaching: *Lectio*: Introduction to Holy Reading

Scripture: Luke 18: 31-43. What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Place in the Model: CONFESS (Step 10)

WEEK 2:

Ice-breaker Question: “What has been your favourite road trip or vacation? What made it special?” (Signupgenius, October 2018).

Taizé: Bless the Lord my soul and Bless God’s Holy Name

Teaching: Lectio: *Meditatio*: Savouring the words

Scripture: John 8: 1-11. Who are your accusers?

Place in the Model: CONFESS (Step 10)

WEEK 3:

Ice-breaker Question: “Who has been a spiritual hero in your life? How is she or he a hero to you?” (Signupgenius, October 2018).

Taizé: Holy Spirit Come to us

Teaching: *Oratio*: Praying to God for understanding

Scripture: Mark 10:17-22. What riches must you give up?

Place in the Model: CONFESS (Step 10)

WEEK 4:

Ice-breaker Question: “Aside from the Bible, what book or story has had the biggest impact on you?” (Signupgenius, October 2018).

Taizé: Jesus, your light is shining within us

Teaching: *Contemplatio*: Resting in God’s presence through the Scripture

Scripture: John 15: 1-9. Where do you “abide”?

Place in the Model: ABIDE (Step 11)

WEEK 5:

Ice-breaker Question: “If you could ask Jesus to change one problem in the world today, which problem would you pick?” (Signupgenius, October 2018).

Taizé: O Lord hear my prayer

Teaching: *Incarnatio*: Embodiment- how the living Word informs the everyday moments of our lives.

Scripture: Luke 10: 38-42. Mary and Martha: What is “the better part?”

Place in the Model: ABIDE (Step 11)

WEEK 6:

Ice-breaker Question: “When was a time when someone showed you deep compassion/love like Jesus?” (Signupgenius, October 2018). Tell us what they did and how it affected you.

Taizé: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Teaching *Augeo*: Reinforcing.

Scripture: John 20: 19-29. “My Lord and My God!”

Place in the Model: ABIDE (Step 11)

WEEK 7:

Ice-breaker Question: “What is a memorable quote or scripture verse that has changed you?” (Signupgenius, October 2018).

Taizé: The Kingdom of God is justice and peace

Reflection Sharing and Closure: Participant Sharing what they experienced over the time spent together.

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35. Were not our hearts burning?

Place in the Model: GIVE (Step 12).

APPENDIX 8: GROUP GUIDELINES

Here is a set of Group Guidelines, Operating Principles designed to foster a community of trust (these will be read each week):

1. Each member commits verbally to the entire group to maintain absolute confidentiality outside the group concerning what others have said. In this way we have Respect for one another; and Trust one another “This trust is not dependent upon similar personalities, mutual interests or common experiences; rather it is grounded in a trust of God’s desire for each participant individually as well as the group as a whole” (Dougherty 1995, 38).
2. We practice attentive listening quieting our own internal dialogue knowing that God is for us. He longs for us to draw near. We can trust Him with our stories.
3. Disclose only what you feel comfortable sharing. Others should not engage in cross-talk, which is, commenting on what another has shared. Simply let someone’s story speak for itself rather than commenting on it.
4. Encourage a spirit of Discovery. Resist the impulse to “fix” others by offering suggestions. Trust the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in their lives through your loving presence.
5. Remember, no matter how difficult someone’s story is, the invitation from Christ in the gospel is to find our well-being in Him (Plass and Cofield 2014, 182). Refrain from the natural tendency to offer solutions.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, Eliot. 1991. *Sick and Tired of Being Fat: A Man's Struggle to Be O.K.* Center City, MN: Hazelden.
- The American Heritage Dictionary. Accessed May 1, 2021.
<https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=Transformation+&submit.x=51&submit.y=19>
- B. Dick. 1998. *The Oxford Group & Alcoholics Anonymous: A Design for Living that Works.* Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, Inc.
- Baker, John. 1998. *Celebrate Recovery: Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory (Participant's Guide 2).* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Barry, William A. 2001. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.* Chicago, IL: Loyola Press.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. 2010. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Bloesch, Donald G. 2006. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology: Two Volumes in One.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Boa, Kenneth. 2001. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Bouteneff, Vera, trans. 1998. *Father Arseny 1893 – 1973" Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father.* Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Bramer, Paul. 2015. "Spiritual Autobiography: The Ways of the Spirit in a Life." Lecture, Tyndale Seminary, at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre Mississauga, ON, February 23-27.
- Brother Lawrence 1982. *the practice of the presence OF GOD.* New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.
- Buker, Bill. 2003. "Spiritual Development and the Epistemology of Systems Theory," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (June 2003).
- The Cabri History Book Committee, 1984. *Cabri Through the Years: Cabri and District.* Steinbach, MB: Printed by Derksen Printers (1982) Ltd.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. 2015. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Chan, Maria Concepcion. 2021. "Trinitarian Spiritual Formation: Spiritual Direction and Supervision of Spiritual Directors Within the Fullness of Trinitarian Life." Doctor of Ministry Research Portfolio, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Theological Research Exchange Network.

- Chan, Simon. 1998. *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press.
- Chatterjee, Rangan, Feel Better Live More Podcast, Episode 169, featuring Dr. Gabor Maté, March 30, 2021. Accessed September 13, 2021. <https://podcasts.apple.com/ph/podcast/169-dr-gabor-mat%C3%A9-on-why-we-are-all-addicts/id1333552422?i=1000515090871>
- Coan, James A., Schaefer, Hillary S., and Davidson, Richard J. 2006. "Lending a Hand: Social Regulation of the Neural Response to Threat," *Psychological Science* Volume 17, Number 12: 1032-1039.
- Colson, Charles W. 1977. *Born Again*. Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books.
- Robert Crais, Robert. 2003. *The Last Detective*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Davis, Alf. 2012. "Comparrognance," *LoveHealsTV Blog*, March 31 2012. Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://lovehealstv.com/comparrognance/>
- Davis, Dawn. 2017. "Developing Intimacy with God in an Anglican Context." Doctor of Ministry Research Portfolio, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Theological Research Exchange Network.
- Demarest, Bruce. 2010. "The Trinity as Foundation for Spiritual Formation." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 225-246. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- De Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. 1962 *The Little Prince*. Translated by Katherine Woods. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Dobson, James. 1977. *What Wives Wish their Husbands Knew about Women*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Dougherty, Rose Mary. 1995. *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Duhigg, Charles. 2012. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. Toronto, ON: Doubleday Canada.
- Dungy, Tony with Whitaker, Nathan. 2007. *Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices & Priorities of a Winning Life*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, INC.
- Flanagin, Jake. 2014. "The Surprising Failures of 12 Steps: How a pseudoscientific, religious organization birthed the most trusted method of addiction treatment." *The Atlantic*, March 25. accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/the-surprising-failures-of-12-steps/284616/>
- Foster, David. 2005. *Reading with God: Lectio Divina*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Foster, Richard J. and Beebe, Gayle D. 2009. *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

- Foster, Richard J. 1992. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- _____. 1998. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York: NY, Harper San Francisco.
- _____. 1998 [a]. *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. New York, NY: Harper One.
- Frakt, Austin and Carroll, Aaron E. (2020). "Alcoholics Anonymous vs. Other Approaches: The Evidence Is Now In –." *The New York Times*, March 11. accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/upshot/alcoholics-anonymous-new-evidence.html?auth=link-dismiss-google1tap&referringSource=articleShare>
- Hagberg, Janet O. 2010. "Baseball." Accessed November 1, 2021. <http://www.janethagberg.com/baseball.html>
- Hagberg, Janet O. and Guelich, Robert A. 2005. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*. Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company.
- Haycraft, Barbara. 2018. "Nurturing Spirituality: A Lifestyle of Mentoring, Discipleship and Spiritual Direction." Lecture, Tyndale Seminary, at Queen of Apostles, Mississauga, ON, February 25, 2018.
- Hawkins, Greg L., Parkinson, Cally, Arnson, Eric. 2007. *Reveal: Where are You?* Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources.
- Henley, Don, Frey, Glenn and Felder, Don. 1976. "Hotel California," track 1 on *Hotel California*. Recorded March-October 1976. Asylum Records 7E-1084, 33 1/3 rpm.
- Howard, Evan B. 2008. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress.
- Jesuits in Britain. 2021. "Pray As You Go." Accessed June 19, 2020. <https://pray-as-you-go.org/pdf/1382>
- _____. 2020. "Pray As You Go." Modified daily. Accessed December 19, 2020. <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>
- Johnson, Sue. 2008. *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Jones, Tony. 2006. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Jung, C.G. 1973. and R. F. C. HULL. *C.G. Jung Letters, Volume 1*, edited by Gerhard Adler, Aniela Jaffé, and ANIELA JAFFÉ. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nxcw4h.6>.
- Kay, Greg. 2012. "The Sound of Sheer Silence," track 11 on *Songs of the Gathering; Volume IX*. <http://songsofthegathering.ca/compositions>

- Keating, Thomas. 1999. *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Keller, Helen. 1904. *The Story of My Life*. New York, NY: Page/
- Keller, Timothy. 2013. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, New York, NY: Penguin.
- Kelly, Thomas R. 1992. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York, NY: Harper One.
- Kierkegaard, Søren, Bruce H. Kirmmse, K. Brian Söderquist, Niels Jørgen Cappelorn, Alastair Hannay, David Kangas, Vanessa Rumble, and George Pattison. 2015. *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks, Volume 2: Journals EE-KK*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,sso&db=nlebk&AN=1063832&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Lewis, C. S. 1952. *Mere Christianity*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Lewis, W.H. and Hooper, Walter, ed. 1993. *Letters of C. S. Lewis*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, Revised Harvest Edition.
- Manning, Brennan 2011. *All Is Grace*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook.
- McNeill, Donald P., Morrison, Douglas A., and Nouwen, Henri J.M. 1983. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. New York, NY: Image Books.
- Malcolm, Wanda. January 19, 2022. Email message to the author.
- Moll, Rob. 2010. *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Moschella, Mary Clark. 2008. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. 2000. *Shaped By The Word: The Power of Scripture in Formation*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books.
- _____. 2006. *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Murray, Annabelle Jane. 2021. *the exact shape of me: Cancer, Cutting Loose and other 'C' words*. Port Perry, ON: Piquant Press.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. 1981. *The Way of the Heart*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- _____. 1986. *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective*, New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday.
- _____. 1988. *Letters to Marc about Jesus: Living a Life in a Material World*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing.

- _____. 1989. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing.
- _____. 1992. *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing.
- _____. 1994 [a]. *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*, New York, NY: Crossroads Books Doubleday.
- _____. 1994. *The Return of The Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday.
- _____. 1995. *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco.
- _____. 1998. *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday.
- _____. 2001. *Finding my way Home: Pathways to Life and the Spirit*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- _____. 2009. *Home Tonight: Further Reflections on The Parable of The Prodigal Son*. Edited by Sue Mosteller. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- _____. 2010. *A Spirituality of Fundraising*. John S. Mogabgab, Series Editor. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books.
- Nouwen, Henri, J. M. with Christensen, Michael J. and Laird, Rebecca J. 2013. *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. New York, NY: Harper One.
- O'Donohue, John. 2004. *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Ortberg, John. 2014. *Soul Keeping: Caring for The Most Important Part of You*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Palmer, Parker J. 1993. *To Know as We Are Known: Education as A Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco, CA: Harper One.
- _____. 2000. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- _____. 2004. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life. Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Peterson, Eugene H. 1985. *Earth & Altar: The Community of Prayer in a Self-Bound Society*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press.
- _____. 2005. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in The Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- _____. 2006. *The Daily Message: Through the Bible in One Year*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Plass, Richard and Cofield, James. 2014. *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press.
- Pollack, Sydney, dir. 1975. *Three Days of the Condor*, Paramount Pictures.
- Reese, Randy and Loane, Robert. 2012. *Deep Mentoring*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.
- Rohr, Richard. 2011. *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*. Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media.
- _____. 2013. *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Savage, Carl and Presnell, William. 2008. *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Approach for Faith Communities*. Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute.
- Sensing, Tim. 2011. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- Sheldrake, Philip. 2013. *Spirituality: A Brief History*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Silf, Margaret. 1999. *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press.
- Signupgenius.com “50 Icebreaker Questions for Church Small Groups.” Accessed October 31, 2018. <https://www.signupgenius.com/church/church-icebreaker-questions-for-small-groups.cfm>
- Smith, James Bryan. 2009. *The Good and Beautiful GOD: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- _____. 2013. *Hidden in Christ: Living as God's Beloved*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Smith, James K. A. 2016. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Standish, N. Graham 2005. *Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose, Presence, and Power*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute.
- _____. 2014. “Listening to God: Discernment for Spiritual Formation.” Lecture, Tyndale Seminary, at St. Francis Centre, Caledon, ON, August 17-22, 2014.

- Stiles, Max and Muriel 1985, *Memoirs 1816 to 1985*. Newmarket, ON: Self-published.
- The Episcopal Church, 1979. *The Book of Common Prayer [BCP]: and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Thomas, Gary. 2010. *Sacred Pathways*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Tickle, Phyllis. 2001. *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Springtime*. New York, NY: Image Books, Doubleday.
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 2004. *Love Alone is Credible*. Translated by D. C. Schindler. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.
- Waaijman, Kees. 2002. *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters.
- Warren, Tish Harrison. 2021. *Prayer in The Night: For Those Who Work Watch or Weep*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP.
- Wehner, Peter. 2015. "Why Evangelicals Should Love the Pope." *New York Times*, April 4. Accessed April 6, 2015.
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/opinion/sunday/why-evangelicals-should-love-the-pope.html?_r=1
- Wilhoit, James C. 2018. "Engaging Scriptures: Spiritual Formation For Information & Transformation." Lecture, Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, ON, August 13, 2018.
- Wilhoit, James C., and Howard, Evan B. 2012. *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.
- Willard, Dallas. 1988. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco.
- _____. 1997. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY: Harper One.
- _____. 2012. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Wilkerson, David. 1963. *The Cross and the Switchblade*. Bernard Geis Associates.
- Wilson, Bill, and Sam Shoemaker. 1986. *Alcoholics Anonymous: Third Edition*. New York, NY: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

Wolfe, Tom. 1988. *The Bonfire of The Vanities*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Inc.