

TEL: 416.226.6620 www.tyndale.ca

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.

De Jong, Werner Herbert. "Adventures in Spiritual Formation: Exploring God's Grace, Intentional Human Response, and Growth from the Holy Spirit." D. Min., Tyndale University College & Seminary, 2017.

Tyndale University College & Seminary

Adventures in Spiritual Formation:

Exploring God's Grace, Intentional Human Response,

and Growth from the Holy Spirit

A Research Portfolio
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
Tyndale Seminary

by

Werner Herbert De Jong
Toronto, Canada

June 2017

ABSTRACT

In this research portfolio, the author explored spiritual formation as an ongoing, adventurous, individual and communal journey of becoming more like Jesus. The key question the research addressed was how Jesus' followers can make progress on this journey, with an emphasis both on God's provision and human responsibility. The author examined the question through three separate yet related projects: the author's spiritual autobiography, which narrates a quest for God through a search for identity and love; the author's articulation of his own philosophy of spiritual formation, viewed through the lens of Anabaptism, which describes the theology, goals, means, and methods of spiritual formation; and a research project into mutual accountability, which the author facilitated with a small group at his church. The conclusions are that the journey of spiritual formation is initiated and supported by God's grace, with which Jesus' followers are called to cooperate by faith (through receiving their identity as God's beloved children, through participating in community, through practicing spiritual disciplines, and through participating in God's reconciling mission), upon which the Holy Spirit blesses Jesus' followers with growth into his likeness.

DEDICATION

This research portfolio is dedicated to my wife Joanne for her steadfast love and support. I would not even have begun this journey, let alone completed it, without your warm encouragement. You are a blessing to me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I offer my heartfelt thanksgiving to everyone at Holyrood Mennonite Church for your grace and patience with me during these years of study. To the members of Holyrood's discipleship circle, I am grateful for your enthusiastic participation in our action research project. Finally, to all my fellow students in Spiritual Formation Cohort 1, my journey was wonderfully enriched by traveling it together with you.

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: ORBIT: THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF	WERNER
HERBERT DE JONG	7
Early Childhood (Birth to Age 6): Losing My Centre	8
Middle Childhood (Age 7-12): Adventures in Space	
Adolescence (Age 13-19): Stars at Night	30
Early Adulthood (Age 20-32): Mission Launched	48
Middle Adulthood (Age 33-Present): Circling the Sun	67
Reflecting on the Experience of Writing my Autobiography	
CHAPTER III: A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION	96
Context and Definitions	98
Spirituality	99
Tripolar Spirituality	
Spiritual Formation	
The Theological Backdrop to Spiritual Formation	104
The Trinity Who Is	104
Shalom in God's Creation	106
Sin: Shalom is Shattered	108
Salvation: Reconciliation and the Restoration of Shalom	110
The Goal of Spiritual Formation	113
Individual Formation	116
Community Formation	119
The Kingdom of God	124
Summary: Reconciling all Things in Christ	125
The Theology of Change	126
The Process of Change	
Human Nature: What is Being Changed	131
Everyday Life: The Context which Stimulates Change	134
God's Initiative in our Lives: The Invitation to Change	137
Grace: God's Power for Change	139
Faith: Cooperating with Grace	
Faith as Intentional Effort	143
Faith as Repentance	
Faith as Receiving a New Identity	145

The Holy Spirit: The Primary Agent of Change	149
Regeneration	
Resurrection Life	153
The Result of Change	155
The Means of Spiritual Formation	
Anabaptist Practices	158
Discipleship	160
Community	172
Reconciling Mission	183
Spiritual Disciplines	192
Prayer	196
Scripture Reading	199
Lectio Divina	203
Solitude	206
Fasting	209
Spiritual Formation Methods	211
Discipleship Circles	
Transformative Preaching and Teaching	215
Final Words	220
DISCIPLESHIP Introduction	
Context	
Models	
Background from Theology, Scripture and History	
Research Resources	
Methodology and Methods	
Field	
Scope	239
Methodology	
Methods	242
Ethics in Ministry-Based Research	251
Findings, Interpretation and Outcomes	253
Findings	253
Interpretation	271
Outcomes	285
Conclusion	287
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION	291
APPENDICES	297
Appendix 1: Discipleship Circle Covenant	297
Appendix 2: Questionnaire	
Appendix 3: Focus Group Interview Ouestions	300

Appendix 4: Focus Group Ground Rules and Procedure	301
Appendix 5: Protocol for Recorder of Focus Groups	302
Appendix 6: Protocol for Observer of Participant Observation	303
Appendix 7: Discipleship Circle Liturgy	304
Appendix 8: Mutual Accountability Chart	
Appendix 9: Information Letter for Research into Mutual Accountability.	309
Appendix 10: Research Study Consent Form	312
Appendix 11: Key for Codes in Tables which need Defining	313
REFERENCE LIST	318

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Information	. 238
Table 2. Phases and Timetable	. 250
Table 3. Pre-Intervention Questionnaire: How do you live out your faith as a	
follower of Jesus in your everyday life?	. 254
Table 4. Post-Intervention Questionnaire: How do you live out your faith as	
a follower of Jesus in your everyday life?	. 254
Table 5. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 1: What joys do you	
experience as you follow Jesus?	. 258
Table 6. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 1: What joys do you	
experience as you follow Jesus?	. 258
Table 7. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 2: What challenges do you	
face as you follow Jesus?	. 259
Table 8. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 2: What challenges do	
you face as you follow Jesus?	. 259
Table 9. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 3: How does the church	
support you as you follow Jesus?	. 260
Table 10. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 3: How does the church	
support you as you follow Jesus?	. 260
Table 11. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 4: What has helped you	
to grow as a follower of Jesus?	. 261
Table 12. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 4: What has helped you	
to grow as a follower of Jesus?	. 261
Table 13. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 5: How would you like to	
grow further as a follower of Jesus?	. 263
Table 14. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 5: How would you like	
to grow further as a follower of Jesus?	. 263
Table 15. Six Lenses of Analysis for Accountability Meetings	. 264

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Adventure of Spiritual Formation.	3
Figure 2. The Three-Fold Goal of Spiritual Formation.	114
Figure 3. Stages in the Spiritual Formation Process.	
Figure 4. Geared for Growth	273

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

This research portfolio describes the journey of spiritual formation as an adventure, even as my three-year journey in Tyndale Seminary's Doctor of Ministry degree in Spiritual Formation has been an adventure. As in all good adventures, there have been challenges to meet, highs and lows in striving to achieve them, and personal growth as a result of it. My hope is that this portfolio will serve both as an artefact to highlight the lessons that I have learned along the way, as well as a map to guide those interested in the insights Anabaptism can teach about the pathways of spiritual growth. As I complete this program, I have served as a Mennonite pastor for almost twenty years, the last eleven with Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

There are three overarching goals in Tyndale's Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation degree: to nurture personal spiritual growth, to explore the academic field of spirituality, and to integrate both of these with the actual practice of ministry (Doctor of Ministry Handbook Part 1 2016, 47-48). At the heart of the program are three research projects. One was written each year, during three consecutive years. Together they comprise the backbone of this portfolio: my spiritual autobiography, my personal philosophy of ministry, and

an action research project conducted with the members of the discipleship circle (a small group with a discipleship emphasis) at Holyrood.

My spiritual autobiography, found in chapter 2, tells the story of my search for identity and love amidst struggles with self-condemnation. It celebrates God's grace which sustained me all along my winding path, both at those times when I felt lost and alone, and at other times when I, surprisingly, discovered God right beside me on the road.

My philosophy of ministry, found in chapter 3, represents my effort to outline a comprehensive, academic understanding of the various elements which compose the journey of spiritual formation, including the theology, goals, and means of formation, together with an examination of some methods to employ in my own context at Holyrood. In essence, this chapter is the fruit of my personal wrestling with the question, "In light of my current studies, and life experiences, how do I understand my own approach to ministry?" I was glad for the chance to explore this through the lens of Anabaptism because it enabled me to mine deeper the veins of spiritual wisdom of my own faith tradition, a tradition which I did not previously have occasion to study formally in an academic setting (since my prior seminary training was at a Baptist school).

The action research project, found in chapter 4, realized the opportunity to put theory into practice. It investigated the question of how mutual accountability to a mutually agreed upon covenant, amongst a group of fellow disciples, might help to promote growth, or spur progress, on our common journey of following Jesus.

There are three common threads weaved in and out of each of these projects, and identifying them helps to integrate this portfolio into a more coherent whole. These three themes, which correspond to the members of the Trinity, include the grace of God, our intentionality in following Jesus, and growth from the Holy Spirit. Broadly speaking, these themes designate the key elements in the journey of spiritual formation: God's grace provides both the invitation and the strength for the journey, which we engage as we purposely choose to follow Jesus, upon which, over time and at the Holy Spirit's discretion, the Holy Spirit blesses us with growth.

The relationship between these themes is visualized in the following image:

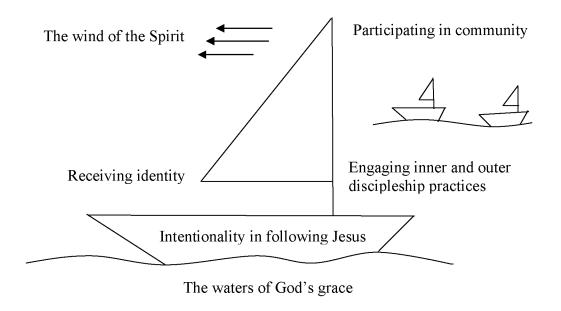


Figure 1. The Adventure of Spiritual Formation.

As the picture indicates, the waters of God's grace support us and carry us along as we intentionally respond to the invitation to follow Jesus. The three corners of

the triangular sail signify how the shape of our intentionality is made concrete: by receiving our God-given identity in Christ, by participating in community with fellow followers of Jesus, and by engaging in the inner and outer practices of discipleship. (The inner practices are characterized by spiritual disciplines like prayer and engaging Scripture, while the outer practices are characterized by actions like loving our neighbours and participating in God's reconciling mission). As we are enabled by Jesus' faithfulness to cooperate with God's supporting grace, we unfurl our sail to receive the transforming wind of the Spirit, who alone can bring about, in, and among us the desired spiritual formation, which in this portfolio is defined as growth into the likeness of Jesus, both as individuals and as communities. The two smaller boats in the background represent the fact that the journey of spiritual formation is not an individual but a corporate one. Together we support one another as we follow Jesus, and together we are changed.

These themes are covered in a personal way in my autobiography. Even as sailboats do not travel in a straight line, but tack with the wind, so too the journey of spiritual formation is not a simple, linear process. My story demonstrates this—while God's grace has been a constant presence in my life, I was not always aware of it, nor was my willing response to God's faithfulness always steadfast. I was erratic in my intentional efforts to follow Jesus, whether I was slow to accept my identity in Christ as a beloved child who belongs to God, or whether I was hesitant to open my heart to others in community. Yet I was quicker to make use of prayer, to study the Bible, and to make myself available

for God's reconciling purposes in this world. By God's grace, I pressed on through many twists and turns, and the Holy Spirit has worked through my sometimes faltering, sometimes faithful efforts to follow Jesus, to shape me into the person I am today.

The key themes of God's grace, our intentional response, and growth through the Spirit are covered in a more detailed, academic way in my philosophy of ministry. There I examine them biblically and theologically, particularly from an Anabaptist perspective. The themes form the core of figure 3 in chapter 3, which pictures a diagram I developed to help show the relationship between the various components in the spiritual formation process. Briefly, this figure portrays spiritual formation as an ongoing process which occurs in everyday life, as God works through our daily circumstances to invite us to ever deeper transformation. Further, God's grace is the indispensable gift to support all of our efforts in spiritual formation, as we very intentionally follow Jesus in faith, and depend on the Holy Spirit to work through us and to mature us.

The research project into mutual accountability examined the themes in the practice of ministry. As a group, the members of Holyrood's discipleship circle agreed to hold one another accountable to pray daily, to engage the Bible daily, and to seek to witness daily in some way to God's love, which together comprise elements of both the inner and outer practices of discipleship. The results of the research indicated the members' perception that purposefully engaging in mutual accountability, which can be considered a corporate means of grace, strengthened our intentions to practice our faith, reinforced our identity as

followers of Jesus, and enabled us to make a measure of progress on our journey of discipleship.

Ultimately, on account of God's grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit, there is every incentive for us to engage the journey of spiritual formation. We do not need to be afraid to commit ourselves to the transforming adventure of following Jesus, for God invites us to it, supplies us with all the provisions we need, and works in and through us by the Holy Spirit. God also gives us the gift of each other, fellow pilgrims on the way, sisters and brothers in Christ, to live out the adventure together.

CHAPTER II:

ORBIT: THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WERNER HERBERT DE JONG

I find it a curious fact that every object in the universe is in orbit around another object: the moon orbits the earth, the earth and everything on it orbits the sun, and the sun orbits the galactic centre of the Milky Way. But this is only the smallest step of the great, universal ballet: the Milky Way itself is spinning in an eternal dance with Andromeda, even as these two brilliant spiral galaxies, each consisting of hundreds of billions of stars, twirl and whirl among the billions of other galaxies in the observable universe. The choreography is magnificent: there are orbits within orbits within orbits. With ceaseless energy one might suppose the universe is perpetually restless, but the centripetal attraction of the universal bodies for one another stills chaos and ushers in harmony. Everything is in constant motion, yet everything is centered.

As I consider the story of my own life, the metaphor of orbit keeps coming to mind, but with regard to my inner space, not outer space. As an introvert, I tend to process my life by what is happening inside of me, which will be reflected in this story. Our inner and outer worlds are connected, of course, but most people view their lives more through the window of one than the other. My story will open the curtains on my inner life: I've always been much more interested in

the question, "Who am I?" rather than "What do I do?," although the two cannot be easily separated. The question of identity cannot be answered apart from relationship with others, which is where the question of orbit becomes relevant.

Orbit is the story of my search for identity and love, for a centre that is firm and reliable. As I slowly discovered God's gracious presence and faithfulness, I slowly entered into the transformative journey of following Jesus. What my story writing lacks in literary skill is hopefully somewhat compensated for in my effort to tell it honestly. Yet honesty doesn't ensure strict accuracy: memory is subjective and bound by personal interpretation. But that's what makes stories interesting, to look at life through the eyes of others, as blurry or clear as their vision may be.

I have chosen to write my autobiography, viewed through the lens of my life with God, in simple chronological order. To facilitate this, I have divided my life into five time periods: early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and middle adulthood. The predominant focus on the earlier years is very much a deliberate choice, as these are the most formative ones in a person's life. To look at the man without considering the boy is like trying to understand a tree without considering its roots.

Early Childhood (Birth to Age 6): Losing My Centre

Ideally our lives orbit around relationships of mutual love, both human and divine. If moons and planets and stars have orbits, do not people as well? Should our lives not revolve around significant relationships with parents,

siblings, extended family and friends? If universal objects are attracted to one another by the force of gravity, should not people be attracted to one another by the force of love? But by the time I was six years old, old enough to retain significant memories, I felt emotionally alone in this world. I emerged as a sensitive, shy, introverted young boy who needed love and affection, but without knowing why, I did not have the understanding or the courage to entrust myself enough to others to receive it.

I was losing my trajectory, like those satellites which experience orbital decay and risk disintegration upon re-entering the earth's atmosphere. No person emerges completely unscathed from the experiences of childhood. But my life story is a testament to the mysterious grace of God who, through a love often hidden, and at rarer times gloriously visible, has refused to let me fall. Although often unknown or un-believed by me, his love has sustained me, and set my life upon surprising courses of adventure.

As a boy, I was surely never aware of my hunger to experience love deep within, or of the equally important need to give love. I could never have articulated that my life felt off kilter. I am aware that these are adult words trying to explain childhood emotions. What boy knows anything about the psychology of his inner world? Boys are concerned with playing and exploring their domain. The last thing I would have wanted as a boy was for some adult to sit me down for a talk about my feelings.

But as I look back at several childhood incidents I see certain shadows, evidence of brokenness in the most vital realm of love, wounds which have

hindered me throughout life. I do not know what caused these shadows, but like shadows cast by the sun they point to something getting in the way of the light.

How did I lose my emotional centre? I wish I knew the full answer. The ability to develop healthy, trusting, loving relationships is something that happens in our early years. I am frustrated at the fog which shrouds my memories and prevents me from understanding precisely why I did not develop a safe, strong, emotional base from which to launch my journey through life.

But surely I am overstating things. The love was there, and even though something prevented it from penetrating deep enough to convince my heart, I have always been stable of mind and temperament. This too is a gift of love, a gift for which I owe my parents a debt of gratitude. If only I could explain why my heart had such high walls around it.

But let me tell you what I do know. My life began in St. Catharines,
Ontario, on May 5, 1966; my parents were living in nearby Niagara-on-the-Lake.
My name, Werner Herbert De Jong, speaks of my cultural heritage. Werner was given to me by my German mother, Siegelinde De Jong (nee Hinz). Herbert is in honour of my maternal grandfather, Herbert Hinz. I inherited my family name from my Dutch father, Hielke De Jong. Although neither Hinz nor De Jong betrays the fact, both of my parents have a lengthy Mennonite heritage.

My father and mother (both born in 1933) were first-generation immigrants to Canada. My father arrived in 1954, a twenty-one year old graduate of horticultural college, hoping to establish his own fruit farm, or a market garden business. After being in Canada less than a year he became a Christian, and

decided to pursue biblical studies. This eventually led him to Bethel College in Kansas, where he graduated in 1959.

My mother fled Germany for Uruguay, in 1945, as a refugee of the Second World War. This war brought her happy childhood to an abrupt end. She experienced terrible things: airplanes strafing civilians with gunfire, which killed some of her classmates as they were walking home from school; the firebombing of Dresden, in which her outlying village was also hit; airplanes bombing the train that carried her family and other refugees; babies dying on the train and, with no opportunity for proper burial, being thrown out of the moving cars. As I consider my mother through adult eyes, I wonder if she has suffered to some degree from post-traumatic stress disorder.

From Uruguay, my mother eventually made her way to Bethel College in Kansas, where she graduated with a degree in home economics. Here, she and my father met and married in 1959. Soon afterward they served two years in a Mennonite colony in Bolivia with Mennonite Central Committee, where my mother taught grade eight and my father worked with the settlers in agricultural extension. Upon return to Kansas, my father graduated from Kansas State University with a Master's degree in horticulture. In 1964, they moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake where they began their family.

My siblings (brother Walter, one year older, and sister Margaret, two years younger) and I were the first members on either side of our family to be born in Canada. My mother's brother and sister followed her to the Niagara region, but shortly after our family moved away from there. As a consequence, we grew up

largely isolated from any extended family. It was not until my adult years that I realized how significant a loss this was; close relatives can help to root us in a wider sense of identity.

My parents also raised us in a culture which was foreign to them, which perhaps made it difficult for them to understand the challenges their children faced. My brother still speaks of the pain of being teased for the odd clothes that we wore as young school children. My mother, in particular, never quite seemed to fit in with mainstream Canadian society. It was not until 2006, when my then 73 year-old parents moved back to the Niagara area, that I finally saw my mother consistently happy as she was again surrounded by a familiar community of German speaking Mennonites.

From my parents, I learned that we moved a number of times when I was young, which made it difficult to put down roots, or to keep friends. In 1967, we left Niagara-on-the-Lake for Kingsville, as my father was transferred to the Canadian Canners factory there. During this year I was dedicated to the Lord at Faith Mennonite Church in nearby Leamington. But the canning plant soon closed, so my father decided to go back to school. He moved our family to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1968, and he graduated from the University of Wisconsin, in 1971, with a Ph.D. in plant breeding and genetics.

The years in Wisconsin were busy and hectic for my parents. My father poured his energy into his studies, yet still found time on many evenings to play games with his children. To help support our family, my mother babysat up to five other children in our two-bedroom apartment. My only memory of this time

was watching ants attack a wasps' nest; I believe Walter and I also caught some wasps and tried to place them in a battle arena with the ants. I have photos of my mother's parents visiting us from Germany at this time, but in my father's brief family history he writes: "This was a difficult visit for all of us. Our children did not speak German and that hurt Oma and Opa very much. They in turn blamed Siegelinde for not teaching the children their 'mother tongue'" (De Jong 2005, 79). My mother had stopped speaking German in our home because the neighbourhood children were teasing us; I believe this was because of lingering anti-German sentiment following the war.

Upon my father's graduation it was time to move again, this time to Morden, Manitoba, where my father accepted a job as a buckwheat breeder with Agriculture Canada. According to my parents, this move was very hard on me. In Wisconsin, I had made a good friend in a young boy named David Griffith, and I had to leave him behind. I wish I had some memory of him because it appears his loss was a very significant, formative event in my life. The full effect of this loss did not manifest until we moved again about one year later, in the summer of 1972, to Fredericton, New Brunswick, where my father accepted a new position with Agriculture Canada as a potato breeder. Fredericton would finally become a long-standing family home.

I have no recollection of the time leading up to the move, even though by then I was already six years old. I wonder if, in losing my friend, I had disappeared into a hole inside myself, and observed very little of the outside world. My parents tell me that I simply quit talking for an extended period of

weeks or even months. This is one of the shadows I spoke of earlier. What makes a young boy stop communicating with others? My silence became prolonged and severe enough that it troubled my parents, who asked the doctor how to manage the situation. Some healing advice finally came through a cousin of my mother, who suggested buying me a pet. So my parents gave me a guinea pig that I named Peter, and I slowly began to interact again with others. Sadly, Peter died about a year later. I can scarcely remember how I felt at his passing. As I try to remember, I conjure up the vaguest shadows of pain.

But the greatest ache of my childhood would happen about a year later, when I was seven years old, and in grade two. The incident would appear to most observers to be very trivial, even as I would assume if I had witnessed it happen to another, but there was nothing trivial about the misery I suffered.

It happened on a family vacation to visit my grandmother in the Netherlands (my father's father had died before I was born). Unlike my German grandparents, I have very fond memories of "Oma Holland," few as they are. She was gentle, kind and warm. I enjoyed being in her presence. On one particular excursion, Oma bought me a pair of wooden shoes. They were light blue in colour. The shoes also came with the bonus gift of a ball. Naturally I delighted to play with it. I remember the game I devised of throwing it onto the slanted roof of some small building in a park, and trying to catch it as it fell back to the ground. But on one occasion the ball did not bounce back to me. It rolled into the eaves trough and stuck there.

I was devastated. I desperately did not want to leave the ball behind. I believe my parents looked for a groundskeeper to bring a ladder to rescue the ball, but they could find no one. So we left. I don't know if I have ever since experienced such pain or guilt. I could have lost any of my toys and recuperated quickly. I could have lost them all and bounced back again. But somehow this was more than a toy. Somehow I became emotionally attached to it. It hurt deeply to abandon my ball to that lonely rooftop, never to see it again.

For months afterward, whenever I thought of the ball, anguish engulfed me. I don't believe anyone knew about this. At least I turned to no one for comfort; I simply tried to force myself to think about anything else. Why was I so private? Why didn't I turn to others for comfort? Perhaps it was simply temperament or genetics? I wonder if I did not feel safe enough to share my emotions. It is also possible that I already realized it seemed silly to become attached to a ball. Regardless, the pain gradually dissipated, until it became nothing more than a memory.

But memories have echoes. Years later, when I was a father, my son Caleb once left a toy dinosaur near the edge of the ocean. Too late we realized that the tide had engulfed it. It was growing dark, so we had no choice but to leave the dinosaur behind. We planned to search for it the next morning. That night I hardly slept. My insides were churning. I imagined how devastated Caleb must feel. I think he was sad. But in truth, I believe my feelings were an echo of my own childhood. I experienced great relief when we did find the dinosaur the next day.

It was not only the ball. In these years, I also became emotionally attached to my stuffed animals. My favorite was my first, a beaver named Bicho. I also had a menagerie of others, including a koala bear, a brown bear, and a lobster. They each had their own names, unique voices, and distinct personalities. There was a time when they seemed more important to me than anyone else. In them, I found a safe place to channel my love and affection. On a few occasions, I remember lying on my bottom bunk and thinking that if our home ever caught fire my first priority would be to rescue these animals.

I have few other memories of my early childhood. Unfortunately, it is the shadows I remember more than the light. Pain has a way of searing itself into our memory such that it eclipses or even erases other recollections. What I do have from those first years are family photos. There are pictures of my parents holding me. There are also pictures of family outings and vacations, whether to the petting zoo, the playground, the beach, or the campground. In most of these photos I appear smiling, content, and happy. I am playing with friends. This reassures me that my early childhood was certainly happier than I am able to speak of from memory.

Yet floating through orbit, drifting away from any centre seems to be the best way to describe these years. My emotional life did not revolve around a significant set of relationships. My parents loved me, spent time with me, and cared for me physically, but somehow we did not connect emotionally. We had moved away from extended family. We had moved away from German or Dutch cultural communities. We had moved away from my best friend.

As a very sensitive boy, I did not know how to deal with the pain of these losses. They cut my heart. Through it all I learned to move away from others; emotionally I disengaged from human support networks. I did not trust the needs of my heart to anyone. At first I found comfort in inanimate objects, but learned that these too can be lost.

The coping strategy I took forward from my boyhood was to build walls around my heart. If, when I hurt, I could find no comfort through human relationships, at least I could seal off my emotional life and prevent further pain. But this strategy is severely flawed, as I would discover throughout my life. The same walls that I erected to protect my heart from pain also prevented love from penetrating it. Worse yet, these walls were not a one way fortification. They also hindered the arrows of love from leaving my heart. The cosmos can be a lonely place behind self-imposed walls of exile.

The ability to love also gives us our sense of identity. It is sometimes said, "We are what we think." I disagree. I believe it is truer to say that we are what we love. We are shaped by our desires. But what if we are too afraid to love, or what if we have learned to stifle our desires? Who are we then? Without a strong sense of attachment, there is little of substance for our lives to revolve around.

If the ability to give and receive love is what keeps our lives in relational orbit, I left my early childhood without a strong sense of centre. But God's saving grace in my life at this point was the faithful physical care and nurture of my parents, together with their gift of time. Through their constant concern, as

demonstrated through such diverse means as regular meals, evening games, weekend excursions, and annual summer vacations, I have always felt safe and secure in my physical environment. To my parents, I owe my love of adventure, my appreciation of the great outdoors, and my excitement to discover and explore more of this orbiting earth.

Middle Childhood (Age 7-12): Adventures in Space

As an eleven year old boy, I was captivated by the *Star Wars* movie when it was released in 1977. The next year, I became a regular watcher of the television series *Battlestar Galactica*. At this same time, I began to read science fiction, including Herbert Walker's classic *Dune* and Jack Chalker's *Well World* series. I also became a lifelong fan of the various television and movie adaptations of the *Star Trek* franchise. How could I resist falling for the mission given to Captain Kirk, his first officer Spock and the rest of the original *Star Trek* crew: "To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before"? Tales of adventure captured my imagination. I greedily devoured most of the books in the Hardy Boys series. Another story which stands out is Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.

My middle childhood years were an age of camaraderie and adventure.

Together with Walter and my friends, I loved to explore the space of my world, whether it was my own backyard, the woods at the bottom of my street, the streets and neighbourhoods of the city of Fredericton, or many of the campgrounds and parks scattered across Canada's Maritime Provinces or the eastern United States.

During these years, I cannot say that my life centred on any meaningful emotional relationships; perhaps the same can be said for many children. My friends were not those who touched my heart, but who shared my interests and my love of adventure. But at the same time I see now that I was drawn to kind rather than popular people. My closest friends tended to be those on the margins, or even those whom others rejected. I felt safe with them.

These were years of great freedom. Without any of the academic stresses of high school or university, without any of the responsibilities of adulthood, with few chores at home and with parents who were content to let me explore to my heart's desire (as long as I came home in time for supper and bedtime), I lived like a caged bird set free. My heart still lay trapped behind high walls but this was not primarily an age of emotion. This was an age of discovery, and I delighted to take wing in it.

My family's move to Fredericton provided me with much needed constancy; our family home at 100 Nottingham Street became a stable base camp from which to launch countless expeditions into the surrounding environment.

Nothing delighted Walter and me more than our home's proximity to 'the woods.' Our house lay fortuitously at the bottom of Nottingham Street, at the southernmost edge of the Skyline Acres subdivision. To the north lay the residential area but immediately to our south, just a minute's walk away, lay the glorious woods: a boy's paradise, acres of Acadian forest, criss-crossed with streams, which adults scarcely visited.

During our elementary school years, Walter and I and our neighbourhood friends spent countless hours in the woods. We climbed trees and forded streams; we explored pathways and created new ones; we built forts and discovered old ones; we caught frogs and threw rocks at bees' nests; we learned basic botany and delighted in Lady's Slippers and Jack pines alike. To my lament, the woods were bulldozed in my university years to expand the subdivision, but the fond memories remain, as does the formative influence which the freedom to explore impressed upon me. While emotional walls prevented me from freely giving and receiving love, physical walls were for leaping. Adventures beckoned on the other side.

About the same time that we entered the woods, we also discovered the seaside wonder of Fundy National Park along New Brunswick's southern coast. At that time there was a potato breeding substation in the park, together with a white house which staff people were free to use for holidays. As a potato breeder my father took advantage of this house, and he brought our family there for annual summer vacations from 1972-1975, until the substation closed. For many years afterward we continued to make annual pilgrimages to the Bay of Fundy with a tent-trailer.

We enjoyed many of the scenic hiking trails in the park: Caribou Plain,
Dickson Falls, Matthew's Head, Coppermine, Upper Salmon River and Third
Vault Falls. But beyond question our favourite destination was Herring Cove, a
crescent-shaped beach backstopped by rocky cliffs. We could access Herring
Cove with a moderate hike from the white house, and my parents gladly released

Walter and I (and Margaret as she grew older) to pursue our own escapades in that intertidal zone. We skipped stones, raced sticks in streams, dammed up those same streams, explored caves and challenged one another as to who could stand in one place the longest before being forced to withdraw by the incoming tide. We spent many hours examining close-up the flora and fauna exposed by the retreating ocean: barnacles, periwinkles, crabs, clams, limpets, sea urchins, anemones, blue mussels, starfish, kelp, red algae, sponges, and sea cucumbers.

The Bay of Fundy is famous for boasting some of the highest tides in the world. Tides are primarily caused by the gravitational attraction between the earth and its orbiting moon. At this time, although not consciously known to me, my attraction to the rugged beauty of the Fundy coast reflected an incipient attraction to its Creator, and began to prepare me for the times I would consciously experience the mystery of God in creation. At numerous points in my life, whether gazing over the ocean, hiking in the woods or bicycling through the countryside, I have been happily surprised by a song of joy suddenly arising in my heart. The song often has the same refrain: "There is more to life than inner strife." These experiences have pointed to One much greater than I, and have helped to put my own problems in proper perspective. There is something very comforting about feeling appropriately small.

During these years, I didn't only enjoy natural places: for my brother, my friends, and I, the city of Fredericton itself was a playground. We played hockey on local streets; we engaged in games of hide and seek across a dozen neighbours' yards; games of Frisbee golf extended over multiple blocks; and bicycle

excursions expanded to include the entire city and beyond. Together with friends, we formed a local basketball team in the Youth Basketball Association. We joined the local Cub Scouts group. At this time Walter and I also developed a liking for the game of chess, and we eventually began to play in tournaments across the province.

But even for a boy, life can't be all about adventures. My academic life took shape at Liverpool Street Elementary School. The school lay only a short walk from my house: up Nottingham Street, then a shortcut through a large stand of trees, beyond which lay the playground. I was a good student. Even in grade one, I was sometimes placed with the grade two students for more advanced study. I often won the spelling bees and math contests in my classroom.

Throughout all my years of schooling I have consistently performed well.

It is difficult to say how much my academic success has shaped me. On the one hand, it helped to provide an introverted boy with some feelings of accomplishment. I enjoyed the camaraderie and mutual respect of other gifted students. On the other hand, in spite of my grades, I often lacked confidence in my academic ability. In part I believe this is because Walter had even greater academic success than I did. If I was at the top of my classroom, he was at the top of the school! I don't recall ever being jealous or begrudging him his academic ability. He certainly studied very hard and earned his grades. But I think subconsciously I did not appreciate my own success because his was always better. If in junior and senior high my marks averaged in the low nineties, his averaged in the high nineties. At the University of New Brunswick (UNB), I

carried an A average in the biology program. However, Walter's average, at the same school and also in biology, was A-plus. He graduated with the top mark of any UNB student of his graduation year, across all degree programs.

It can be challenging to follow in the footsteps of a very gifted sibling, especially when his gifts closely mirrored mine. For his part, Walter was good about it: at times he would acknowledge my academic ability without bragging about his own. He never compared the two of us. The problem was my own: by subconsciously contrasting myself with his unique academic abilities, I failed to fully appreciate my own considerable gifts. Nevertheless, I mostly enjoyed my years at school. I liked learning and enjoyed getting good grades even if I was often needlessly nervous that I might do poorly on the next test.

During my elementary school years, I also participated in extra-curricular sports. I have always been tall and of moderate athletic ability. I played on our school's basketball team. One of my happier accomplishments was becoming the Liverpool Street School wrestling champion in grade six, even though I never wrestled again after that. I lacked the confidence to try out for sports when I arrived at junior high school.

A significant but rather traumatic incident in my life occurred in grade seven, my first year at Albert Street Junior High School. This school was not in walking distance of our home, so we took a yellow bus on a daily basis. I was placed in the homeroom of Mrs. Spinney, a notoriously strict English teacher, but for whom I remain grateful for drilling English grammar into my brain on a daily basis. During that school year all of the students at Albert Street were required to

deliver a speech in front of their classrooms. I chose to write mine on the pros and cons of nuclear power. This was my first effort at public speaking. I was very nervous. Mrs. Spinney had encouraged us to memorize our speeches, which I did, although most of my classmates did not. In the end, I actually pulled it off. My speech went flawlessly. As a result my fellow students voted my speech the best of class.

Unfortunately, there was a prize for winning the 'best of class:' I was now rewarded with the privilege of delivering my speech in front of an assembly of the entire school, together with all the other classroom winners. When speech day arrived I chose to stay with my memorized speech. When it was my turn to speak, I looked out very nervously at the many hundreds of gathered students and teachers. I had practiced my speech dozens of times before the event and launched easily into my introduction. But then I froze. I could not remember the next line. Panic set in as I stared out at the sea of faces; I had not brought a single note up to the podium with me. Try as I might, I could not remember the main body of the speech. After what seemed like an eternity, I mumbled a few lines of the speech's conclusion before sitting down to muffled applause. I was absolutely humiliated. I had never been so embarrassed in my life.

For weeks and months afterwards, I felt deep shame whenever I thought of the speech. I promised myself I would never speak in public again. I didn't process this experience with anyone; I just absorbed the pain. For many years, I carefully evaded any classes which I knew required public speaking, until my third year of university, at which time it became unavoidable. The wonder is that

I am now a pastor. I speak on most Sundays, and I am often invited to speak in venues beyond my church. I tell this story, not only because it reveals my tendency to internalize my pain, but ultimately because it is a testament to God's healing grace, which in time gave me the courage to overcome this fear.

During these years of middle childhood, I slowly began to grow aware of God. It began in our family home, where my parents faithfully conducted daily devotions after supper. We always used the Mennonite devotional guide "Rejoice!" One of us three children would take turns reading from the guide, while another would read the suggested Bible reading. Although we never discussed the readings afterward, as my parents rarely verbalized their faith, this practice had a formative influence on me. It not only demonstrated the importance of my parents' faith; it also provided a foundation to awaken faith in me. I am grateful to my parents for persisting with this discipline even when my brother and sister and I complained about it.

My understanding of God especially began to develop through regular church attendance. As there was no Mennonite church in Fredericton, my parents took us to Skyline Acres United Baptist Church, the local church in our subdivision. Every week we attended Sunday school class followed by the worship service. While I often found the worship services boring (the pastor at the time was an old man who seemed to me to drone on through interminably long sermons), I enjoyed the Sunday school time. We had the same teacher for many years, David Malcolm, an intelligent, humble, sincere man with a servant heart. More than anyone else at this time, he helped to instill knowledge of the

Bible in me. Walter and I also became friends with the other students in the class, and these friendships persisted throughout our years in Fredericton. These positive associations made it enjoyable to come to church, as did the many adults who were genuinely happy to see us week by week.

I have good memories of attending Skyline Acres. It was a place to belong, which is exactly what my heart needed. Looking back at this church experience now, Walter has sometimes commented how very conservative the teaching was. I believe he is mostly right; I am no longer entirely comfortable with all of the theology taught to us. But at this time, it was not primarily my mind that needed shaping—it was my heart. On account of the kindness and friendship I experienced at the church, my heart remained open to the possibility of God's goodness. This is not to say that at this time I opened my heart to God; it is to say that I experienced God's kindness through the kindness of God's people, without realizing at the time that this was God's way of caring for me and preparing me to know him more fully.

But my mind did also begin to be formed. In many ways it was and has been more open to God than my heart, if indeed the two can be separated. During these years, my conscience gradually began to develop, in line with simple biblical teaching, as my mind contemplated God's Word. For example, in grades one and two I would sometimes steal loose change from my parents. I used it to buy candy or trading cards from the local convenience store. On one occasion, my parents became aware that I had spent some money and asked me where the money came from. I lied and told them I found it outside. This close call scared

me enough that I stopped stealing. But as I entered my junior high years, I rejected stealing for another reason: the biblical teaching on money began to make a strong impression on me. In fact, the Bible's teaching on money is the first biblical teaching that I remember having any significant influence on me at all, especially the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-20, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (all biblical quotation are from English Standard version [ESV] unless otherwise noted), and the teaching of Paul in 1 Timothy 6:7, "for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world." Since then, I have not desired to accumulate money or possessions. For me the logic was clear enough: if money and stuff can be lost, and if I can't take it with me when I die, I do not want to waste my time pursuing it.

This story reveals a pattern: I have almost always found it easier to obey God through the mental processes of my mind, as I came to understand God's Word, than I have found myself ready to open up my heart to God (or to others). My heart has so often been scared to come out from behind its protective fortress, afraid of loss and pain. I am glad that God, rather than condemning my feeble heart, has used my more willing mind to work in me, taking me where I am, and slowly, graciously leading me forward. Where my mind has taken the lead on many occasions in my spiritual life, my heart would later, fearfully, and only ever, ever so slowly follow.

As I reflect on the state of my heart at the end of my middle childhood years, it becomes apparent, in spite of my boyhood adventures, my growing academic ability, and my fledgling introduction to God, that my inner wounds never disappeared. Two related stories reveal how alone I still felt myself to be. The first occurred on an adventure, an annual family vacation. In the summers, we often travelled long distances by car to explore eastern North America. I have fond memories of these trips, but as I grew older and taller I increasingly found it uncomfortable to travel in the cramped back seat with my brother and sister. I have often had trouble with knee pain, and during one particularly long day of driving my knees began to ache. I longed to stretch them out, but said nothing. As the hours passed the pain increased, and became almost unbearable. Still I said nothing, suffering in silence until the tears began to run down my cheeks. When my mother became aware of the problem, the car was stopped immediately and I was able to stretch my legs. My mother asked me, "Why didn't you say something?" I had no answer.

The second story is about a night when I was sick. I don't remember the details, but I know I felt completely miserable. I needed help and comfort. In the middle of the night, I tried to work up enough courage to wake up my parents. My bedroom was downstairs, and theirs was upstairs. Eventually I got out of bed, went half way up the stairs, lost my nerve and turned around. I repeated this multiple times that night, until finally my mother heard creaking noises on the steps. When she found me on the stairs, she discovered that I was sick and gently asked, "How long have you been here? Why didn't you say something earlier?"

Why didn't I? In both of these stories, I think I was afraid to be an inconvenience. I was afraid of provoking a negative reaction in others. I did not have a strong enough sense of identity that my own needs mattered. With the walls I had erected around my heart, with my difficulties receiving and giving love, who was I? Who indeed are we apart from close relationships with others?

But there is also more. My mother, perhaps due to her wartime experiences, had a need to maintain strict control over her home. To give one trivial but insightful example, she sometimes counted the number of cookies in the cookie jar to make sure none of her children took more than the allotment of one cookie per day. When we overstepped her boundaries, even the seemingly trivial ones, she could become upset. She did not yell but she had a tendency to use guilt to maintain control. One of the strongest negative emotions I remember experiencing as a child was when my mother used guilt. It made me feel like my mother's need to control the home mattered more to her than me or my feelings. Unfortunately this only served to reinforce the walls around my heart. My side of the wall felt like an emotional safety zone. But this strategy only worked when I did not have to depend on others. At such times, when I needed to reach out for help, I was afraid. I was afraid of the emotions I might experience on the other side of the wall.

Thus, it becomes apparent that by the end of my middle childhood I still lacked a strong emotional orbit. But something positive had changed: I began to have plenty of adventures in space. It is a strange dichotomy to have a fearful heart coupled with an adventurous spirit. Normally, one would expect a timid

heart to create drag on an exploratory spirit, like a ship trying to sail without lifting anchor. But this was not usually the case with me. By God's grace my spirited adventures in the midst of God's creation, in which God's Spirit began to awaken me, helped to prevent my heart from withering behind its lonely walls.

So too did my studies. My academic ability is another gracious gift from God, and during my school years I found some measure of healthy self-esteem in my academic success, even if I often lacked confidence in those very gifts. This too was a good preservative for my heart. Emotionally I may have hunkered down in my own barren fortress, with little to do there but explore empty rooms, but my enjoyment of learning and reading kept me from becoming lost in introspection.

Increasingly, my adventures were shared with church friends, and my academics grew to include the study of God's Word. Like a comet journeying through space finds its trajectory influenced by a planet's gravity, so too the course of my life began to be influenced through my parents introducing me to the faith environment of daily devotions and the church. At this stage, the attraction was not strong enough to pull me into orbit, but it was significant enough to begin to change the arc of my life. My interest was piqued if not my heart.

Adolescence (Age 13-19): Stars at Night

The best time to stargaze is at night when the sun has gone down, and artificial lights are extinguished. This is a paradox: it requires the cover of darkness to reveal the light of the stars. This is also a testament to my teenage

years, during which the shadows in my life deepened while simultaneously the light of God's love intensified.

By God's grace, it was during these years that I became a follower of Jesus. This was not the result of being overwhelmed by a blinding light, like Paul on the Damascus Road, but can be described as catching the occasional glimpse of a distant star that is unexpectedly revealed by a shifting cloud. These infrequent sparks of light awakened something deep within me, an awareness of mystery, a hunger and a yearning for something more. In his autobiography Surprised by Joy, C.S. Lewis describes a recurring childhood experience which he called "joy," beautiful stabs of longing for something so good and pure which cannot be described by words (Lewis 1956). Eventually he came to realize that both the longing and its fulfilment were found in God. This has been my experience as well, but if I was quicker than Lewis to associate the longing with longing for God, and if I turned to God sooner in my life than he did, I have also been slower to enter into and embrace its fulfilment. To this day, my heart hesitates to open even to God, but God in God's goodness has sometimes wonderfully surprised me by coming to meet me on my side of the wall.

I remember the first time this happened, my first memory of actually experiencing God. It was in the summer of my thirteenth or fourteenth year, when I was attending a week-long summer camp for junior high students at Green Hill Lake, my Baptist church's denominational camp outside of Fredericton. This was my first and only experience of summer camp. I'm not sure why I went, as no one else from my church attended. Or if they did, I have no memory of it.

What I do know is that I did not enjoy myself; it was a rather miserable week, which has been the experience of more than one person at summer camp. I didn't know any of my fellow campers, but they all seemed to know each other. This made for a very lonely week, which was compounded by my introverted nature.

By this time, I had already begun to wrestle with what has been an often debilitating lifelong struggle of self-condemnation. I have never found it easy to reach out and make new friends, and on this occasion I put myself down for being an outsider. Not only was I lonely, I felt awkward and embarrassed by my lack of social skills. I kept to myself, and then felt shame that I was by myself.

My melancholy reached its peak on the final evening of camp. While the other campers celebrated the end of the week in the lodge, I wandered off by myself, following my feet wherever they led. I had no destination in mind. I just needed to be by myself, anywhere, to sort through my feelings. Before long I found myself wandering outside, alone on a dark, starlit night. Slowly I meandered away from the cabins, across an empty field. I looked up at the huge expanse of the heavens above me. I can't put into words what I experienced, but somehow I knew I was not alone. My sadness did not entirely lift, or perhaps it is better to say that it shifted to a beautiful sadness. I felt isolated from my fellow campers, but cared for; the One who flung all those distant stars into space had his eye on me. God, why would you want to meet me? I felt like a nobody. However, God did not seem to agree. God didn't speak to me with words, but a gracious, holy presence gently enveloped me. I experienced the beauty of

humility, the sheer wonder at the possibility that God saw something good in me.

On that night a rare ray of love penetrated my defenses.

I believe it is these uncommon flashes of light, graciously illuminating the darkness (but never again quite so literally as on that starry night), that have kept me from abandoning my faith journey when God all too often has seemed distant, and I all too often have succumbed to the scourge of self-condemnation. I don't quite know how this lifelong thorn in the flesh became so deeply embedded in me, but I have yet fully to extricate it. Because of this sense of inadequacy, I hesitate to write this spiritual autobiography. If any who are reading this are looking for a story of triumphant victory, you can stop reading now. However, if you are interested in hearing how God in grace has not abandoned me, even when I repeatedly doubt his love by doubting my worth, then you are encouraged to read on.

During my teen years, my self-condemnation increased significantly through a struggle not uncommon to teenage boys. By this age my conscience was developing and I knew my behaviour was wrong, even if I did not engage in it frequently. Therefore, each failure only compounded my feelings of low self-worth. With no voices in my life able to reach my heart and assure me otherwise, it was all too easy to listen to the negative self-talk. This also influenced my view of God's goodness, as I began to extrapolate that God felt somewhat the same about me as I did about myself. This only worsened with each repeated failure, setting in place a vicious downward spiral of failure and condemnation which has plagued me for far too long.

One way to deal with it was to escape into games. Entering into our high school years, Walter and I and some friends began to play a lot of pinball. Part of it was simply sheer fun. I still remember the excitement of racking up enough points to hear the pinball machine make the sharp cracking sound which announced that I had won a free game! While I don't think there is anything intrinsically wrong with enjoying some entertainment, in my personal experience gaming (or other forms of entertainment) easily became an escape. I sometimes used it as a deliberate distraction, a way to avoid dealing with personal issues. Sometimes, I still do today.

From 1981-1984, I attended Fredericton High School which at that time, with a population of close to three thousand students, was the largest high school in Canada east of Montreal. While it was easy to get lost among so many students, the school was large enough to offer advanced academic courses, which I took advantage of in math and the sciences. In my study of science, I was following in both my father's and my brother's footsteps.

During my junior and senior high years, I also became more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of my parents. My mother continued to provide for us as a faithful homemaker. I never once had to worry about not having good food to eat. Every day at 5:30 PM supper was ready. You could set your clock by it. There were also always clean clothes to wear and a tidy house to live in. The best gift my mother gave me was to pray for her children every day, a fact which I learned later in life. That is a wonderful gift of love and commitment for which I am very grateful. I don't think a parent can give a child a better gift than daily

lifting them up and releasing them into the caring hands of God. Every parent has flaws and defects, but weakness can become strength when we bring it to God.

My mother always seemed to be the happiest when she was not at home. She relaxed on outings and vacations and let go of the need to control her own space. I have happy memories of my mother taking Walter and Margaret and I to the beach at Mactaquac Provincial Park over a period of many summers. During the warm months of July and August, we would often make the half hour trip more than once a week. This is where I taught myself how to swim. It was evident that my mother loved swimming: it seemed she could do a slow breaststroke forever. We all enjoyed reading, and could bask on our towels in the sun for long stretches with a good book.

But my mother was somehow different at home. She was never cruel or unkind; she never put her children down. It was just that her need to keep a tight rein over the state of the house seemed to take priority over anything else, including the nurturing of relationships. Everyone reacts differently to the weaknesses of others, but her use of guilt as a tool to maintain order angered and upset me, and made me feel controlled at a time when what I believe my heart most needed was affection. This is where another of my own major weaknesses began to show itself. My response to the use of guilt was to reinforce the walls around my heart with the iron bars of pride: "If you are going to treat me this way, I am going to withdraw from you."

At some point in my early teen years, I became so frustrated that I vowed to myself that I would stop speaking to my mother. This is not a mature response,

but as a young adolescent I was not mature. I believe this does reveal the growth in me of what theologians would call the sinful nature. When I was a young boy, I do not attribute any culpability on my part to my extended silence; I simply did not know how to cope with the pain of loss. My silence then was not a weapon but a symptom of pain. But now, as a young teen, a spirit of prideful rebellion began to be mixed in with my pain, and I must own the responsibility for my own actions.

This speaks to the insidious nature of sin: when the actions of others hurt us, it leaves a mark, it forms us negatively, and we in turn respond with inappropriate actions of our own. The Bible teaches us the amazing truth that God created us in God's own image. Unfortunately, the harmful actions of others tend to imprint new and negative images. An extreme example concerns adults who were sexually abused as children and grow up to be abusers themselves. Our prisons are full of victims of childhood abuse who in their brokenness hurt others in turn. But on various levels, pain inflicted by others affects all of us deeply; sin leaves its imprint on us all. We get hurt, our wounds shape us, and we hurt others in response, whether inadvertently or deliberately. One generation passes on its pain to the next. For this reason I do not judge my mother for her shortcomings as a parent (or my father for that matter). My mother carried her own wounds through her upbringing and her own set of life circumstances, and passed some of that on to me, even as I have passed on some wounds to my own children. We are all complicit in sin. None of us are innocent. I wholeheartedly agree with the teaching of the New Testament that only grace and forgiveness can set us free. If

I can preach for one more sentence (this is the autobiography of a pastor after all), I believe this also summons the church, the followers of Jesus, to be a loving, generous presence in the world, rather than a legalistic, judgmental one. Love and truth heal.

Interestingly, it was the love of my mother which snapped me out of my vow of silence. I persisted in it for a number of weeks until she came to my bedroom one day to ask me what was wrong. She came humbly and vulnerably, approaching me with a softness that I had never before experienced with her. I did not share anything of myself at the time, in part because of my growing pride but certainly also because it felt too awkward to begin sharing on an emotional level when no such relationship had existed before. Nonetheless, her overtures warmed my heart, and for the second time in my life I began to speak again. Throughout my life, I have noticed that all it takes is a little kindness and I immediately drop any sense of a grudge that I might have against another, and do not pick it up again. Thankfully, I would also never resort to such a use of silence again.

As with my mother, I have not had a very close relationship with my father. But as I grew into my teenage years, I began to recognize his many good traits. Above all, he is a very generous man: with his time, with his money, with his strength and, as I later discovered at his retirement party, also with the fruits of his scientific research, which he freely shared with his colleagues rather than jealously guarded for his own advance. I recall countless nights, at the end of the school day, how my father would pick me up at high school or university when I

called to ask for a ride, even though he himself had just returned home from a long day's work.

A six-foot-six Dutchman, my father is rather gregarious in nature and enjoyed inviting people, often his international colleagues visiting Canada, home for supper. My mother sometimes found this stressful, especially when he failed to give much advance notice. But to their credit, and my benefit, my parents often entertained guests in our home. For many years they listed our home in the Mennonite-Your-Way travel directory, a listing of hosts willing to accommodate travelers for a night or more stay at no cost to the guest, other than a small suggested donation. In this way, I met people from all across North America. It is not that I talked much with them, but my parents' generosity in extending hospitality was a positive example which has influenced me for the good.

Perhaps the most significant guests my parents hosted, from the standpoint of my own development, were a series of African international students, studying at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. My parents would invite them to our home on special occasions like Thanksgiving or Christmas. I still remember the kind and gentle nature of Wenceslas from Tanzania who took time to talk and play games with Walter, Margaret and me. In reaching out to people of other cultures, my parents modeled for me the truth that all people are equal and helped me become comfortable around people who were different than I. I am encouraged at how God is actively working through this element of my formation in my present congregation, whose members consist of about forty percent West African refugees, primarily from Liberia and Sierra Leone. I

thoroughly enjoy being with them. Interestingly, Margaret has spent the last eight years working as a missionary in Senegal, after serving eleven years in Haiti, while Walter (a potato breeder like my father) has been making frequent trips to Ethiopia to help with the development of their potato program.

From my father, all three of us learned the value of helping others: he is the consummate servant. I have never seen my father hesitate to lend a helping hand to others in need. It did not matter who they were, whether a neighbour, a stranger, or a church member. When serving alongside others from church, I have sometimes heard my father speak wise words such as, "We are not only building a shed, we are building community."

I am grateful for this heritage and how it has helped to shape me. This has also become a strength of mine: I gladly help others in need, and I am also generous with my own time, strength and money. When I was younger I did not always appreciate my father's ways, especially on those many occasions when he volunteered not only his own services but also those of his children. We would complain about it but looking back I think it was good for me, if not also frustrating.

Like all people my father also has his weaknesses. I have sometimes wondered if he has been too eager to serve, to the point that he sometimes seems to lack a strong sense of self-identity outside of helping others, and also to the point where the person he is helping becomes so all important, in that moment, and his own family simply seen, in those moments, as an extension of his need to help—hence our being volunteered as children without much consideration to our

own thoughts or feelings. My father can also become rather easily flustered, which I especially witnessed growing up in some of his conversations with my mother.

Yet all told my parents have had a solid marriage. Like many people of their generation, it does not seem to be so much based on emotional love and friendship, but on mutual support to help navigate life together. I've rarely seen my parents demonstrate affection for one another, but they have faithfully cared for one another's physical and material needs. Their relationship is reflected in my own being: the affection I did not witness resonates with my own hunger for affection, while the faithful care I did witness speaks to my confidence and adventurous spirit in the physical world.

It is in the physical world that I seem to catch most of my glimpses of God. If my first experience of God was on a dark, starry night, another memorable occasion was in the bright sunshine of a beautiful spring afternoon. It happened as I was walking home after sitting for my last exam of the season. I was so busy preparing for and writing exams that I had failed to notice the arrival of spring; the stress of exams had a way of blinding me to other realities around me. I had walked about halfway home before the scales fell off my eyes. As I finally allowed myself to relax, I lifted up my head and it was as if I had passed from the dark to the sunny side of the moon. The day was glorious: warm sunshine emanating from a pale azure sky, a gentle breeze carrying the songs of birds returning from their winter migration, and fresh green shoots bursting through the thawed ground. In the midst of it, I again sensed the presence of God,

and an unspoken voice which reassured me with these words: I'm always here.

Under all of the stress you will always find me. You have allowed the clouds of pressure and worry to block your vision of me, but I have been here with you all along. My heart thrilled with the joy of spring: while its reinforced walls kept the love of people out, its walls were not high enough to block out the mid-afternoon sun. God knew just how to reach me.

By this time, I had already become a follower of Jesus. I made my formal decision to become a Christian when I was fifteen years old, when my Baptist church was hosting a guest speaker who conducted a week of renewal messages. On the final evening, he challenged any who wanted to follow Jesus in baptism to come to the front of the sanctuary. I can't remember any of his teaching, but I do remember a sense of conviction settling upon me that I should go forward. Yet I was afraid to: I was not afraid of God, but as a private and introverted individual I was afraid to make a public declaration of faith in front of others. A number of people from my youth group accepted the speaker's challenge and walked to the front of the sanctuary, but I remained glued to my seat. "God, give me the strength to overcome my fear," I prayed. The next thing I knew, Margaret was walking up the aisle. That did it! If my younger sister could find the courage to profess her faith, surely I could as well. So, I also moved to the front of the church.

I don't consider this to be a conversion experience. I can't pinpoint any single conversion experience in my life. Rather, I see it as a confirmation of my slow and gradual journey towards faith, a journey guided by the light of numerous

stars twinkling one at a time in the darkness. Certainly my hesitant march to the front of the sanctuary did not come with any warm and wonderful emotions. Neither did my baptism which followed a few months later, after a series of baptism classes. This does not trouble me at all. While in my younger years I sometimes wondered if my baptism was sincere, I now recognize that God simply received me where I was, as I was. Emotions can be a very fickle and unreliable guide—what matters is the obedience of faith, whether or not this is accompanied by strong sentiment.

I recall one childish exercise of faith which nonetheless points to a growing faith within me. It happened sometime in my junior high years. My friend Scott and I were playing outside on a very dark night, and we were enjoying scaring each other with thoughts of what might be lurking in the woods. Then we dared each other to enter them. We were both too frightened to do so as images of imminent danger loomed in our susceptible minds. Then suddenly my thoughts turned to God, and I said to myself rather matter-of-factly: "God is here so why am I so afraid?" Instantly my fear melted and I immediately strode under the dark canopy of trees, feeling rather triumphant. Then in a bout of youthful mischief, I couldn't resist hiding silently for a while amidst the gloomy shadows as Scott frantically called out for me, fearing the worst.

Following my baptism, my faith grew in deeper ways through continued participation in my local congregation, as well as through my affiliation with ISCF (Inter School Christian Fellowship) at Fredericton High School and IVCF (Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship) at the University of New Brunswick. It was

at IVCF that I accepted my first Christian leadership responsibility as the coordinator of campus small groups. I did not fulfill that responsibility particularly well, but my acceptance of the position does point out willingness on my part to make myself available for however God might be calling me to serve. This willingness to be used by God has stayed with me all my life. It is something that I grasp first and foremost with my mind: I see and understand in God's Word that we are called to make ourselves available for God's service. My struggle has not been to say "yes" to God's leading; rather, having said "yes," my struggle has been that my heart is slower to catch up, and I have often condemned myself that I don't seem to have enough 'heart' (or love) to be as effective in my calling as I would hope. Nonetheless, I do believe that my willingness to serve God in various capacities is an expression of faith, and remarkably God seems to keep calling me in spite of my glaring weaknesses.

My faith in God especially began to grow through the reading of many missionary biographies, which topped my reading list for a number of years.

These books spoke to my love of adventure, both through their exotic settings as well as through their dramatic stories of missionaries depending on God, not only for their ministries, but sometimes for their very lives. By reading about God's faithful provision and sometimes miraculous answers to prayer, these biographies awakened a realization and a hunger in me that God could be known and experienced in much deeper ways.

I also read *Knowing God*, in which J.I. Packer makes a clear distinction between knowing about God and actually knowing God (Packer 1973). I

recognized that my own understanding of God tended towards mere head knowledge, and I began to hunger and thirst for more of God. Thus began an up and down journey, which I am still on, the longing for God at times growing strong, and at times seemingly disappearing altogether. Sadly, it seems to be a fear in my heart which so often holds me back, and surely also a fierce measure of pride. Yet the one thing for which I am most grateful is that, by God's grace, the longings have never altogether dissipated. Even my darkest moments have sometimes been surprisingly illuminated by flashes of light too wonderful, too mysterious, too enticing, for me to ever turn my back on God completely, even if these revelations from God have seemed too rare and too brief, only to be shrouded again by the murky clouds of self-condemnation following sin and failure. On numerous occasions, I have been surprised by God's grace suddenly and unexpectedly speaking peace and love and acceptance to my fearful, closedoff heart, whether catching a glimpse of God's beauty on a bike ride, or in the reading of a book, or simply through the hearing of a particular turn-of-phrase in a movie or a conversation. It is precisely because these moments happen at unguarded times that they are able to penetrate my defenses.

During my teenage years, my working career also began. My first job, in junior high school, was to deliver newspapers to a set of apartment buildings about a half hour walk from my house. I faithfully delivered the papers for about two years, rain, snow, or shine, never making any false excuses to get a day off. While I didn't mind delivering the papers, I disliked collecting the money. Some customers were friendly, while others were grumpy, and still others rarely paid.

All in all, it was a very uneventful job, but a good introduction to the responsibilities of work.

My second job, in the summer of grade 10, was spent working for my mother's brother, Uncle Armin, at his greenhouses in St. David's, Ontario (near Niagara-on-the-Lake). Walter had spent the previous summer working for him. The job primarily consisted of manual labor: moving the very large lawn, digging a drainage ditch, watering and weeding plants, etc. But my primary project for that summer was to dig a shallow foundation for a new greenhouse bay, approximately 100 feet long and 15 feet wide, with only a spade. Occasionally Uncle Armin would bring out a long pole, lay it on top of my excavation, and place a level on top of it. He insisted that my spade work must be level. Sometimes as I laboured under the sweltering sun, I wondered why he didn't simply rent a bulldozer for a day, but I suppose he wanted to teach me the value of hard work. I did work steadily for him, without complaint, but one day toward summer's end a customer came by and joked how I needed to work for my uncle as hard as my brother had. But Uncle Armin abruptly interrupted saying, "This is no joke, his brother was a better worker." That stung, especially as I don't remember that my uncle ever complimented or encouraged me. I was very glad when the summer did finally come to an end. My work actually ended two weeks early, as a friend I had made in the area invited me to join him on a cross-Canada car trip. I couldn't have been happier when Uncle Armin agreed to release me: what could be better than a chance to escape hard labour for the promise of an adventure! I enjoyed discovering parts of Canada I had never seen

before, from the rocky outcroppings of northern Ontario to the flat prairies of the western provinces. We made it as far as Calgary before we returned home.

In grade 11, I began working at McDonald's restaurant, on Prospect Street in Fredericton, a part-time job I held for three years. I never missed a shift, even though I often had to walk a half hour to or from work. I worked diligently and received good reviews, and eventually I was promoted to crew trainer.

It was at McDonalds that I met my future wife Joanne, who also worked there. We began to date when I was in grade 12 (and she was in grade 11). She was not following Jesus at the time, as her family did not attend church. After we had been dating for a while, her lack of commitment to Jesus began to disturb my conscience. I did not judge or look down on those who thought differently than I did, but my faith in God was becoming so central to my life that I could not imagine sharing the rest of it with someone with whom I could not share my faith. One day I surprised myself, and absolutely shocked Joanne, by blurting out of the blue: "I just want you to know that I could not marry someone who does not share my Christian faith." While my attempt to share my conviction was about as gracious as a dancing warthog, God ultimately worked through my blundering speech. After initially yelling at me, slamming the door and blowing out of my house like a summer storm, Joanne, to her credit, began a sincere quest to determine whether or not there was any truth to basic Christian beliefs. She did not want to pretend to believe just to be with me. She began to attend my church and my youth group, and asked a lot of questions. She read various books and

studied the Bible. As a result of her search, she came to affirm a sincere faith in Jesus, and was baptized about a year later.

In 1984, I graduated from Fredericton High School and was offered a full-tuition scholarship to the University of New Brunswick; I accepted and enrolled in the biology program. I did not wrestle a great deal with this decision. In part, I was simply following in the footsteps of my father and my brother; in part, I was attracted to biology, the study of living things, because of my love for creation. God would soon reveal different plans for me, but that is a story for the next chapter.

So I ended my teenage years midway through a biology degree, but with a growing sense that God had other plans for me; once I made the decision to become a follower of Jesus it slowly began to change the trajectory of my life.

Now I was consciously caught up in God's orbit, whose flashes of love drew me nearer and nearer to the sun until I could not and did not want to escape. I was no longer drifting through space and, at least in general terms, I was beginning to understand the purpose of my life: to serve the God who created and loved me.

My heart had found a home, but too rarely rested in this good news. Self-condemnation kept me from joyfully opening up to God's presence. If not for God's grace I could easily have floated away, but who can escape the gravitational pull of God's goodness and love, once having tasted even a small measure of it? Throughout my life I have sometimes distanced myself from God for days or weeks on end, hiding from God like Adam in the garden, condemning myself for having disobeyed or disappointed God in some way again, only to have

God reach out to me once more and say, "I am not giving up on you, nothing can separate you from my love." I do not fully know why it is so difficult for me to yield to that voice, to accept fully its good news. Far too often I have doubted it, imagining only God's displeasure with me. In the end, I can only thank God that he has never stopped sending sparks of light to illumine my darkness.

Early Adulthood (Age 20-32): Mission Launched

My early adult years marked my launch into God's mission. This was propelled by the fuel of the missionary biographies which I read, combined with my many years of formation in my family, the church and in ISCF/IVCF. As I plodded my way through my biology degree, the Spirit of God began to combust all of these spiritual influences to inspire my imagination and thrust my life in unexpected directions. While I did not abandon my science degree, I found that my heart was no longer in it. Yet I am glad that I stuck with it, because my B.Sc. provided the requisite foundation for further studies in different fields.

At the end of 1987, Joanne (then my fiancée) and I eagerly attended the major IVCF-sponsored Urbana student missions conference which was held every three years at the University of Illinois. While much of the conference was a steady blur of speakers and large halls overcrowded with mission booths, one speaker in particular stood out for both of us: George Verwer, the founder of Operation Mobilisation (a missions organization mobilising young people to live out and share the good news of Jesus) and a passionate advocate for a faithful

following of Jesus. His enthusiasm for radical discipleship was infectious and left its mark on us.

In the spring of 1988, I graduated with my B.Sc. in biology; shortly afterwards, on May 28, Joanne and I were married at Skyline Acres United Baptist Church in Fredericton. Joanne is a beautiful gift God has given me. We complement each other well. She is far more outgoing and social than I am, helping to keep my life grounded in relationships with others which on my own I could all too easily ignore. She has also been a faithful, ready and willing participant in our life of following God's call together, wherever the road may lead. In grace, God led me to a partner who is not afraid to embrace adventure.

Following our marriage, Joanne still had a year left to complete her B.A. in Sociology, after which we hoped to engage in mission work. As I had already graduated, I needed to decide how I would spend this year. I was torn between two options: working for the year, or furthering my studies with a one-year B.Ed. degree in secondary science. Although I prayed about the matter, I did not seem to receive any clear guidance. It was not until the final possible day of registration that I made up my mind. I called Joanne and said, "I've decided to go back to school." In this way we were both students throughout our first year of marriage. Our only income came from a part-time janitorial position which we shared at a local church school (Devon Baptist). For accommodations, we rented half of an attic at the top of a rickety old three-story house. We had no car and almost no spending money. But that didn't matter to us; neither of us has ever been interested in the empty pursuit of money and comfort. We both believed the

deepest meaning in life was found in God's service. We had God and each other and the new found freedom of no longer having to live with our parents, and an enjoyable year quickly flew by.

Then began our first great adventure together: after an ongoing period of discernment, we applied and were accepted to a two-year short-term mission assignment with Operation Mobilisation (OM). There is no doubt that my desire to see new places was a significant factor in my motivation to serve overseas. I realize now that I definitely had an overly romantic notion of missionary service. While that would be corrected soon enough, through some painful lessons, God nonetheless worked through my personality to direct my path.

We were initially accepted to serve on OM's travelling ship the Logos II, which travelled to the world's port cities with Christian literature, relief supplies and training opportunities. I was to teach the schoolchildren on board. It all sounded so exotic and enticing. After an evangelistic summer campaign in the Netherlands, we were all set to join the ship in Belgium. But then we were apologetically pulled aside and told that OM Canada had miscommunicated with OM Ships and that my teaching position had already been filled by someone else whom, ironically, I had encouraged to apply for a second teaching position on the ship. Since we had just discovered that Joanne was pregnant the week before we left Canada, other OM fields were unable to accept us, as they were not set up for families with children. The one exception was OM Norway, a new mission field for OM, which offered us a position that we gladly accepted. There was no way we wanted to go back home to Canada.

I reluctantly accepted the invitation to be the leader of a team of young people from numerous countries and denominational backgrounds. I believe I was asked simply by virtue of being married, as well as by my being the oldest member of the team (I was 22 at the time). I had no prior leadership experience and was nervous of the responsibility as well as of my capability. Nonetheless, I said yes as I wanted to make myself available to God.

Those two years leading the team in Norway were a baptism by fire! I failed a lot, but learned so much. Unfortunately, I received no leadership training; our team was essentially dropped off in the mountainous, harbour city of Bergen and told to begin ministry, at times in cooperation with a few local churches. An early experience was extremely humiliating, on the same level as my failed speech in grade seven. The OM Norway director, who lived in Oslo, had arranged for my team to make a musical presentation at an esteemed international school near Bergen. I should have immediately said no, as only one of our members had any musical training, but in my inexperience I did not even consider this as an option. As a team, we hastily learned a few songs and performed them at the school. Our singing was atrocious. The principal of the school politely thanked us and then asked the hundreds of students to rise and sing for us: they sang in beautiful four-part harmony. I was mortified and our team morale quickly plummeted. To this day it still hurts to remember it.

There were many more trials. Someone had said to us that the most difficult part of our experience would be the relationships with our fellow missionaries. We quickly dismissed that thought as we imagined we could get

along with anyone. But when you bring together a dozen young people, most of them teenagers from different nations and denominations around the world, and place them on a team with a young, inexperienced leader, with no mentors readily available to help, it is a situation ripe for conflict. Not only were we faced with cross-cultural communication challenges, we also had different understandings of theology and mission. At the end of these two years, the leader of OM Scandinavia apologized and said we should never have been thrown together like that and left on our own—but we were, and we tried to make the best of it.

We experienced numerous team conflicts but somehow we managed to work through them, to the degree that we were able to carry on our ministry with relative unity. I think it helped that I was non-defensive and collaborative as a leader, always willing to listen to the opinions of others. Nevertheless, some traumatic things happened: a female team member slept with one of the youth we were reaching out to, became pregnant, and had an abortion, all of which we discovered only after the fact; one of our team members attempted suicide when we visited an isolated village in which everyone on the team felt a spirit of darkness and of heaviness; while another team member, a man in his forties whom the OM Norway leader parachuted into our team in the second year, had an erotic dream about a young female team member and shared his dream with her. Needless to say she was very frightened, and we had to send him home.

I took all of this very hard, and so often felt like a failure. At one point during the second year, I offered to resign as team leader, but the other team members encouraged me to stay on. Even today, with the benefit of hindsight and

the realization that I was placed in a very difficult situation, there is a place in my heart where I still feel like I should have done better. With my mind I do not condemn myself, but it is hard to shake the deep-seated emotions in the depth of my being. Again I see a certain dichotomy in me, a disconnect exists between heart and mind. I think I often elevate the voice of my heart above the voice of my mind because my feelings somehow seem more real to me than my thoughts.

Nonetheless, God in grace worked some good things in me during those trying years: the cultural and theological diversity on our team stretched me and helped me become more tolerant and generous toward those who thought differently than I did; the recurring team conflicts helped me to grow in my understanding and appreciation of the beauty of unity and reconciliation; and the fact that I remained on as leader taught me something about resilience and perseverance in times of difficulty. Perhaps the most significant benefit I received, in terms of my personal growth and future calling, was the opportunity to preach regularly in the Arna Misjonsmenighet, a small missions church situated in Arnatveit, outside of Bergen. I preached my first sermon in Norway. This wise and caring church, with whom we partnered in our second year, and which at the time had no pastor, offered all of the members of my team the opportunity to exercise their spiritual gifts through various avenues of service. Through their openness, I discovered that God had given me a gift for teaching and preaching, which was much affirmed by the Arna church. By the goodness of God, the entire trauma I had experienced as a result of my grade 7 speech was not only healed—public speaking actually became one of my central ministry gifts.

The best gift we received in Norway was the birth of our first child, Caleb. The timing and place of his birth was perhaps also a gift from God, as his presence helped both to add unity to our team (everyone loved him) as well as to prevent me from becoming too inward looking with respect to my team's struggles. It helped to have another focus for my thoughts and energy. I have happy memories of wheeling Caleb in a stroller up and down the hills of Arnatveit.

We returned to Canada in 1991, again settling in Fredericton, where I quickly found a summer job as a mini-golf course attendant, with the anticipation of beginning seminary studies in the fall. The difficulties I had encountered in Norway were more than enough to convince me that I needed more training to better prepare for a life of ministry. At the time I envisioned returning to the mission field after my studies, even though Joanne encouraged me to consider becoming a pastor. I had zero interest in that possibility!

We quickly rejoined our faith community at Skyline Acres United Baptist Church, many of whom had faithfully supported us during our time in Norway. Both Joanne and I agreed it would be wise to include the leaders of our church to help us discern whether or not God truly was calling us to seminary. The leaders graciously agreed to meet with us; we had a good session with them in which they asked probing questions, prayed with us and promised to get back to us after taking more time for prayer. When they contacted us the next week, we were surprised by their unanimous decision: "We do not believe God is leading you to

seminary at this time." In spite of our shock, we were not upset and freely chose to submit to their wisdom.

A wonderful stress free year of rest followed in which I found a full-time job as a microbiology lab technician in the biology department at UNB. I had had no idea how completely worn out and exhausted I was after those two years in Norway, and it was both a relief and a joy to have a simple nine to five job with no leadership responsibilities. I still look back on that year with fondness; I very much needed it to heal and to rest. Once again God in grace looked after me, even though in many ways I had been an inadequate servant.

Two other significant events happened during that year. Best of all was the birth of our daughter Ruth. I had actually had a dream of her infant face before she was born and said to Joanne, "I think we are going to have a daughter." When she was born, she looked just like the face I remembered from my dream. This is the only time I have ever had such a thing happen.

The second event was that I accepted my church's nomination to become a deacon, at a time when there were soon only two other deacons in a congregation of over one hundred. This became significant because during that year it became known to us that our pastor had been involved in separate sexual affairs with two vulnerable married women in the congregation. The fallout from that crisis fell squarely upon the three of us, and two of us were still in our twenties.

Thankfully, God gave us the wisdom to handle the situation very well: we brought everything into the light, as rumors were already beginning to fly, while insisting that the pastor confess and repent. He refused and resigned. We offered

the two women the opportunity to share their stories with the congregation, without any coercion from us, with the simple hope of healing. They accepted and after they told their stories, it was beautiful to witness how the congregation rallied around them, openly forgiving and restoring them; that moment of reconciliation actually drew the church closer together in love and unity. In the end, no one left the church but the pastor, and I was greatly encouraged at how God worked through us as deacons to help bring about a good measure of healing. This event further added to my love of reconciliation.

After that year, the microbiology professor I worked for offered me a permanent full-time position in his lab. While I was grateful that he appreciated the work I did, I still had a sense that God might be calling me to seminary. So once again Joanne and I approached our church leaders and asked them to help us discern God's guidance. Once again they met with us, asked questions, prayed for us, and promised to pray some more before they got back to us. Once again their answer was unanimous: "At this time, we do believe God is calling you to seminary!"

Therefore in 1992, I applied and was accepted to the Masters of Divinity degree program at Acadia Divinity College (ADC), my denomination's seminary in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, with the intent of becoming a missionary when I graduated. Shortly afterward, we rented a basement apartment in New Minas, just outside of Wolfville. When I began my studies and realized how very heavy the workload was, I recognized how gracious God had been to provide me with a year of rest. It also taught me a lesson about the importance of involving the body of

Christ in significant questions of discernment. On my own I surely would have chosen to go to seminary immediately, but by involving others in the decision the timing of God was better discerned.

There was also another added blessing: because we included our home church in the decision making process, our sisters and brothers in Christ embraced God's plan for us and gladly invested in my education. Entirely on their own initiative, our church community faithfully supported us financially with a gift of two hundred dollars every month throughout all three years of my degree. This was very much a Godsend as the only work I had throughout those years was a summer job working with the development program at ADC, and as a small school ADC could only offer a very small scholarship. We experienced more lean years financially, this time with the added burden of raising a family, including our youngest son Zachary who was born in 1994, another precious gift from God. But through it all, Joanne and I grew in our faith in God's goodness to provide for our needs as we strove to follow God's will. We sometimes had little or no food in our cupboards, but at those times the doorbell would ring and someone would drop off a gift of food right when we needed it. I remember one such occasion, when someone came with bags of apples that they had gleaned from the orchard floor, after they had fallen from the trees. We gratefully received that gift.

I received an excellent academic education at ADC in which I learned much about the Bible, theology, biblical languages and church history. While I enjoyed these studies, which provided a solid academic foundation for my

ministry, and received good grades, the seminary education I received could be described more as 'informative' than as 'formative.' While my mind was educated, which is a gift in and of itself, I do not believe I grew that much in my spirit, in my ability to give and receive love, or in my relationship with God. I cannot blame the seminary for this, as I recognize that I bear primary responsibility for my own spiritual formation. In fact, I believe most seminaries in North America at this time focused more on academics than on spiritual formation, although this has since changed significantly. Nonetheless, I believe it would have been helpful to have more attention focused on the character and spirit of the minister rather than just the mind, and especially upon how to nurture a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

Sadly throughout these years, I often neglected prayer as the demands of a young, growing family, coupled with the rigor of full-time graduate studies, left me with little surplus energy. It was my own choice, mostly decided by default, to prioritize academics above relationship with God—not that the two are mutually exclusive. This was likely influenced by my desire to do well with my studies, or my fear of not doing well. Spiritually I feel like I made little progress other than to maintain a distant orbit around God. If I can anthropomorphize two planets in our solar system, in my relationship with God I was much more like Pluto, cold and distant, rather than fiery-hot Mercury cheerfully orbiting close to the sun. Yet even then God in grace did not abandon me: the gravitational strength of God's love refused to surrender me to the dark vacuum of space. It is

not that I had a lot of faith in this love, but that this love remained faithful to me, revealing itself every now and then as a bright glimmer of hope.

At times I experienced God's love through the love of my young children, with whom I played each night before taking up my homework. I think I did my best parenting when they were young. Joanne and I often took them on various excursions: to the library, to the petting zoo, to the beach, and to local, provincial and national parks. On many occasions we pulled them to church on Sunday morning in a wagon. But these years presented a challenge to our marriage, as Joanne and I had little time to ourselves, and I neglected to give her enough attention. But she was gracious and forgiving, yet another sign of God's love. I never could have made it through seminary without her steadfast support.

Among the various people at seminary, Joanne and I both came to enjoy the company and fellowship of a small group of Nigerian students and their families, who all lived together in one rental apartment. Not only were they serious students, they were also serious about their relationship with God. Perhaps this is what drew us to them. In spite of my spiritual weaknesses, and underneath my clouds of self-condemnation, I still hungered for God's reality. On numerous occasions our Nigerian friends invited us to all-night prayer meetings which they hosted at a local church; typically Joanne and I were the only Caucasians present. We enjoyed and were intrigued by their passionate singing and praying, and marvelled at how their young children often slept through it all on the church pews. In looking back, I am encouraged to see that these

relationships were yet another way in which God prepared us for our current ministry context among many West Africans.

While we attended seminary, Joanne and I also applied to join a mission agency, with whom we hoped to serve as missionaries in Asia upon graduation. I was primarily attracted to the agency through reading many of the biographies of their missionaries. We were excited to pass the language competency test, and then had to write another battery of standardized tests. We had encouraging meetings with both local and national representatives of the mission. Yet somewhere in the midst of the process we began to lose our enthusiasm, especially as we saw one young missionary couple returned to New Brunswick because they were unable to raise sufficient funds. This troubled us: the mission agency claimed to be a faith mission, whose missionaries raised money for their mission not by asking others for it but by depending solely upon God in prayer. Yet it seemed to us that the emphasis was entirely on the faith of the individual, rather than the missionary community as a whole. This individualistic approach left a bad taste in our mouth, so we decided to withdraw our application. But before we could do so, the mission informed us that the standardized tests I wrote revealed a significant weakness in me to the degree that I was likely not suitable for their mission. They never told me what this weakness was. While the sting of this rejection was mostly offset by our decision to terminate our application, it nevertheless contributed to my feelings of inadequacy.

Yet in my seminary years, I also experienced the encouragement of having my teaching gifts affirmed. One summer, I was asked to represent Acadia

Divinity College on a development trip to Newfoundland, where I spoke on a Sunday morning in a Baptist church which had a shaky relationship with the seminary. Upon returning to Nova Scotia, I was informed that the president of the Atlantic United Baptist Convention wanted to speak with me, a man I had never spoken to. I approached the meeting with apprehension, wondering if I had done something wrong, but he warmly encouraged me for my sermon in Newfoundland, saying that he had heard many good reports about it, and that it had helped to improve the relationship between the seminary and the church. I was grateful that God was able to work through me to bring about this small measure of reconciliation.

Before long, I received invitations to speak at other churches on occasional weekends, including a five-week call to a field of three Baptist churches in and around Woods Harbour, a small fishing village on the south coast of Nova Scotia, while their pastor was on vacation. One Sunday I was feeling quite sick, with a good touch of laryngitis, but still felt responsible to preach, so I made the three hour drive to Woods Harbour and delivered my sermons with a very raspy voice. Afterwards, in addition to receiving the usual preaching stipend, I was amazed to receive numerous envelopes with money from various seniors who took pity on me for my sickness. It totaled close to an extra five hundred dollars. This wonderful surprise came when we were low on money. Once again God was faithful to meet our needs.

A short while after this, just before I entered my final year of seminary, I accepted a call to my first pastorate. The call story is interesting because it

reveals my own inexperience, even naïveté, at this time. In the summer of 1994, I was asked to preach at the Sackville Bible Chapel in Lower Sackville, NS, a small congregation of about forty people. This was my first invitation to speak in a non-Baptist church. Immediately afterwards, Joanne and I were invited to the home of an older couple, who asked me to consider becoming their pastor on a half-time basis. The offer included a parsonage for our family to live in. In hindsight this invitation should have set off an alarm bell: how could this couple by themselves invite me to a position of church leadership? Where were the other church leaders? However, neither Joanne nor I registered this thought, simply saying that we would like to take two weeks to think and pray about it. After much discussion and prayer, we did sense God's guidance, so we accepted and moved our family from New Minas to Lower Sackville. On our first Sunday the couple who had invited us was away on vacation, but everything seemed to be in place, until after I preached my sermon. As I stood by the door shaking people's hands on their way out, I was dumbfounded to hear person after person say something like this: "I enjoyed your sermon; I hope you come back again sometime." Apparently not one person had any idea that I had been called to serve them. In my embarrassment, I finally worked up the courage to say to one individual, "Actually, I have accepted a call to be your pastor." The response, at least, was quite heart-warming: "Oh, isn't that wonderful!"

I would soon find out that the older couple had built the church building with their own money, owned the parsonage, and were the only elders in the congregation, as they did not think anyone else was suitable to be an elder.

Needless to say the congregation primarily consisted of dependent people. Yet I liked the church members: they were honest, humble and down to earth. I found them non-threatening to visit, which helped me overcome my fears of pastoral visitation, and God worked through their kindness toward me to transition me into pastoral ministry. For the most part I even got along well with the controlling leadership couple. They also had good traits: they had a sincere faith and they were very generous with their time and money and possessions. They had a genuine heart for global missions, and hosted a monthly missionary prayer meeting in their home. All told, this story reassures me that God can work through a less than ideal call, in the midst of less than ideal circumstances, to work God's purposes. I think it also reveals two of my personal, beneficial character traits for ministry: patience and understanding. I am very longsuffering, and most often I am non-judgmental as I try to understand and work together with others. Perhaps I spare others my judgment because I tend to reserve that scourge for myself. Or to be kinder to myself, perhaps I am well enough aware of my own weaknesses that I understand and tend not to judge others for their weaknesses.

About midway through our four years in Lower Sackville, I received a phone call from a very distraught mother I did not know, who could no longer control her son Stephen (a pseudonym) who was in grade eight, and had stopped going to school, and whose father had abandoned both her and her son a few years earlier. I promised her I would pray about her concern, and then I talked it over with Joanne. As I always wanted to make myself available for God to work

through me, I wondered if Joanne and I should take him in. Joanne was thinking the very same thing, and after some prayer and discernment Stephen came to live with us for a year. That was certainly an adventure! It was a very difficult but worthwhile year. Stephen hated going to school, and some mornings I literally had to grab his arm or leg and drag him out of bed. That was hard on me as I much prefer gentleness to aggression, but my gentle remonstrations to get out of bed and get ready for school didn't work. Either Joanne or I then had to drive him to school and watch him enter the doors before we knew we could relax. We eventually discovered he was stealing some things from us, and made the difficult decision to press charges in juvenile court. Yet we spoke on his behalf in the courtroom and he received no criminal record, to our relief, as that was never our intent. In the end he respected us for it, and today we still maintain a relationship with both Stephen and his mother. My only regret is that I did not open my heart more to him, and spend more time just talking with him. I think that is the very thing he needed most. While I cared for him physically, and stood by his side in times of trouble, I did not share my very self with him.

This is something that is also true of my relationships with others. I see it especially with my own children. As they grew older, into their junior and senior high years, I was almost always there to give them rides, to go hiking or bicycling, or to go on various excursions, just as my parents were with me. Yet just as something failed in the communication of love and affection between my parents and me, so too this has been my greatest failure as a parent. It is a serious and significant failure. I feel it most in my relationship with my daughter, as I

don't think my two sons needed my emotional attention in the same way that she did. I have no greater regret as a parent. It is painful to know that my failures have hurt others. Worse yet, I still don't know how to open my heart to others. Or perhaps I am deceiving myself: do I know, but am too afraid? That seems much closer to the truth. I wonder how long it will be before I am able to rest fully in God's goodness, and become a better channel of God' love.

My journey with the Sackville Bible Chapel ended after four years.

During that time, in the spring of 1996, I graduated from ADC with my Masters of Divinity degree. Upon graduation I supplemented my income from the church by becoming a substitute teacher in the Halifax region, until I received a new call to pastoral ministry in 1998. I did not leave the congregation on bad terms, but I was finding it increasingly difficult to serve faithfully as a pastor while also being on constant call as a substitute teacher. The situation gradually felt untenable, even as I also grew to recognize that I needed a new environment in order to grow more as a person, as a pastor, and as a leader.

My final act of ministry in the congregation was to promote and help establish a leadership team to work alongside the older couple, to which they rather reluctantly agreed. A few years after we moved away, we learned that the team had removed the couple from leadership, as their control tendencies were hindering church growth. This may have been for the best, but it is sad.

As I look back at these early adulthood years, I recognize the call of God upon a vessel made of clay. In my youthful enthusiasm I excitedly launched into God's mission, eager to make a difference in the world, as I had read about in

missionary biographies. But repeatedly I was confronted with my own weaknesses: my fears, my failures, my self-condemnation, my struggles to love, and my doubts regarding God's love. I was no missionary hero. Nor was I a heroic pastor. It seems I experienced more failure than victory. But in retrospect, was this not a necessary part of chiselling away at my pride? I have not reflected on my pride much in this story, but in writing I recognize that it has always been there, a fierce but quiet partner trying to assure me that I mattered, that I was somebody. Like a weed, pride seems to have grown in the very soil intended for love.

The ugly nature of my pride is such that it turns in on itself. It is not boastful when I accomplish something, but it is self-condemning when I fail.

Surely then my struggle with self-condemnation is at one and the same time a struggle with pride. To condemn myself is ultimately to take my focus off of God, whose Word declares that I am loved and valuable, and whose love I have sometimes experienced in beautiful ways, and to put my focus on myself, onto my own failures or accomplishments. I long for God to give me the grace to take my eyes off of myself, and off of the question of my own success or failure, and to keep them fixed on God, and the concerns of God's kingdom.

The wonder I see is that, in spite of all this, God continued to call me and to provide for my family's needs and to offer clear guidance at various stages of my young adult journey. God has worked through me to reconcile others and to encourage others with my teaching. Even Pluto, in its distant, tentative orbit, still receives the gracious gift of the sun's light.

Middle Adulthood (Age 33-Present): Circling the Sun

No planet in our solar system is in a perfectly circular orbit around the sun. Rather, each planet traces an elliptical path as it winds its way around its own prescribed trajectory. On every one of their annual orbits, each planet has a moment when it is closest in distance to the sun (the perihelion) and a moment when it is farthest from the sun (the aphelion); every planet moves fastest at perihelion and slowest at aphelion. Nonetheless, every planet remains in constant orbit. I take heart in this astronomical observation because I find it so closely mirrors my own spiritual life. Throughout my middle adulthood, there have been times when I have felt close to God and times when I have felt distant, times when my spiritual life has quickened and times when it has slowed down. Yet the entire time, the attractional pull of God's love has helped me to maintain a position circling the Son.

But I have also been troubled by this phenomenon. I have found that just at those moments when I draw nearest to God, I begin to retreat out of fear that I will be consumed. I have been afraid to remain at perihelion lest I share the fate of the Greek mythological figure Icarus who, with the wings his father Daedalus fashioned for him of feather and wax to flee Crete, ignored his father's advice and flew farther and farther from the earth, and ever closer to the sun, until its fiery heat melted his wings and he fell back into the foaming sea. But I have twisted this lesson: if in pride Icarus flew too close to the sun, in pride I have kept my distance from the Son because of my desire to preserve my will and not subsume

it under God's will. Similarly, I have also found that I cannot maintain my position at aphelion: when I am distant from God, I cannot endure an overly prolonged separation, for my heart can only find satisfaction in the warmth of God's love, and it inevitably returns. Fortunately, I have followed some of Daedalus' good advice, who had also warned Icarus not to fly too close to the ocean lest his wings become waterlogged. In grace, God has kept me from the danger of becoming so complacent that I drown.

This oscillation between nearness and distance has marked my adult spirituality as I have struggled to navigate the twin dangers of pride and complacency. While my wish is for more constancy, for a steadfast experience of God's goodness, perhaps this fluctuation is as natural to those whose lives revolve around God as it is to those planets which revolve around the sun. What matters in the end is not experience but obedience, a faithful following in the footsteps of Jesus, as marked by love of God and neighbour. In this regard, I do recognize that I must learn to submit my will more and more to God, whose will is always towards abundant life and the flourishing of human communities. But it is precisely in the falling away that this resolve deepens. In the spiritual life, the way up is often the way down; failure is the back door to success. Until I thoroughly experience the consequences of my actions, I am bound to repeat them; it is not until I fail repeatedly in my own strength that I begin to look to God for strength.

Such lessons have been learned the hard way over the past seventeen years of my life, which have been invested in two church pastorates. In each of these I

have sincerely tried to obey God by serving and loving others; in each, I have been hampered by my ongoing struggle with my old problems of self-condemnation and giving and receiving love. Yet, through it all I have grown. I have learned in a way I could only learn through struggle that God is faithful and that God truly has given me the gifts and resources I need to serve God faithfully.

In 1998, I accepted a call from Petitcodiac Mennonite Church in New Brunswick to become their new pastor. Joanne and I consulted with numerous people regarding this call, and they all affirmed their belief that this was in line with God's will for us. We sensed the same thing in our own prayers, so we moved our family of five to the rural village of Petitcodiac, half an hour west of Moncton, and joined the small congregation of about forty members. This lumber and farming centre then had a population of about fifteen hundred people, although its school and other community resources drew upon a population of about ten thousand people from outlying areas.

I was known by many of the members of this church. While growing up my parents took our family to the annual Mennonites of the Atlantic Provinces (MAP) retreat, held in various Maritimes locations, which was also attended by many members of the Petitcodiac congregation. MAP played a vital role for many years in helping maintain connection between the Mennonites scattered across the Maritimes.

In many ways it felt like a homecoming for me to become the pastor of a Mennonite congregation. I immediately felt comfortable with Anabaptist theology and its emphasis on the centrality of Jesus, and the call to follow Jesus in

a holistic way. Over the past seventeen years I have grown to cherish the

Anabaptist understanding of Christianity as a life of discipleship, as being Christ's agents of reconciliation and peace in the midst of a broken world. In the process,
I have also become convinced that Christians should abstain from both war and violence, as they are incompatible with the teaching and the life of Jesus.

Perhaps now is a good time to expand a little more on my personal beliefs as they have taken root and matured in the Mennonite church. I think stating my overarching faith conviction will add something to the telling of my spiritual autobiography. While I do believe we can learn more about people through the way they live rather than through their stated beliefs, ideally the two go hand in hand. An authentic life of faith is demonstrated by a congruity between action and belief. It is not that I have arrived at such a congruity, but I am striving towards it.

Therefore, in brief, here is my understanding of God's purposes with this world. The Bible tells the story of God the Creator's relentless quest of love to restore shalom, well-being in every dimension of life, to all of the broken creation, a breach caused by human pride and selfishness. At the heart of God's plan is Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who came and lived among us, taught us through both word and example, died for us and rose again, in order to reconcile all that is broken, to renew all of life. God longs for everyone to receive and enjoy God's gift of reconciliation through faith in Jesus. God's dream of shalom becomes reality as human beings are reconciled to God, to one another, to themselves and to creation. As we receive God's gift, God also sends us,

corporately and as individual members of community, to be agents of reconciliation, through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Through participating in Jesus by the Spirit, we enter into and become part of God's story. We live into this story as we embrace Jesus' way of the cross, laying down our lives in love, with the joy of the resurrection set before us. As we walk the journey of reconciliation, everything that we do is lived out against the backdrop of God's great promise that the dream of shalom will one day become the all-encompassing reality. This is our sustaining hope.

One of the things I soon learned and appreciated about the Petitcodiac congregation is that its members did express their faith in practical actions. They were there for each other as well as for their neighbours. I learned a lot from witnessing and participating in such concrete actions as shovelling the snow off a farmer's barn after it partially collapsed, assembling and sending school and health kits to developing countries, raising money to buy coal and potatoes for people suffering from a harsh winter in Ukraine, hosting an annual fundraising dinner for the local food bank and clothing depot, visiting the local senior's home regularly while providing singing and teaching, entering into a sister church relationship with a Mennonite church in Colombia, and being part of a delegation to visit that congregation. The Petitcodiac congregation also runs a thriving nonprofit Ten Thousand Villages festival sales program, selling fair trade goods produced by artisans in developing countries at weekend sales all over Atlantic Canada. Joanne successfully managed that program for the eight years we lived in Petitcodiac, increasing annual sales from about \$50,000 to close to \$500,000.

This project continues to involve many faithful volunteers from the small congregation.

Petitcodiac was a good place to raise our young family. The congregation included all of its children in all of its activities. Our children were always loved and welcomed, and never singled out as the pastor's children. They quickly made friends with others in the congregation.

We lived in an old farmhouse on a one-acre property, so there was plenty of room to run and play. There was also abundant space for gardening. While I had never gardened before, I discovered that I found a lot of relaxation and joy in it. Before long I had planted a large vegetable garden, numerous fruit trees and many perennials. I also fashioned a rock garden. Every spring one of my favorite activities upon coming home from a day of work was to investigate my various gardens for signs of growth. I never lost my sense of wonder that year after year the seeds, bulbs and transplants which I placed in the ground began to stir with new life.

The small congregation also experienced new life as a number of children were born during those years. I had the privilege of baptizing a number of young people, including my two oldest children Caleb and Ruth. When we first arrived in Petitcodiac it was apparent to me that many in the congregation were tired, but during my first six years as pastor I witnessed the congregation strengthen and increasingly turn its attention to the needs of others. Together with another couple from the church, Joanne and I again invited a teenager from a troubled family to live with us. For about one year Josh would alternate spending one

week in our home, and then one week with the other family. Last year we received a very gracious letter from Josh, now a young man in his twenties, thanking our two families, and sharing with us how our care helped to change his life. The heartfelt message was heartwarming and encouraging to receive.

One of the best gifts I received during those years was a discovery my father made while researching our family tree. Shortly after I became a Mennonite pastor, he learned that many of our ancestors had actually been lay pastors in the Dutch Mennonite church over many generations. For the first time in my life I experienced a wonderful sense of deeper family identity, even a sense of marvel that I was included in the way God has been working in my family throughout history. This greatly reinforced my feelings that I had found a true spiritual home in the Mennonite denomination. Words cannot express my glad humility at the thought that God has had his hand upon me and my family over many centuries. I praise God for this wider sense of identity. I know that our deepest identity is found in our spiritual family, but to discover that my ancestral family was also part of my spiritual family is a cherished gift from God that helps fill a hole from childhood.

Around this time, my father also gave me two precious documents from past family members. The first is a letter written by my great-grandfather, Fokke Hommes de Jong. He wrote the letter in November of 1871, when his first wife and mother of his young children died at a young age. While the letter expresses his profound grief, it sings with faith in God's goodness, and is filled with thanksgiving to his parents and siblings for all the loving care they provided for

his wife when she was sick. Here are a few quotes which I find very moving: "If I had not received strength from above, I would have succumbed from heartache. To see such a suffering of someone whose life and health was so pleasing to me and had such an inexpressible value. But, thanks to God, she took her suffering patiently and fought with courage and power until her end in order to share in the kingdom of God;" "With many people it goes like the flowers of the field which flower beautifully today and are no more tomorrow....Therefore let everybody work as long as it is day before the night comes when nobody can work;" "Everything you dropped for us; your night rest as well as your home and your farm. I am almost prepared to say that you were willing to sacrifice your life in order to keep her alive....Thanks be to God for such parents" (De Jong 2005, 51-52).

The second document is Oma Holland's confession of faith, my father's gentle and kind mother of whom I earlier made a few brief comments. She wrote it before her baptism in March 1957, when she was 53 years old. While she had no formal education beyond elementary school, her simple faith is profound: "For me God means love. In all of one's daily life, one is always in touch with God. Yes, all of our life must only be love. Everywhere God's love must always have priority;" "Jesus went into death for all of us. At his birth there was no place in the inn and now there is no place for him in this world. But are we not all guilty of that as sinful people? When things go well in our life, we think that we can do without Jesus and when things go bad...we often have the tendency to blame Jesus. But Jesus knocks on every heart if we only want to understand" (De

Jong 2005, 55). It gives me joy and hope, both to see how God has swept my ancestors up into his orbit, and to see how they have gladly yielded their lives to him; it gives me courage to realize that I am but one member of my family whose life has revolved around God. I thank God for such a heritage and for this beautiful gift of identity.

My first six years at Petitcodiac flew by quickly. While I continued to struggle with old failings, and oscillated between feeling near and distant from God, I also grew in confidence and in the exercise of my pastoral gifts. My sense of adventure was satisfied by two international trips: one with my oldest son Caleb to see my sister Margaret in Haiti, where she served for eleven years as a missionary nurse with Mennonite Central Committee, and one with members of my congregation to visit our sister church in Bogota, Colombia. On both trips I was moved to experience generous hospitality from the poor, and to witness the vibrant, joyful spirituality of their churches. This was yet another way in which God was preparing me for my current pastoral placement.

Sadly, our final two years at Petitcodiac Mennonite Church were marred by conflict. It was not a church-wide conflict, but it involved both Joanne and I, which made it very hurtful. I think it is fair to say that neither Joanne nor I have ever experienced such intense relational pain. One couple in the church, with whom we had become friends, began to misinterpret some of our actions and accused us of acting with certain motives that were simply not true. They had been upset with us a few times over the years, and on at least three occasions, for various reasons, had threatened to leave the church. The first time this happened

was after we had been at Petitcodiac for over one year, on Caleb's birthday, when the couple gave me a card after church. I assumed it was a birthday card, and didn't open it until my family was at the bowling alley celebrating Caleb's birthday. The letter stunned me: it accused us of not caring for our friends, as we had not invited them to our home, and they threatened to leave the church. While it is true that we had not yet invited this couple over, we were certainly planning on it. We had been to their house numerous times, and assumed that we were being good friends by paying for the babysitter and thus sparing them this expense. For us friendship was about being together, not about where we met. Why didn't they simply ask for an explanation rather than threatening to leave? Looking back this should have been a red flag, but I was still young and fairly inexperienced as a pastor, so I immediately visited them and apologized, and soon after we invited their family to our home.

For a few years everything seemed well, until more accusations came, this time more closely related to ministry than to friendship. Each time I would search myself to see if I had done anything wrong, and if I did, I apologized for it. I know I made some mistakes and that I am certainly not blameless, but I also know that neither Joanne nor I were the kind of people they were making us out to be.

In our sixth year, after one particularly painful accusation, we brought the matter to the church leadership, but were only further hurt when the leaders assumed that there must be some truth to the misguided accusations leveled against us, and encouraged us to apologize for the sake of peace. We had already apologized for anything we thought we had done wrong, and had come to realize

that any further apologies would be both insincere and unhelpful. Joanne and I both experienced significant anguish that those church leaders who became involved did not see us for who we were. Their actions hurt us more than the actions of the couple. How could they not see our character? How could they imagine that we acted with the bad motives that we were being accused of? We had both tried to love and serve this community with integrity, which only heightened our pain at being so deeply misunderstood.

In the end, after two years of struggling with this conflict and seeking to help resolve it, the situation only became more and more entangled until we accepted a call to another church. We did not want to be the cause of any division at Petitcodiac, and I believe we made the right decision to leave when we did. I am grateful that the congregation remains vibrant and healthy today.

Unfortunately, the conflict was never resolved between us and the other couple, but we did go out of our way to do our best to leave the church on good terms with everyone else. In this peaceful leaving, I believe, we largely succeeded.

Nonetheless, it was very difficult for me to leave with unresolved conflict with the couple, so I took my concerns to a Christian counsellor. He reassured me that I had done all I could, including extending an offer to enter into mediation with the other couple, but it was rejected. I took the counsellor's words to heart and left with a good conscience. By the grace of God, I do not condemn myself over this trial. In fact, God has worked through it to significantly strengthen my resolve to live as a peacemaker. Having personally experienced the pain of conflict has only deepened in me a love of reconciliation. It is more beautiful in

my eyes than ever before. I am so grateful and indebted to God that in my new ministry context God has often worked through me to bear the precious fruit of reconciliation.

In our final year at Petitcodiac, Joanne and I both found ourselves drawn to a pastoral opening at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta, an urban congregation of about one hundred members. Although we had begun to look at various pastoral job postings over the year, this was the only one that caught our attention, and it was the only one to which I applied. The immediate appeal for me was the fact that the job posting stated that there was a significant African minority present in the congregation. That fact alone stirred up an excitement within me. Furthermore, as part of the application process, the Holyrood congregation sent us an audio recording of one of their worship services. I still remember the thrill in my spirit when, on that recording, I heard a young African man sing a solo. I was deeply moved. Something very close to joy stirred in my innermost spirit. It cemented my desire to continue with the application.

Nonetheless, at some point in the process, both Joanne and I decided to terminate my application. At that time the Holyrood congregation had a youth pastor and a couple of items on his personal website made us rather uncomfortable (we have since discovered that there was nothing too serious to worry about). Because we did not want to raise awkward questions about his website, and risk undermining someone we did not know before his own congregation, we quietly withdrew our application. But almost immediately, we

both felt we had made a big mistake. It was a feeling that we could not shake. I was too embarrassed to re-submit my application so both Joanne and I prayed, "God, we think we have made a mistake. If it is your will that we move to Edmonton, please have the church contact us again. If they do, we will go."

Quite some time went by and we heard nothing. Sadly I began to wonder if the congregation had found another pastor. Yet I did not have the heart to apply anywhere else, and wondered if God was calling us to persist at Petitcodiac. I was willing to do so, but my heart was no longer there either. My prayer remained, "God, please guide us."

It was then, a few months after pulling my application, that I received a very surprising and most welcome phone call: "Do you think you could ever reconsider your decision? We would be very happy if you re-applied." Relief and joy flooded me, and Joanne shared in my excitement. Soon after we flew to Edmonton so I could candidate to be their pastor, and a short while later, upon returning to Petitcodiac, we heard the following words via the telephone: "We wish you could have been in the congregation today after we announced the vote that went overwhelmingly in your favour. People in the congregation spontaneously cheered and then burst into song!" Both Joanne and I choked up at this news. Once again we experienced the goodness and grace of God's guiding hand upon our lives.

This guidance was confirmed in a wonderful way when it came time to sell our house. There were forty homes for sale in our small village, and many had been on the market for years. In faith we had already purchased a new home

in Edmonton, but not one person came to look at our home for sale in Petitcodiac during the first two months in which it was listed. We knew we could not afford to pay two mortgages at once, and our moving date was rapidly approaching, now only a month away. "God," I prayed, "will you please look after us? You know we have so little money." At the suggestion of our real estate agent, we had an open house. One couple attended. Another week went by without hearing from anyone, but then we were contacted by the only people to have viewed our house. Not long afterward we settled on a fair price with them, and the money from the closing of the sale arrived on the exact same day when we had to begin paying our mortgage in Edmonton.

As I write, I have now been the pastor of the Holyrood congregation for nine years, and I am very grateful for the good fit that continues to exist between pastor and congregation. I have so much enjoyed working in a multicultural setting that I have a difficult time imagining ever pastoring any other kind of congregation. I am stimulated by the diversity. The African members at Holyrood, now close to forty percent of the congregation, come from West Africa, primarily refugees and immigrants from Liberia and Sierra Leone. Most come from a Pentecostal background, and are accustomed to loud, lively and demonstrative worship services, while most of the other members are Mennonites descended from European heritage and prefer a quieter, more reserved and thoughtful service. The relationship between these two groups was still in its early stages when we arrived, and I have been happy to witness a slow yet steady growth in our efforts to reconcile two very different cultures into one body in

Jesus Christ. I am always delighted to see members of one culture reaching out to show care and concern to members of the other culture, something which is occurring with increasing regularity.

On one occasion, I asked one of our African members why he continued to attend Holyrood. His answer was straightforward: "Before coming here some of us attended other churches, and we were told that we were welcome. But we were never invited to use our gifts. At Holyrood we are not only welcomed but embraced as equal members of the body of Christ."

It has not always been an easy journey as there are occasional misunderstandings between the cultures. Further, a few people have left the congregation because of the changes that were taking place. Differing understandings of leadership, time and responsibility have also created tension and frustration. But the elders of the church have always stood with me in the conviction that we are pursuing a Godly vision. We are now seeing the fruit of these efforts as the congregation is integrated at every level. We have Western and African elders, preachers, worship leaders, Sunday school teachers and ushers. We sing each other's songs. At our potlucks we share Western and African cuisine. For me it is a beautiful sign of the Kingdom of God, which is based not on nationality or tribe or religious denomination, but on our common confession, love and allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord.

After my first year at Holyrood, the youth pastor left to pursue graduate studies, and Joanne became the associate/youth pastor. Joanne shares my enjoyment of people of other cultures. She is much more gifted than I am at

working with young people, and is also a much better organizer and administrator. We complemented each other well until 2014, at which point Joanne, who has a very entrepreneurial spirit, decided to pursue a new challenge. She now works for Habitat for Humanity. Nonetheless she remains very involved in church ministry, and is especially loved by the African members.

I myself have grown significantly as a pastor since coming to Holyrood, both through the continual encouragement of the congregation as a whole, as well as through the expectations and invitations of the African church members to be deeply involved in their lives. More so than most Western Christians, they hold the position of pastor in high regard and honour, and subsequently welcome and expect their pastor to speak into their lives, whether in times of celebration, sickness, tragedy or conflict. For example, I have been invited to help resolve numerous conflicts, not only among the African members of Holyrood, but in the greater Edmonton Liberian community. I have been humbled by these invitations, and by the ways in which God has worked in these situations to bring healing.

Recently I witnessed God at work to bring about what I can only call a miraculous reconciliation in a marriage between two church members that both partners had declared to be hopeless. There was so much suspicion, mistrust and lack of forgiveness between them that all of our efforts accomplished nothing. Indeed, our attempts only seemed to provide both partners further opportunity to criticize and tear each other down. I had all but given up on the marriage when one of our African elders decided to try one last time. He invited me and a few

other church members to a reconciliation session, and after two very difficult meetings we managed to get the couple to agree to participate in a marriage course. While this meant that I had to teach the class, it was more than worth it. On the final evening of the course, the estranged couple joyfully announced their reconciliation. The wife was scooped into the arms of another woman and spun around gleefully. We all broke into cheers and singing. It was a moment of wonderful joy! For years this couple had sat apart in church services, and now it is a delight to see them week by week sitting together with their young children as a family, smiling and laughing and clearly enjoying each other's company.

Through its Liberian members, Holyrood Mennonite Church has also entered into a partnership with the Free Pentecostal churches of Liberia. I have personally had the immense privilege of travelling to Liberia four times on behalf of my church, together with Joanne, largely to do Biblical peace and reconciliation teaching, which has been enthusiastically embraced by our partners in this broken country recovering from a devastating fourteen-year civil war. On one occasion, I was the keynote speaker at the four-day annual national conference of the Free Pentecostal Mission of Liberia with the theme, "Jesus has broken down the dividing wall" from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We met on holy ground in the rural interior of the country: the buildings on the conference grounds were riddled with bullet holes, while in the recent past the soil had soaked up tremendous amounts of blood, including that of many Christians and pastors. This was the very part of Liberia where the civil war began, and where the fighting was the heaviest. Countless people had lost their lives here and in the

surrounding villages. I can think of no greater honour in my life than the privilege I had to proclaim: "Jesus is our peace. In Jesus we are one. Through Jesus who in love died for us on the cross, to reconcile us both to God and to one another, all national, ethnic and tribal barriers are broken down. Jesus calls us to forgive and to love even our enemies. The same Jesus who in love gave his life for us asks us to do the same for one another. This is very difficult, but the Holy Spirit can help us."

I was humbled by an immediate and unexpected result of this teaching. I had been oblivious to a deep rift between the leaders of the denomination, and on the final day of the conference the divided leaders began, one after another, to confess their sins against each other and to ask one another for forgiveness. What followed was a beautiful time of healing and reconciliation.

God has worked through this peace teaching to bring about other acts of reconciliation. There is one story which still makes me laugh. On a different trip, after engaging in a peace workshop with a gathering of pastors together with the General Secretary of the Free Pentecostal Global Mission, he unexpectedly invited me to address the annual national conference of the Free Pentecostal women, which just happened to be taking place at the same time. As I stood before the hundreds of gathered women looking curiously at this strange white man who had just parachuted into their conference, completely out of the blue, I thought to myself, "You never know what situation you will find yourself in if you are willing to say yes to God." I enjoyed the time of teaching, and the lively question and answer session afterward.

A couple days later the leader told me, "My plan worked!" When I asked what he meant he told me this story: "The women's delegates have been very angry with their national women's leaders. For years the women had saved up money so they could surprise their leaders with the purchase of a car. They wanted the women's department to have a car just like the men's department does. But their leaders found out about the money and used it to buy the car before it could be donated to them. They wanted to drive it to this conference to surprise the delegates, to celebrate together with them, but no sooner had they purchased the car than one of the women's leaders crashed it and destroyed it. The women were so angry that they came to this conference fully prepared to dismiss all of their leaders. I wasn't sure how to handle the situation, so I thought the women should listen to your peace teaching. And it worked. After you taught at the conference, the women delegates took the initiative to approach and forgive their leaders and to start saving up for a new car." Sometimes God indeed works in mysterious ways.

Back home in Edmonton, I have helped to initiate an annual Prayer Walk for Peace. On the evening of each Remembrance Day (for the last six years), over one hundred people from numerous churches and denominations have gathered to walk through Edmonton's downtown core with lit candles to sing and pray and listen to meditations on peace. This is not intended as a protest of typical Remembrance Day ceremonies, but as an alternate way of remembering, one which includes remembering all of the victims of war, combatants and civilians alike, on all sides of every conflict. It is an opportunity to pray for peace and to

reflect on the non-violent example and teaching of Jesus. In 2010, I also became one of the founding members of the Edmonton Ecumenical Peace Network, which consists of followers of Jesus dedicated to promoting the peaceful, non-violent, enemy-loving message of Jesus, through education, dialogue, and advocacy. Sadly, in today's western church which easily conflates nationalism and faith, this is too often the missing 'peace' of the gospel.

Through all of these things, through my time at Holyrood, my time in Liberia, and my time involved in broader ministries in Edmonton, my negative self-view has been slowly improving. I have not completely overcome self-condemnation, but the wonder of experiencing God at work through me has been dulling the sharper edges. In 2014, I also became a student in the Doctor of Ministry program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale Seminary, which has led to a time of vigorously exploring and practicing numerous spiritual disciplines. These continual efforts to put myself regularly in God's presence, and to reflect on God's Word, have also better enabled me to listen to God's voice of love.

This is not to say that there is no longer any inner voice of judgment that still pains me. The following questions sometimes haunt my thoughts: The congregation has not grown in numbers since I have been here—is there something wrong with me? As a congregation we need to do more to support and invest in our youth—why haven't I helped this happen? I often don't use my time efficiently while I am in my office—why can't I overcome this? There is still a rather awkward distance in my relationship with my daughter, who is now a young adult—why can't I be more vulnerable in showing love? I genuinely

believe there is room for me to grow in each of these areas, and many more besides—but my repeated failures to do so weigh heavily on me. I still wrestle with accepting myself when I so often fall short of my own expectations.

Yet by God's grace, the journey carries on. Though I am deeply flawed, God has not discarded me. Though I am sometimes fearful, hesitant to love, and prone to inverted pride, God has never given up on me. When I least expect it, the warm rays of God's love flood my darkness. When I grow discouraged and feel like giving up, God revives my soul with rare glimpses of Beauty so radiant that I am captivated by its splendour, and cannot help but journey toward its source in Jesus. And when God sees fit to involve me in the joy of reconciliation, my heart melts. It is a joyful wonder that God would see fit to create beauty through me.

As I reflect upon the entirety of my life, and consider God's grace and faithfulness to me, I can only answer with wonder: I am God's beloved, because God is love. God's love lies at the centre of everything. Physicists teach us that gravity is the central force in the universe, because it is the only force which is able to exert a pull over great distances. Its range is unlimited. There is no space in the universe outside of its influence; there is no object in the universe which does not experience its pull. This is just how it is with God's love. It reaches everywhere. It is poured out upon all human beings. Jesus used this glorious truth to motivate his followers to love even their enemies, saying that if they did so they would be imitators of God: "So I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in

heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44-45).

The power of God's love, like the force of gravity, is quite simply everywhere. I am not alone in this universe after all: "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you" (Psalm 139:7-12).

Such love cements the very bedrock of God's faithfulness. It is an interesting observation that satellites are actually always falling, yet they maintain their orbit. This speaks to a profound theological truth: even our repeated failures, our constant falling, cannot separate us from God's love. It is not our feeble efforts which maintain our relationship with God, but God's steadfast faithfulness. The wonderful thing about God's love is that it is a force, just like gravity, which always attracts and never repels. In spite of my weaknesses, God accepts and works through me. In spite of my failures, Jesus forgives and sets me free. In spite of my efforts to hide from God when I condemn myself in shame, the Holy Spirit graciously seeks and finds me. Indeed my life's story testifies that it is the place of my deepest brokenness, the wounds in my heart that have caused me such a struggle to give and to receive love, in which God has been most at

work in my ministry. Having experienced the loneliness of alienation, I deeply appreciate the joy of reconciliation.

In the midst of this great universe, spanning countless galaxies, and trillions upon trillions of stars, who am I that God has chosen to love me, and to gift me, and to draw me into an eternal orbit of love? In the end, all I can do is respond with the Psalmist in wonder and praise: "O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens....When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor....O LORD our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1, 3-5, 9).

Reflecting on the Experience of Writing my Autobiography

I have found that the practice of writing my spiritual autobiography has helped me in a significant way to make sense of my life. Rather than ignoring my past and living rather aimlessly in the present, which is quite easy for me to do, my reflections on my own life story have revealed God's hand at work in my life, thus giving my life abundant meaning, while also providing encouragement, hope and a sense of direction for the future. While I would not have chosen to write my spiritual autobiography at this stage in my life outside of the requirements of this program, as I recognize my level of spiritual maturity is still so incomplete, and therefore I am concerned that there is not all that much in my story to

encourage others, nonetheless I do not regret for a moment writing my story at this stage. To whatever degree my story encourages others I am grateful, but at this point I recognize that writing this story has inspired me to look ahead to the rest of my life with much more anticipation.

The source of this inspiration is two-fold. First of all, through the process of writing I have come to see in a much clearer way that my story is part of God's bigger picture. This is a marvel to me, to consider that God actually has a hand on me, and has chosen to include and to work through my life to help fulfill God's good and eternal purposes. Secondly, it has helped to write my story while simultaneously reading the spiritual autobiographies of others. This has enabled me to see that I am not alone in my life's experiences, whether in my painful struggles or in my good desires. This also gives me courage to carry on.

Let me begin with the intersection of my story with God's story. As I prepared to write my autobiography I recognized a significant lack, a loneliness arising from the early years in my life, in which I failed to connect relationally in deep and meaningful ways with others. This has led, throughout much of my life, to feelings of inadequacy and questions of identity, and to repeated failures in the giving and receiving of love. But the process of writing my story has revealed to me, in ways I had not been fully aware of before, that I have never truly been alone. This discovery has been a source of joy. My life does have a centre, my life is orbiting around Someone who is much greater than I, the God who created and redeemed me. I am held in place, not through my own power or abilities, but

by the greatness of God's eternal faithfulness. It is not the strength of my grip on God but the strength of God's grip on me that counts.

It has been through the very writing of my story that I have been able to see the many times in my life that God has revealed God's love, provision and guidance to me. To remember one such incidence provides some encouragement, like observing one twinkling star on a dark and overcast night. But to consider the many incidences as a totality throughout a lifetime provides great inspiration, akin to the wonder of observing a panoramic view of the entire starry host in a clear night's sky. It stimulates a visceral, spiritual effect of humility and awe.

The act of writing my autobiography has reinforced these amazing truths: God loves me. God created me for a purpose. God has been at work in my life to fulfill this purpose. Even through my failures, God is developing my character. God never leaves me alone. My story is part of God's great story, which gives my life eternal meaning and significance.

In the literal act of writing out my story, I have also noticed a pattern: there were three themes which caused me to experience strong emotions, even at times to choke up, as I wrote about them. In their own way each of these themes reflects something of God's goodness and God's presence and God's work in my life, for which I am profoundly grateful. Each tells me I am not alone, and that my life matters. The first is my many experiences of God in creation. I had never before realized how much God has spoken to me in the midst of the beauty of nature. In re-reading my autobiography, I also observe that my writing somehow becomes more poetic and more descriptive when noting these experiences. I

believe I have learned something important about myself and my relationship with God through this observation, as well as something about the importance of deliberately spending time outside in the future, for the sake of my ongoing spiritual formation.

Second, in the process of writing I have noticed that my spirit stirs within me in the glad discovery that I have an answer to the question, "Who am I?" I did not leave my childhood with a strong sense of identity, and I did not even recognize this lack until I began to write this story. As I wrote, something invariably warmed within me at the thought that I matter to God, that I belong to God, and that God has actually been choosing to work through me to accomplish God's purposes. For me personally, this has probably been the most spiritually instructive and uplifting element in writing out my life story. I am not insignificant in God's eyes—this is a marvel too wonderful for words. My identity is found in God's love for me, the God who refuses to let me go.

Third, in re-reading my story I noticed how many times I described reconciliation as "beautiful." Why do I find it so beautiful? Why does reconciliation move me more than many other positive descriptions of God's work in the world? As I reflect on this question, I can only answer, "Because this is how God created me, this is how God is redeeming my broken life, and this is how God wants me to engage in future ministry." In the wonderful theme of reconciliation, I have discovered something of the heart of God's purpose for my life: to be an agent of reconciliation. I am humbled that the Holy Spirit has woven together the events in my life, and my feeble but sincere efforts to follow

Jesus, and has transformed me into someone with a heart that celebrates the beauty of relational healing.

While the writing of my story has shown me many places where my life intersects with the story of God, the simultaneous reading of others' spiritual stories has also been a strong source of encouragement. In the first place, reading other autobiographies helped me simply by providing me with inspiration for how to structure my own story. This is especially true of John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (Bunyan 1978) and C.S. Lewis' Surprised by Joy (Lewis 1956). From Bunyan, I adopted the overall arc of my story: a life often punctuated by cycles of despair and self-condemnation, yet one which in the end testifies to the wonders of God's grace. While his story is far more introspective than mine, I very much relate to Bunyan's internal struggles. With Lewis, I strongly resonated with his understanding of "joy," glimpses of exquisite beauty, stabs of longing which only left him thirsting for more. I experienced my own "joy" primarily in creation, and I realized I needed to incorporate these experiences into my story as those moments which both awakened and sustained my pursuit of God, without which I might otherwise have collapsed under the weight of self-condemnation.

Reading the stories of others also gave me the courage to write my own story by reassuring me that I am not alone, whether in my strengths or my weaknesses. In the realization that I found certain parts of all the autobiographies which I read to be inspiring, I also found a measure of hope that others might find the same to be true in aspects of my own story. The sincere and transparent way

in which these stories were told motivated me to tell my own story with as much honesty and forthrightness as I thought possible and beneficial at this stage of my life.

It is encouraging to realize that as common participants in the human story we can both learn from and encourage each other through the art of storytelling. In Henri Nouwen's *The Road to Daybreak* (Nouwen 1988), I was inspired by his honest recounting of his struggles and self-doubts as he wrestled with God's call to a new vocation, as well as by his ultimate decision to abandon worldly glory in order to follow the descending way of Jesus. In Saint Augustine: Confessions (Augustine Confessions), in addition to his profound insight that humans are restless until we find our rest in God, I was particularly impressed by the way in which he addressed his entire story to God, regularly addressing God with the second person pronoun "you." It speaks to the recognition that our life stories are lived out in the presence of a personal God. While I could not relate to the ecstatic visions in the *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus* (Teresa of Avila, 1904), I was moved by Teresa of Avila's longing for deeper and deeper intimacy with God. Finally as a pastor, I related to much of Henry Wildeboer's When God Shows Up (Wildeboer 2013), especially to his painful experiences of church conflict.

In the end, the process of writing my own spiritual autobiography while reading the stories of others taught me as much about God as it did about myself and others. After all has been written, I must gladly confess that God has a sovereign hold on me, as surely as the sun holds the earth in its orbit. The God who holds me is love. The God who is at the centre of all things is the faithful

provider, who has carefully tended to my various needs throughout my life. The God who determines the courses of the stars in the sky is the trustworthy guide who has carefully directed my path and gently led me back when I strayed. The God who created the universe with such intricate beauty and gave us the ability to appreciate it is the God of grace who has opened my unworthy eyes to see the beauty of God's patient acceptance of me. The God who gave humanity and all living things the gift of planet Earth as a home is the God of generosity who has also given me gifts of ministry and of a heart for reconciliation. O God my Father, and my Lord Jesus Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, may I always keep my eyes fixed on you. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, world without end! Amen.

CHAPTER III:

A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

"Life with God is an ongoing, ever-changing, relational adventure" (Foster 2008, 134). It is the adventure of following Jesus as we find ourselves caught up in God's story. It is the adventure of being led by the Holy Spirit into the infinite landscape of God's kingdom purposes. It is the adventure of spiritual formation, as the journey with Jesus through life both requires change and changes those who sincerely embrace it. The purpose of this chapter is to present my own model of how the followers of Jesus are formed in their life with God.

An adventurous life with Jesus, rich in relationship and purpose, is God's great invitation and gift to human beings. My autobiography Orbit (chapter 2) tells the story of my own call to follow Jesus, through a struggle with self-condemnation into a gradual awareness of my identity as someone loved and gifted by God, from alienation to reconciliation. The best adventures are shared with a company of traveling companions. As we follow Jesus, we do not do so alone: God graciously provides us with brothers and sisters in Christ, and calls us to life together in community. There are deeply meaningful things for us to do, for together God calls us to engage in the journey of reconciliation: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry

of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). Together we follow Jesus and together, through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are changed.

The odyssey of life with God, and its call to participate in God's mission of reconciliation, is a tremendous challenge: "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life" (Matthew 7:14). The way is hard, for as God's people we are called to the ongoing repentance of turning from our own paths to God's paths. There are enemies which seek to prevent our progress: sin, Satan and the lures of this world's treasures. Yet there is no greater privilege than Christ's call upon our lives ("follow me"), and the sheer grace of being invited into a story that is so much bigger than we are calls us to do all that we can to prepare ourselves and others for this life-changing pilgrimage.

This chapter, therefore, represents my efforts to understand and explain the journey of spiritual formation, God's invitation and gift of change as we share life with Jesus and one another. What can we do to help facilitate this change? What does God ask of us? What does God do for us? My intent in writing is not to provide a detailed manual to be used by church leaders for a specific context, but to present my own philosophy of spiritual formation, one which guides my personal approach to ministry. Rather than supply a detailed prescription of spiritual formation, I will outline the key essential elements which shape my own philosophy of ministry, one which I hope and believe will also be beneficial in guiding others who are concerned with the formation of God's people.

The crucial elements which form the backbone of my model include my understanding of the goals of spiritual formation, the theology of spiritual

formation, and the means of spiritual formation. While I had originally intended to produce a separate section on the references to spiritual formation in the Bible, I have found it more amenable to refer liberally to Scripture throughout this chapter. In order to provide necessary context, the central elements of my model will be preceded by a description of my current ministry setting, some basic definitions, and a theological explanation of why spiritual formation is necessary in the first place. Finally, I will conclude with a consideration of some basic methods to promote spiritual formation in my congregation.

Context and Definitions

I approach this model as someone who has deeply engaged with the Christian life personally, and who has worked in the church as a pastor for twenty-one years. As I am committed to the Mennonite faith tradition, this paper will be rooted in Anabaptist theology and spirituality. Palmer Becker (2010, 2), in broad but succinct terms, highlights three core Anabaptist values: Jesus is the centre of our faith, community is the centre of our lives, and reconciliation is the centre of our work. Each of these emphases will be reflected in my model, which presents the formative adventure of life with God as a Christocentric, communal journey of reconciliation.

As introduced in the last chapter, my Holyrood congregation itself bears witness to God's reconciling work, as the community consists of two cultures seeking to live out our faith as one body in Jesus Christ. While sixty percent of the congregation (of about one hundred active members) consists primarily of

Caucasians born in the western world, the other forty percent are West African immigrants and refugees who all arrived in Canada during the last fifteen years. The majority of these are from the war-torn nation of Liberia, and most of these Liberian members were affiliated with the Pentecostal church. With major differences in both cultural and denominational backgrounds, it is vital that any efforts in spiritual formation point to our common identity in Jesus, our common vocation in mission, and our diverse community life as a precious gift of our reconciling God.

Spirituality

A second key contextual piece of my model of spiritual formation is my understanding of the words spirituality and spiritual formation. The term spirituality is popular in the western world today, reflecting a hunger for something in life beyond mere physical and material pursuits. Yet precisely because the term has become so popular, it has come to mean different things for different people. In the book *Spirituality: A Brief History*, Philip Sheldrake (2013, 3-5) points out numerous contemporary nuances of meaning: a desire for a holistic, integrated approach to life; a quest for the sacred; a quest for meaning; a thriving life; and a quest for ultimate values. At the same time he indicates how spirituality often connotes an individual's inner, subjective journey, which is not necessarily connected with one's social existence. Furthermore, many today draw a clear distinction between spirituality and religion, as they increasingly view traditional religion an inadequate means to further their spiritual journey.

In light of such broad and diverse practice, it is necessary to specify my own understanding. In the first place, my usage of the noun spirituality (and its adjectival form spiritual) will be rooted in its historical Christian meaning. The Christian concept of spirituality ultimately derives from the New Testament, and in particular from the Greek noun 'pneuma' (spirit) as it appears in the New Testament letters. Here 'spirit' is contrasted with 'flesh' (Greek 'sarx'), with flesh being understood as anything that is *against* the Spirit of God. Hence spirituality, broadly speaking, refers to life lived in conjunction *with* God's Spirit. As Sheldrake (2013, 2) writes, "This sense of 'spirituality' meaning 'life in the Spirit,' remained in constant use in the West until the twelfth century." Evan Howard (2008, 16) provides a useful working definition when he defines spirituality, at the level of practice, as "a lived relationship with God." At the centre of this relationship with God is the life of following Jesus.

Tripolar Spirituality

There is need for further refinement when spirituality is spoken of from the perspective of the various Christian traditions. In this regard, David Augsburger (2006, 12-13) provides an excellent understanding of Anabaptist spirituality when he describes it as a concrete, practised life of following Jesus in which lives are formed in the midst of everyday discipleship, as expressed in the love of neighbour. The term he coins for this is "tripolar spirituality." In distinction from "monopolar spirituality," the individual's quest for self-discovery, and from "bipolar spirituality," a life sought to be lived together with

God, Augsburger insists on tripolar spirituality, a life in which one's relationship with God cannot in any way be divided from one's relationship with others. The inner journey, the God-ward journey and the journey with one's fellow humans, both friend and enemy, are inseparable.

Tripolar spirituality serves as a necessary safeguard against accusations that spirituality is simply escapism from the real concerns of a broken and hurting world. Eugene Peterson (2005, 335) highlights the legitimate danger: "The great weakness of North American spirituality is that it is all about *us*: fulfilling our potential, getting in on the blessings of God, expanding our influence, finding our gifts, getting a handle on principles by which we can get an edge on the competition." To clarify his robust, other-oriented understanding of tripolar spirituality, Augsburger provides the example of enemy treatment, stating that in bipolar spirituality it is possible to rationalize killing one's enemy, however regrettable, because it is done in the name of God and country. But in tripolar spirituality, one pole cannot be cut off without destroying the other two: "In destroying my enemy, I destroy the integrity of my own soul. In taking my enemy's life into my own hands I do it to Christ" (Augsburger 2006, 15). Thus radical love lies at the heart of Anabaptist spirituality.

Spiritual Formation

This understanding of spirituality directly influences the Anabaptist understanding of spiritual formation. While Marcus Smucker (1989) notes that this term itself was not used by Mennonites until recently, concern for formation

has "been inherent in Mennonite emphasis upon discipleship. Anabaptist and Mennonite spirituality has been a spirituality shaped by the ethical imperative to follow Jesus at all costs." For Anabaptists, therefore, spiritual formation is essentially equivalent to discipleship formation. We are formed to be disciples, disciples whose lives reflect the life of our Lord. The followers of Jesus, whether as individuals or communities, are not formed for their own sake, but precisely for the adventure of following Jesus in life, for a life of loving God by loving neighbours, even as Jesus did. While this understanding of the Christian life is given significant emphasis in Anabaptism, it is not exclusive to Anabaptism. Southern Baptist Dallas Willard, for example, highlights the crucial link between spiritual formation and concern for others:

Spiritual formation, good or bad, is always profoundly social. You cannot keep it to yourself. Anyone who thinks of it as a merely private matter has misunderstood it. Anyone who says, "It's just between me and God," or "What I do is my own business," has misunderstood God as well as "me." Strictly speaking there is *nothing* "just between me and God." For all that is between me and God affects who I am; and that, in turn, modifies my relationship to everyone around me. My relationship to others also modifies me and deeply affects my relationship to God. Hence these relationships must be transformed if I am to be transformed. (Willard 2012, 182)

As far as actual, written definitions of spiritual formation, there are many good ones in the literature. For those who appreciate brevity, it is difficult to improve on Robert Mulholland's (1993, 12) description: "Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others." Jeffrey Greenman (2010, 24) provides an excellent, more comprehensive understanding: "Spiritual formation is our continuing response to the reality of God's grace

shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world." An historic Anabaptist understanding was provided by Dutch Anabaptist leader Dirk Philips in 1556:

Therefore, each person who has reached the age of understanding and knows the difference between good and evil must be transformed into a new, godly being through the enlightenment, work and transfiguration of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, each must be reborn into the communion and likeness of Jesus Christ, transformed into his image from glory to glory, and thereby be renewed according to the image of God and created in God's likeness, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. (Philips 1556, 202)

While I feel no compulsion to provide my own definition, as each of the above suffices in its own way, nonetheless I believe it is useful to clarify my own understanding: "Spiritual formation is the process whereby the followers of Jesus and their faith communities, in their journey of following Jesus, are formed by the Holy Spirit, and in intentional cooperation with the Holy Spirit, into the likeness of Jesus, for the sake of others, and ultimately for the sake of the kingdom of God." Later in this model, in the two sections titled "The Goal of Spiritual Formation" and "The Theology of Spiritual Formation," I will provide a more detailed explanation of the various elements either implied by, or directly stated in this definition.

First, however, it is necessary to address the question of why spiritual formation is required in the first place. To do so, it is vital to consider the key theological pieces that provide the contextual backdrop for spiritual formation. A consideration of this backdrop will also provide me with an opportunity to present my understanding of the basic story of the Bible. This story is in and of itself

deeply formative: "Stories have the power to influence us in a way bare facts do not....Stories touch the heart and are remembered, while facts are often forgotten. God told his people to tell their stories to the next generation so that generation would remember the works and care of God" (Seidel 2008, 219). When people discover that their own stories are part of the greater story of God, they find relevance and encouragement to engage in the adventurous, formative journey of life with God.

The Theological Backdrop to Spiritual Formation

In order to understand the theological context for spiritual formation, it is necessary to go back to the beginning: "All of our work in spiritual formation must be done against the backdrop of the God who forms us in love" (Wilhoit 2008, 35). Everything finds its meaning in the life of the God who is, and in what God has done.

The Trinity Who Is

The Confession of Faith in a Memonite Perspective (1995, 10) points to the foundation: "We worship the one holy and loving God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally. We believe that God has created all things visible and invisible, has brought salvation and new life to humanity through Jesus Christ, and continues to sustain the church and all things until the end of the age." We exist because God created us, we maintain our breath because God sustains us, and we have new life through Jesus because God has saved us.

Spiritual formation is entirely rooted in the Trinity. The life we absorb into our bodies and church communities, the living water which changes us ever more into the people God longs for us to be, is nothing less than the very life of God, the eternal life shared among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bruce Demarest (2010, 225) sums up the nature of this divine life which God offers to us: "From eternity past to eternity future, Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other with grace, love, mutual submission and unity of heart...Marvellously, this Triune God has invited us, in relationship with Himself, to participate in this culture of grace."

The great adventure of spiritual formation is to allow this life to shape us into a united body in Jesus Christ, a people who, in following Jesus together, bear witness to the reality of God's life shared in and among us to the world. This is the very thing Jesus prayed for his future disciples:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me....I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-21, 23)

As the apostle John indicates, the life of God is shared with us *through* relationship. God is essentially relational, for relationship is in the Trinity: the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Even before human beings were created, Father, Son and Holy Spirit related to one another in a community of three loving persons. Therefore, if the community of God's people is to be shaped into the likeness of Jesus, we must enter into this relationship, so God's

life can flow into ours: "that they also may be in us." As Klaus Issler (2001, 25-26) states, "Christian spirituality involves a deepening trust and friendship with God for those who are in Christ Jesus. More specifically, it is an ever growing, experientially dynamic relationship with our Trinitarian God...through the agency of the indwelling Spirit of God."

The community of the Trinity also signifies the communal nature of spiritual formation: "Since God created persons in his image, the loving communication of three persons within the unity of the Godhead constitutes the basis and model for the fellowship of God's people in loving community" (Demarest 2010, 244). Since Jesus dwells in his followers, by consequence Jesus' followers experience God through relationship with one another. The journey of spiritual formation is not an individual enterprise, but a corporate pilgrimage.

Ultimately everything that can be said about spiritual formation flows from who God is: "The triune God is both the beginning and the end of all reality. The dynamic communion of the three divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—constitutes the very heart of Christian faith and life" (Demarest 2010, 228).

Shalom in God's Creation

The opening chapters of the Bible attest that the Triune God has created everything else that is: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The apex of God's creation was human beings, male and female, created in God's image: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image

of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27, NRSV). Creation is a gift of God's love. The special gift of being created in God's image, a gift granted only to the human creation, includes the wonderful capacity for relationship with God, with fellow human beings, and with creation itself: "We are inherently relational because we are made in the image of a relational God" (Morrow 2008, 39). As people made in God's image, "we have been blessed with the abilities to respond faithfully to God, to live in harmony with other human beings, and to engage in meaningful work and rest" (Confession of Faith 1995, 28).

When God completed the work of creation, God looked upon it and declared it all "very good" (Genesis 1:31). The world was filled with beauty and peace, and the peace of God extended to every dimension of human relationship. In the creation story, Adam and Eve enjoyed fullness of peace with God, as they walked and talked with God in the garden. They enjoyed fullness of peace with each other, as evidenced by Adam's joyful exclamation: "This is at last bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). They enjoyed fullness of peace with creation, as evidenced in God's call to steward the earth and God's promise that it would bear fruit for food (Genesis 1:28-30). They even enjoyed fullness of peace in relationship to themselves: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25).

The gift of God's peace was all-pervasive, and all was well. The Hebrew word for this peace is 'shalom,' which references well-being in every dimension

of human relationship: physically, socially, morally, and spiritually. In the early days in the garden, shalom flourished.

Sin: Shalom is Shattered

But (and there is no more ominous 'but' in all of history) God's human creatures were not content to live in the garden under these very generous terms of God: "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). God gave great freedom to Adam and Eve, but it was not enough. As humanity's representatives they succumbed to the temptation of the crafty serpent, who seduced them into eating the forbidden fruit, with the promise that they in turn would become like God (Genesis 3:1-6).

The consequence of Adam and Eve's disobedience was devastating. Although God created a peaceable world, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God, and shalom was shattered. Profound brokenness entered into every dimension of human relationship where they once enjoyed peace. Their sin was first experienced as shame within themselves: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Genesis 3:7). Next they learned how their relationship with creation was altered: "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you" (Genesis 3:17-18). Ultimately, and worst of all, they were cut off from an intimate relationship with the loving God who created them, as God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden (Genesis 3:22-24). Finally, it did not

take long for the ripple effects of sin to destroy human relationships, as seen already in Adam and Eve's children: "Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:8).

The wrecking of shalom at every level of human relatedness is ultimately why spiritual formation is necessary. Humans are no longer whole but broken, for "through sin the powers of domination, division, destruction and death have been unleashed in humanity and in all of creation" (Confession of Faith 1995, 31). The ongoing story of human history reveals a narrative of suffering and alienation:

The groaning we all experience living this side of Eden shows itself painfully in relationships. So often domination, distance and self-interest have replaced the trust, true partnership, and intimacy of Eden. We catch glimpses of how things are supposed to be in healthy marriages, committed friendships, healthy churches, and good work groups. But we also see much pain and ugliness in relationships as well. (Wilhoit 2008, 65-66)

Such broken relationships are what necessitate the journey of reconciliation to which Jesus calls us. He asks us to enter into the pain of the world and its nationalistic, ethnic, gender-based and socio-economic fault lines in the power of his own name. But before we can embark upon this journey, this difficult but adventurous life with Jesus, we first need to receive the salvation which Jesus offers us. Until the human heart, broken by sin, is forgiven and healed, we cannot make progress. In order to become ambassadors of reconciliation, agents of God who faithfully answer God's call to help reconcile human beings to God, others, creation, and themselves, we ourselves first need to be reconciled to the God who created us. For it is the broken relationship with

God through human sin which created the crippling ripple effect, the overwhelming tsunami which shattered shalom in God's good creation.

Salvation: Reconciliation and the Restoration of

After the eviction from Eden, the rest of the Bible can be summarized as the story of the triune God's unfolding plan to reconcile all that is broken in creation, and thereby to restore shalom. It is the story of constant human rejection of God, which is met by the relentless love of God, acting through both judgment and grace, to woo the hearts of God's rebellious people. Beginning with the call of Abraham, through whom God promised to bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3; a plan to be carried out through the people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham), God repeatedly sent leaders (like Moses, Esther, the judges, David, and the prophets) to rescue God's people from the power of sin, and to call them back to faithful living and the vision of shalom. The hearts of God's people, however, remained hard. The Old Testament prophets regularly railed against two primary sins among the people of Israel: idolatry, which reinforced the alienation between humans and God, and social and economic injustice (frequently associated with violence) which reinforced the alienation between human beings.

As the pages of the Old Testament close, God's people are still living in darkness. But the New Testament opens with the promise of a new day, as heralded by the angel: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a

Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Jesus, the descendant of Abraham and heir of the promise, is at the centre of God's plan to restore shalom: "In the drama of reconciliation, Jesus is constantly named as the most important person in the story" (Katangole and Rice 2008, 49). Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came and lived among us, taught us through both word and example, died for us and rose again, in order to make possible the forgiveness of our sins, to reconcile all that is broken, to renew all of life. In the words of the apostle Paul, "If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). This life is the resurrection life of Jesus, which he shares with all of those who receive it by faith: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:38).

The victory Jesus achieved through his death and resurrection has both vertical and horizontal implications: those who receive Christ's gift are reconciled both to God and to one another. Regarding the former, the apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). In speaking of the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, Paul also highlights the latter: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14). Myron Augsburger (1976, 52) summarizes

the healing results of this two-fold reconciliation upon our relationships: "Once we were estranged, now we are sharing. Once we were in the grip of the spirit of rebellion; now we accept God's will for us and identify with Him. Once we were isolated by our self-interests; now we enjoy fellowship with others.

Reconciliation affects the very essence of our personalities."

Spiritual formation begins when we receive the gift of Jesus Christ by faith. If spiritual formation is necessitated by humanity's rebellion against God, healing begins when we receive Christ's forgiveness and are reconciled to God. It begins as we hear and answer Jesus' call, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). As we receive God's salvation God also sends us, corporately and as individual members of community, to be agents of reconciliation. This is how we take our place in God's story.

We do so with great hope, for we know how the story ends: with "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), with a future in which "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4). We are being formed spiritually both to bring about and to inhabit this promised future.

Spiritual formation therefore concerns our ongoing response to God's initiative in Jesus Christ. As Emmanuel Katangole and Chris Rice (2008, 43) write, "There are two movements in the story, and the order is important. The first movement is about God and what God has done in Christ. The second

movement is about the transformation this first movement has enacted in the world and in the lives of people." In this process individuals and faith communities are changed, and the kingdom of God continues to grow, from its beginnings as small as "a grain of mustard seed," to its growth "larger than all the garden plants," a tree offering healing to the nations, "so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (Matthew 13:31-32).

Individuals, faith communities and the kingdom of God: each of these represents different yet inter-related elements of the goal of spiritual formation.

These objectives will be considered in the next section, for it is vital for those engaged in ministries of spiritual formation to know at what they are aiming.

The Goal of Spiritual Formation

In keeping with tripolar spirituality, discipleship formation in the Anabaptist tradition is not merely about the spiritual growth of the individual believer, but also concerns the growth of the faith community as a whole. God works through both to promote the greater goal of the advancement of God's kingdom purposes—the restoration of shalom, of well-being in every dimension of creation. Unfortunately, in the hyper-individualized context of the western world, many efforts at spiritual formation tend to focus almost exclusively on the individual. This is to set our sights far too low. In speaking about his own desire to grow as a pastor, renowned Anglican poet George Herbert (1652, 201) penned a poetic turn of phrase which is very applicable to efforts at spiritual formation today: "he shoots higher who threatens the moon than he who aims at a tree."

The following diagram outlines my understanding of the three-fold goal of spiritual formation:

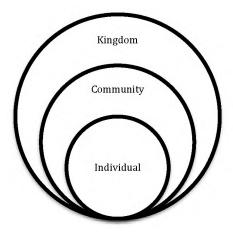


Figure 2. The Three-Fold Goal of Spiritual Formation.

The first way to interpret this diagram is to begin with the large circle. In this way, the highest aim in spiritual formation is to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33), which encompasses both community and individual formation. To hit this target is to hit the other two as well. To seek the growth of community is a higher goal than merely seeking individual growth, which it encompasses. However, if kingdom is neglected community formation risks devolving into the exclusivity of either individual or collective church pride (denominationalism), in which Christians from one church or denomination fail to appreciate the goodness of God's kingdom activity in those of another. This approach can never achieve the restoration of shalom, for it divides rather than reconciles churches or denominations. Correspondingly, the lowest form of spiritual formation is to focus only on the individual, for without emphasis on community formation the

individual approach has nothing to offer to reconcile divisions even within a single church.

Yet there is also something to say by interpreting the diagram from the inside out. As long as the greater visions of community formation and of God's kingdom are kept in sight, beginning the work of spiritual formation by emphasizing the individual can be fruitful. The individual is the basic unit of community; therefore, by engaging in the ministry of individual formation communities are strengthened, prepared for mission together in God's kingdom.

In addition, something vital is lost if individual formation is underemphasized. We cannot overlook that we are individuals whom God created to function within community: "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:4-5). In critiquing what he sees as the tendency of neo-Anabaptists to overemphasize community to the neglect of individuality, Stephen Dintaman (himself an Anabaptist) writes:

We cannot reverse the hands of time and ignore modern individual self-awareness. Like us, our young people are aware of themselves as irreducible, unique individuals. We are aware of our aloneness. If we do not address the Gospel to our irreducible individuality, to our aloneness, then our message will not reach and claim them nor will it really reach us. To have a sense of belonging to community but lack a sense of personal faith and identification with the Gospel of Jesus Christ results finally in a paralysis of commitment and creates a cynical, detached attitude. We have in many cases taught alienation and detachment more effectively than personal faith and commitment. (Dintaman 1995, 318)

Ultimately there is a paradoxical relationship between individual and community spiritual formation: the community cannot be formed without the individual, and the individual cannot be formed apart from community. Simon Chan (1998, 119) plays up the paradox when he writes of "a community of solitaries:" "Being in community does not mean that personal distinctiveness is lost to the group. The Christian in communion with others is not simply a face in the crowd. On the contrary, there is no community unless each member learns to live in solitude."

Individual, community and kingdom: these three separate yet intertwined goals are the strategic targets when considering the work of spiritual formation.

Each will now be taken up in turn.

Individual Formation

Given that individuals need to be formed in the greater context of community and kingdom, what then is the goal of the spiritual formation of individuals? As noted in my definition of spiritual formation, it is to be shaped "into the likeness of Jesus." Contrary to the thinking of some Christians, the goal of Christ's followers is not to 'get into heaven,' but to become like Jesus.

The apostle Paul yearned for Christ to be formed in the members of the churches of Galatia: "I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Elsewhere Paul attests that it is part of God's eternal plan to bring about Christ's likeness in those who follow Jesus: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,

in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Yet we also have a role to play, by fixing our eyes on Jesus: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). In drawing attention to 1 John 3:2, Greenman (2010, 25) writes that such transformation is also our "eschatological destiny": "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." Therefore, as Richard Foster (1996, 27) writes, "The daring goal of the Christian life could be summarized as our being formed, conformed and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ."

First, to become like Jesus means that the character of Jesus' followers, and the actions which flow from their character, mirror the character and actions of Jesus. Mulholland (1993, 25) captures the idea well: "Spiritual formation is...a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world—in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did." One can also think of growing in the fruit of the Spirit, fruit which was demonstrated in Jesus' life: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

For his part, Jesus encouraged his followers to love their enemies, noting that as they did so their actions would be in keeping with the character of God: "I

say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45, NRSV). Similarly Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9, NRSV). As these verses clarify, it is above all through radical love and engagement with the ministry of reconciliation that Christ's followers reflect their heavenly Father and the way of Christ. When we love shalom and pursue it we share the very heart of God.

But there is still more involved in becoming like Jesus. It is not only sharing his character, but sharing his very life, which extends into sharing his sufferings. To be like Jesus is to suffer with Jesus, as Jesus pointed out to his disciples when he forewarned them of persecution: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matthew 10:24-25). While today we so often love comfort and shun suffering, it was the heart cry of the apostle Paul to share the suffering of Jesus, for this also meant sharing in his precious resurrection life: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10).

Jesus was shaped by his sufferings: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Therefore, as Greenman highlights, those who want to become like Jesus must share in this cruciform life:

Being 'conformed to Christ' or 'becoming like Christ' involves embracing a cruciform way of life with a distinctive shape expressed by obedience to God, which is marked by self-sacrifice and humble service for the sake of others, a way that Jesus demonstrated during his earthly ministry and commended to all his followers. (Greenman 2010, 26)

The comfort we have when we suffer for Christ is that we do not suffer alone. Jesus is with us, and our sufferings are also shared by the church, the body of Christ: "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). This directs us to the higher goal of spiritual formation, the formation of the community of Christ: "Becoming a better Christian is not a matter of individual personal development. It is growing in the body with the other members of it" (Chan 1998, 110).

Community Formation

Since Protestant spirituality has tended to focus on the individual, there is not much written about the goal of community spiritual formation as an end in itself. John Driver is blunt in his assessment that even our congregational efforts are heavily infiltrated by individualism:

Even our congregational spirituality—expressed in practices like common prayer, Bible study, and worship—has generally been directed toward the personal edification of individual members, rather than an integration of practices into a shared missional fellowship characteristic of an authentic community of faith. (Driver 2015, xi)

While recent trends have added an important measure of correction, by emphasizing the significance of the community as a context for the formation of Christians (consider for example the title of James Wilhoit's excellent book, Spiritual Formation as if Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through

Community), there is still another essential step to take—to consider the development of the body of Christ as a whole as a vital end in and of itself. It is good and true to stress that individual Christians grow through community, but it is equally critical to remember that God is interested in the growth of that very community: "The goal of spiritual formation is not my own individual growth apart from the body, but my maturity and development within the body and for the body....Growth as an individual would be desired, but growth on the part of the entire family is even more desirable" (Pettit 2008, 271-272).

The biblical pattern consistently underscores community formation. This is particularly apparent in the letter to the Ephesians, which highlights the vision of the body of Christ building itself up through life and ministry together. While Ephesians is certainly concerned with the growth of individual Christians, it is always done with the greater goal of the growth of the corporate body in mind. Consider Ephesians 4:15-16, which emphasizes the maturity of the body through the frank but loving communication of its individual members: "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." Consider also the corporate dimension of spiritual formation in Ephesians 2:19-22, which speaks of the diverse community of Christ's followers, Jews and Greeks alike, being formed together into one temple, a communal home for God:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

While God dwells in each and every follower of Jesus, God's preeminent purpose is to mold the followers of Jesus together into one holy habitation.

There is also ample confirmation of the goal of community growth in the other epistles. The letter to the church at Philippi encourages believers corporately to share the mind of Christ: "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:4). 1 Corinthians reminds Christians that their individual spiritual gifts are given for the sake of the body: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Colossians speaks of Jesus as "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). The epistles, written specifically to churches, never lose sight of God's work to form not just individuals, but a people.

If our spiritual formation efforts are to be faithful to Scripture, it is necessary to regain a sense of the church as a corporate, spiritual reality. The very story of the Bible, beginning with God's promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham, reveals that God has always been interested in forming a people as a people. It begins with Abraham's descendants, the children of Israel: "For you are a people holy to the lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

God desires to partner with people to fulfill God's dream of shalom. As the story of Israel continues we see that, after God in grace delivered the people from slavery in Egypt, God gave them the Ten Commandments as a way to participate in God's grace. The commandments instructed the people of Israel how to live in shalom as a community, through maintaining healthy relationships with God and one another (Deuteronomy 5:1-21). The community did not exist as an end in itself, but to serve the greater purposes of God: "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6).

In the New Testament, the church is the community which has received God's greatest gift of grace, the gift of God's Son, Jesus. Again we see God's desire for a people, a people with whom God can partner to fulfill God's purposes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1Peter 2:9-10)

Peter further proclaims that God's people are to lead a pilgrim life as "sojourners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11). Together we are pilgrims who, as one body, are called to share the most excellent adventure of the journey of reconciliation. We are a people seeking God's dream of a world of peace and justice.

In this regard, it is of vital importance to stress that the church not only has a message, but the church is a message. The very fellowship we share as a new

creation is in and of itself a witness to the world: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Community formation ministries, therefore, must include lessons in how to foster and maintain a culture of peace. As "God's chosen ones," Paul wrote to the Colossians, we are to "bear with one another," to "forgive one another," to "clothe ourselves with love," and to "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts" (Colossians 3:12-15).

By stressing, giving instructions in, and practicing these things in the local church, the church becomes a school of reconciliation, whose students are trained to be authentic ambassadors of reconciliation. But if the spiritual formation of the community as a whole is neglected, if we do not learn how to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3), our very life together will undermine our message. We will tear down with the one hand what we are trying to build up with the other. Conversely, when our common life is characterized by the grace, love, unity and mutual submission that characterizes life among the members of the Trinity, what we build up with the one hand will be reinforced by the other. When we participate in the eternal dance that is the shared life of the Trinity, others cannot help but see our genuine enthusiasm for shalom, and desire for themselves to join God's people, to be reconciled to God and to their neighbours.

The Kingdom of God

The greatest aim in spiritual formation is to cooperate, as members of community, with God's leading and thereby participate in the growth of God's kingdom. Jesus taught his disciples to seek this very thing in their prayer lives: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). While our daily work in spiritual formation is done at the level of forming individuals and church communities, we must retain sight of the vision that God is working at a higher level, towards the recreation of the heavens and the earth (Revelation 21:1). To fail to do so is to lose sight of the fact that God loves all of creation, and that the community of Jesus' followers should impact the culture itself. We are not saved merely for our own sake, but for God's greater purposes: "The end toward which the journey of reconciliation leads us is the shalom of God's new creation—a future not yet fully realized, but holistic in its transformation of the personal, social and structural dimensions of life" (Katangole and Rice 2008, 148). The scope of God's vision is far greater than the number of members joining our congregations. To maintain a kingdom vision is to seek the flourishing of all humanity, and indeed of all life in creation.

What is the kingdom of God? While a detailed answer to this vital question is beyond the scope of this paper, Willard provides a succinct, helpful answer:

As we have noted, the kingdom of God is just God in action. Theological books like to use the word *reign* for it and that is fitting, but *reign* doesn't mean very much to ordinary people. *Rule* might be a substitute, but it is more informative to say that the kingdom is *God in action*. The kingdom of God is where what God wants done is done. (Willard 2010b, 37)

This teaching provides a major theological underpinning for a point which will be raised later in this paper: ultimately the work of spiritual formation is God's work, and can only be accomplished by God, whether at the individual, community or cosmic level. Only God can build the kingdom of God. Yet we also have a role to play, as Paula Fuller maintains: "The kingdom of God is the reality of God's transforming presence, power and goodness manifested in the community of Jesus' disciples. This community witnesses to the reality of the presence of the kingdom throughout this age" (Fuller 2010, 195).

Summary: Reconciling all Things in Christ

The Bible provides no better summary of the three-fold aim of spiritual formation—individual formation into the likeness of the peacemaking Jesus, community formation which displays the unity of life in the Trinity, and kingdom formation which manifests the reconciling activity of God—than the words of Ephesians 1:9-10: "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (NIV). This is the goal toward which all of history is moving—the reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ.

At the centre of history is the suffering, incarnate Son of God who laid down his life for the creation he created: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

Radical, divine love lies at the centre of the universe, and therefore at the core of the task of spiritual formation is learning how to love: deeply, unselfishly and sacrificially.

To love in such a way requires both individual and community transformation. The next section will address the theological dynamics of the change process.

The Theology of Change

The most basic thing to say about spiritual formation is that it is about change. At the outset, it is instructive to point out that everyone undergoes change, and that everyone is being formed spiritually, whether for good or bad. Change at any level begins with a given state (state A) and ends in a new state (state B). The movement A→B depends upon the choices we make: the actions we undertake, the thoughts we think, and the emotions we allow ourselves to dwell on. C.S. Lewis put it like this:

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. (Lewis 1966, 82-83)

Of course, in Christian spiritual formation it is the positive change which is desired! In the literature, positive spiritual change is most commonly spoken of at the individual level: "Inherent in the idea of spiritual formation is the notion that a particular person is being changed (formed) at the core of the person's being

(spirit)" (Pettit 2008, 19). For the Christian individual, A→B is a movement toward greater Christlikeness, which is expressed in Christlike living. But change can also be spoken of at the community level. For Christian communities, A→B is a movement toward greater unity in Christ, and thereby sharing in the very unity Jesus himself shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This unity in community is expressed in modeling and participating in God's mission of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, positive and profound spiritual formation is not commonplace in western Christianity today: "Most of our Christian peers are not being deeply changed by the gospel in ways that result in Jesus' promised lifestyle of peace, service and spiritual authority" (Wilhoit 2008, 33). Wilhoit (2008, 33) provides helpful insight into this lack of Christlikeness: "Our culture and, sadly, many churches seek to squeeze us into the mold of merely being nice and seeking a sensible consumer-oriented faith that meets our needs and avoids offending anyone else." To this can be added the fact that, in some church circles, salvation is construed merely as a moment, the uttering of the sinner's prayer to assure one's place in heaven, rather than as a rigorous life of formative discipleship. For his part, Willard (2010b, 32) attributes the glaring lack of spiritual growth to "our failure to understand what the kingdom of God is and what it is like to live in it." He also stresses the fact that spiritual formation is a battle, and that the "trinity of evil" is lined up against us: the world, the Devil and the flesh (Willard 2010b, 47). To make matters worse, it appears spiritual formation is scarcely even expected: "Today, books calling for and expecting

significant change in believers are rare" (Meyer 2010, 144). They may contain lots of information, but hold little or no expectation of reformation. The same holds true from too many pulpits: church leaders often capitulate to popular culture, preaching a gospel of comfort and not sacrifice, a message of how God can provide for us, yet unaccompanied by how God also asks us to share in the suffering of Jesus.

In the face of all these obstacles, it is vital to hold to the truth that change is possible. The Bible contains many stories of people whose lives were profoundly transformed by their encounters with God. Keith Meyer (2010, 143) also points to the lesson of history: "I found in my study of church history that this kind of deep and radical life change is not only possible but was expected of believers as recently as the late 1800s; without it one might seriously wonder if you were saved."

In light of the possibility versus the current reality, it is vital for those engaged in ministry to understand more of the change process. In particular it is crucial to understand the relationship between the grace God extends to us, our intentional response to it (as in faith we embrace all that is involved in the call to follow Jesus), and the actions of the Holy Spirit in shaping us, as individuals and as communities, into the people God longs for us to be. As we better understand the dynamics of spiritual formation, we increase our confidence that God truly can shape us into people who reflect the beauty of Jesus.

The Process of Change

There are surely many ways to outline the components of change involved in the spiritual formation process, yet each must include elements of the interchange between God and human beings, and take seriously both divine and human agency. The following illustration includes what I consider to be the major factors which contribute to spiritual growth, with the recognition that many specific points could fall under each general category:

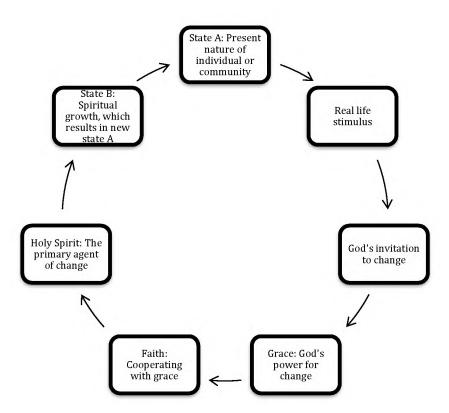


Figure 3. Stages in the Spiritual Formation Process.

While the diagram shows a cycle of distinct stages, in reality two or more of these stages may occur simultaneously. In addition, while the diagram envisions this

process as a neat cycle, growth does not usually occur in such an orderly fashion; the cycle of forward progress sometimes stalls or even regresses. Yet over time progress is made, and therefore the cycle of spiritual formation is best visualized not as a circle but as an upward spiral (described by the apostle Paul as "being transformed...from one degree of glory to another," 2 Corinthians 3:18). But even with these disclaimers, I believe the diagram does provide a helpful overview of the core components of change and their relationship to each other.

While each of these components of the change process will be taken up in sequential order, it is first important to point out that the spiritual formation process is indeed just that: an ongoing process. The adventure of spiritual formation is a lifelong journey. While it begins with the regeneration of individuals that is only the vital first step:

Yet we must understand that this character transformation cannot and will not be done quickly, by osmosis, or through passive reception; it is formed through *time* and *experience*. This is why we must say to new disciples, "Now that you have made a decision to 'trust Jesus,' it is the *beginning* of your lifelong process of transformation." (Matthews 2010, 97)

It is essential to take the long view to guard against society's addiction to quick fixes, for those who seek rapid or immediate spiritual growth will become all the more easily frustrated or defeated.

Spiritual formation simply cannot be reduced to the perfect program or technique, especially in light of the fact that shalom has been shattered on every level of human relating through human sin, sin which will never be fully eradicated until Jesus returns. In an article in which Peter Nelson (2011, 85) explores "a theology of imperfection," he draws our attention to this realism: "we

must be content to be 'in process' as disciples grappling with sin rather than living under the unbearable expectation of attaining the perfect holiness of heaven."

While growth is indeed possible, sinless perfection is unattainable: "not that sin should dominate one's vision of the future or that hopes of radical progress should be set aside, but our brokenness must have its place within an honest conception of spiritual growth" (Nelson 2011, 86).

Human Nature: What is Being Changed

This brings us to the first stage in the cycle of change: if human beings are broken inwardly because of sin, which impacts all of our relationships, causing everything from strain in a single relationship to full out war between nations, it becomes apparent that something within human nature must be transformed so that God's vision of shalom can become a growing reality. As Katangole and Rice (2008, 45) write, "The dividing line between good and evil runs straight through each one of us. So the journey of reconciliation begins with a transformation of the human person."

When we speak of community transformation, it is evident that what is being changed is how we as humans relate to one another, together with our growing understanding of our corporate identity as a reconciled people in Christ. But what is being changed in the individuals who make up communities? The first answer to that question is to say this: spiritual formation refers to the formation of a human's inner being. Jesus refers to the locus of change as occurring in the human 'heart':

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. (Matthew 12:33-35)

Thus, according to Jesus, transformed living begins with a renovated heart.

Inward change leads to outward action. While today we primarily refer to the heart as the centre of our feelings, the word is used in a much more expansive way in the Bible, as Bill Hull notes:

It is clear that rarely does the Bible refer to the physical organ of the heart. The heart is a metaphor for the immaterial nature of a person....The heart can see, feel, know, reflect, and be turned toward God or away from him....One could naturally ask, "What about the will, the spirit, feelings, conscience, the mind, and the other biblical descriptions of the inner person?" Yes, we could follow any of these dimensions of the immaterial nature, but we believe that "spiritual heart" captures them all. (Hull 2010, 120-121)

At the same time, while it is useful to differentiate between the inner being and the physical body, and while the Bible certainly distinguishes between them in numerous places, it is important not to draw too sharp of a distinction. For everything we do and experience is a part of embodied existence: our thoughts are connected to our neural networks; our feelings are influenced by our hormones; our habits become embedded in our flesh. The same Holy Spirit who transforms us inwardly, by producing in us the fruit of the Spirit, also gives life to our mortal bodies: "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will

also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:10-11).

In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard carefully outlines the close relationship between the body and the spirit. His concern is that some might interpret the spiritual life as something opposed to bodily life, or even as a disembodied mode of existence. Against such thinking Willard (1991, 75) writes: "The spiritual and the bodily are by no means opposed in human life—they are complementary." The dualistic thinking which divorces flesh from spirit has often led to unfaithful living, such as the notion that humans are free to sin with their bodies, because the sins of the flesh will not hurt the human spirit, or the idea that there is nothing we can do with our bodies to help our spiritual development, because the actions of the flesh cannot help form the human spirit. These false teachings are counter-productive and even destructive to spiritual formation. Therefore, while I do believe it is important to name the heart or the spirit as that aspect of human nature which needs transforming, and which subsequently leads to transformed living, my model of spiritual formation very much includes the importance of engaging our bodies to help transform our hearts. This will become most evident when I consider both 'discipleship practices' and 'spiritual disciplines' as the key means by which we can cooperate with God and help facilitate spiritual formation. Both the ongoing practice of our faith, combined with the classic spiritual disciplines, very much make use of our bodies in the task of spiritual formation.

Everyday Life: The Context which Stimulates Change

Spiritual formation occurs in everyday life, in the daily journey of following Jesus. The primary context of our discipleship is the stuff of ordinary life: the work we engage, the recreation we enjoy, the dreams we have, the disappointments we endure, the difficulties we encounter, the problems we solve, the people we meet and the relationships we develop. While some Christian spiritual traditions have emphasized retreat to monasteries or the wilderness as the primary context for growth, Anabaptists seek spiritual growth through ordinary occurrences and commitments, especially as expressed in relationships.

Anabaptist spirituality is therefore a practiced spirituality in the contexts where God places us. Augsburger describes this everyday spirituality:

This is a spirituality of action on behalf of the neighbor....It is a spirituality of the feet, the knees, the hands, and the spine as well as the heart and the head....In tripolar spirituality, we come to know Christ through participation in the practices of discipleship that express love of others and result in practices of inner depth. These three-dimensional practices of everyday spirituality are worked out it many different ways... (D. Augsburger 2006, 21)

In his teaching, Jesus constantly addressed real life concerns. This is easily demonstrated by a quick survey of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus' most extended teaching in the gospels, and to which Anabaptists have repeatedly turned as the primary source for training in discipleship. As Jesus instructed his disciples how to embody the good news of God's kingdom, he addressed these common concerns: anger, lust, divorce, honesty, revenge, enemy

treatment, religious practices (giving, prayer, fasting), money, worry, and judging others. Jesus' desire is that his followers be formed in the midst of daily living.

As we are formed in the midst of everyday spirituality, even so we are formed in the midst of daily circumstances. In trust that our lives are in God's providential care, we accept not only the good things that come our way, but the hardships as well:

We must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are, and if we faithlessly discard situation after situation, moment after moment, as not being "right," we will simply have no place to receive his kingdom into our life, for those situations and moments *are* our life. (Willard 1997, 348-349)

Whether good or bad, God is at work through all of the circumstances of our lives to shape us and our church communities. For example, Paul encouraged the suffering Christians in Rome with the reassurance that God could bring good from their trials: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The truth that it is through ordinary situations that God stimulates us toward spiritual maturity comes with an important corollary: it places upon us the responsibility to seek to discern the activity of God in our daily living. Spiritual discernment, whether as individuals or as communities, is a key part of faithful discipleship. Henri Nouwen (2013, 3) draws our attention to this in his posthumously compiled work *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*: "Discernment is faithful living and listening to God's love and direction so that we can fulfill our individual calling and shared mission." Therefore Christians

need to develop the ability to listen: "The great movement of the spiritual life is from a deaf, nonhearing life to a life of listening....We simply need to keep our ears open. Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat, a life in which we become 'all ears'" (Nouwen 2013, 4-5). In particular, Nouwen (2013, chapters 3-6) recommends discerning God's presence and activity in the books we read, the nature we appreciate, the people we encounter, and the incidents we experience.

In their book on mentoring leaders for the church, Randy Reese and Robert Loane (2012, 15) draw our attention to another vital context in which we may discern God's guidance—the very stories of our lives: "it is within our story and in light of the stories of those around us where God matures us." Therefore, they encourage mentors to pay careful attention to the life story of others as a foundational act in leadership formation: "And a crucial way we can truly be with others today in a manner that both supports and challenges them to grow up into Christ is to *prayerfully pay attention with them to their life stories*. For it is amid the particularities of our lives that we discover, in part, God's character and transforming work in the world" (Reese and Loane 2012, 50; the italics are those of the authors).

Surely the same thing is also true of our church communities. As we seek God's guidance as communities of faith, we do very well to remember the stories of our local congregations. While the written histories of local churches often gather dust on their library shelves, the very stories of our churches demonstrate how God has been at work in our midst, and serve as key indicators as to where

God may be leading us in the future. By paying attention to our stories, both individual and corporate, we also better understand how our lives fit into God's story, into God's renewing and reconciling work in creation.

God's Initiative in our Lives: The Invitation to Change

This gives rise to the next stage in the diagram of the process of change. By noticing God's initiative in others and, indeed, in our own lives and the lives of our church communities, we are able to focus our efforts in spiritual formation. Ultimately we can say that as we pay attention to the everyday circumstances of our lives, we discover that God is already there, inviting us toward faithful responses.

The spiritual formation process only moves forward by God's initiating grace. God's first invitation to us to change comes in the offer to receive forgiveness through the cross of Christ, and thus to be reconciled to God. But this is only the beginning of our formation. Once we have set foot on the road of following Jesus, God comes to us again and again to invite us to grow.

Our ongoing spiritual formation always begins with God's generous initiative in our lives. As Greenman indicates, God is the one who takes the first step toward us, and then invites our response:

The process of spiritual formation is not defined by someone's search within themselves for spiritual health, but rather by a continuing response to the reality of God's grace. By using the term *response* I want to emphasize that spiritual formation is not self-generated. It is not our attempt to cultivate inwardness for its own sake. Spiritual formation in its best sense cannot be reduced to the results of human techniques or

personal willpower, but is primarily a matter of God's own initiative and God's vital action. (Greenman 2010, 24)

In the Bible we see this pattern of divine initiative inviting human response in God's call of Abraham, in God's rescue of Israel from slavery, in God sending the prophets to deliver messages to Israel, and ultimately in God sending Jesus, followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. God's initiating activity evoked a range of responses, both faithful and unfaithful: Abraham left his homeland in faith that God would lead him to the land of promise; the redeemed children of Israel accepted a covenant with God, but then failed to keep it; the voices of the prophets were sometimes obeyed, but mostly ignored or silenced; Peter accepted Jesus' invitation to follow him, while the rich young ruler did not; and the early church submitted to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, thus extending God's mission of reconciliation to the Gentiles.

While these examples represent major events which propelled God's story forward, God is also present in the common events of our lives, working through them to capture our attention, to initiate responses which will help to form us and to move our story forward. To give but a few examples, we see that these events can be as varied as life itself: a job offer, a health crisis, a recurring dream, the birth of a child, or the death of a loved one. Similarly, we can also name ongoing events in the lives of church communities: declining church membership, the arrival of a new pastor, church maintenance issues, the gift of a generous bequest, or a sudden influx of refugees into the church neighbourhood.

As we pay attention, we notice that God is at work in the circumstances of our lives to shape us. What is critical on our behalf, in response to such stimuli, is attentiveness to God's presence and activity, followed by a response of faith. We do well to heed the warning to Israel which the author of Hebrews quoted to caution early Christians: "As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Hebrews 3:15).

Grace: God's Power for Change

The good news is that God's mercy extends beyond the initiating invitation: in great generosity God also provides the strength to fulfill the call. The biblical word to describe God's empowering activity in our lives is grace. While grace can refer to God's every invitation to new, transformed living (as in the previous section), it also refers to God's provision of all we need to follow Jesus as we engage the journey of reconciliation. Willard (2010b, 51) offers a simple definition of grace: "Grace is God acting in our lives to accomplish what we can't accomplish on our own."

While some in the evangelical tradition tend to limit the language of grace to God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ, Wilhoit (2008, 27) rightly stresses that the gospel of grace is for all of life: "The gospel is the power of God for the beginning, middle and end of salvation. It is not merely what we need to proclaim to unbelievers; the gospel also needs to permeate our entire Christian existence." To this he adds his own testimony: "From personal brokenness and reflection I have come to see that the gospel is not simply the door of faith; it

must also be a compass I daily use to orient my life and a salve I apply for the healing of my soul. It is in returning again and again to the cross that we receive the grace that transforms us" (Wilhoit 2008, 29).

Without God's ongoing gift of grace we cannot follow Jesus in life. Grace empowers us to give ourselves to our neighbours, to forgive those who hurt us, and to love our enemies: "The journey of reconciliation begins with seeing that reconciliation is not the goal of human striving but is instead a gift God longs for us to accept" (Katangole and Rice 2008, 43-44). By grace God extends to us the insight, guidance and ability to know which challenges to attend to in our lives, how to address them, and the strength to do so. Ultimately, God's grace amounts to nothing less than "the infusion of God's life into ours" (Foster 2008, 186). This is the very life Jesus infers in his parable of the vine and the branches, the life which flows through the vine to sustain the branches: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The Scriptures repeatedly encourage us to receive the grace God offers us, that we may be faithful followers of Jesus: "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1); "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18); "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace" (Hebrews 13:9); "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one

man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17); "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Faith: Cooperating with Grace

To say that spiritual formation is always initiated by God should not be understood to imply that we are merely passive participants in the process. To the contrary, as the Spirit of God initiates work in our lives, we are called to cooperate with that work. As the Spirit of God offers us strength, we are called to serve in that strength. The biblical word for this cooperation is faith, which expresses itself in active trust in and obedience to Jesus.

How do Anabaptists understand the relationship between God's initiative and human response? More specifically, is grace required before we can respond to God in faith? This question cannot be simply answered, as Anabaptists held differing views, yet Thomas Finger (1989) indicates most Anabaptists "appear to have held that grace somehow comes before" human response, an understanding sometimes described as 'prevenient grace'. This can be seen in Michael Sattler's (n.d., 116) affirmation that "the willing and ability to turn to God are not of man but the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Contrary to Calvin, Anabaptists would not hold that this grace is 'irresistible'; rather, God's prevenient grace is restorative, granting to humans a measure of free will, which precedes the work of regenerating grace.

The journey of faith begins when we first place our trust in God's redeeming love for us in Jesus, looking to Jesus for forgiveness and new life. The Mennonite *Confession of Faith* summarizes this well:

We believe that, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God offers salvation from sin and a new way of life to all people. We receive God's salvation when we repent of sin and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community of God's people. We place our faith in God that, by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, we may be saved from sin to follow Christ in this life and to know the fullness of salvation in the age to come. (Confession of Faith 1995, 35)

As the *Confession* makes clear, faith is not only for the beginning of the Christian life, but also "to follow Christ in this life."

Indeed, salvation is best understood as the gift of life with Christ. While we can certainly speak of an initial moment of salvation when we first believe, ongoing salvation is expressed in a life of commitment to Jesus. Once we become followers of Jesus, our trust becomes expressed in a life of yielding and obedience. As Arnold Snyder writes, Anabaptists have always maintained that faith and obedience need to be held together:

The Anabaptists insisted that true, saving faith must be manifested by a holy life of obedience. Salvation, insisted all the Anabaptists, is not by faith *alone* but by a faith that obeys. This "obedience of faith" becomes possible, the Anabaptists maintained, by the power of the Holy Spirit who regenerates believers. If there is faith, the Anabaptists insisted, there will be a visibly holy life—not because human beings are innately good, but because they yielded to the power of God, which power produces good works. (Snyder 2004, 26)

As we cooperate with God's empowering grace, we discover, as Paul wrote, that God is at work in our obedience: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work

out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). Indeed, this was Paul's own testimony regarding his ministry of spiritual formation: "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Colossians 1:28-29).

Faith as Intentional Effort

Spiritual formation is not an 'either-or' but a 'both-and' process—our growth as disciples requires both God's grace and our cooperation. Simply put, God's strength empowers human effort. Therefore, for our part, we need to be very intentional as we seek maturity in Christ. As Willard (2010b, 31) writes, "we are called to *well-informed action in the process of our own spiritual growth.*" In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul compared such action to a disciplined athlete in training (1 Corinthians 9:24-27); in his letter to Titus, he stressed that training in godliness is empowered by grace (Titus 2:11-12); in his letter to the church at Colossae, he let Christians know what some of this disciplined action should look like—there are things that need to be 'put on' and there are things that need to be 'put off':

Put to death whatever is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry....But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self....Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven

you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love... (Colossians 3:5, 8-9, 12-14)

It is critical to note that this list contains not only imperatives for individual formation, but also imperatives for community formation (do not lie to one another, bear with one another, forgive one another). As noted earlier, the New Testament never loses sight of the fact that God is at work to form a people. Both individual and community means of spiritual formation will be considered in more detail later in this model, when I consider historic Anabaptist practices and classic spiritual disciplines.

Faith as Repentance

Another word for 'putting off' and 'putting on' is repentance. As an element of faith, repentance is critical, both to accept the offer of new life in Christ, as well as to sustain the ongoing life of salvation. In stressing that repentance is not primarily an affective quality (like 'feeling bad' or 'sorry'), Keith Matthews (2010, 94) paraphrases Jesus' invitation in Mark 1:15 like this: "Hey everyone, the kingdom of God is in your very midst, so rethink your way of thinking about reality and take action in accordance with this invitation." As seen in this way, repentance requires both an action of the mind and the will. The mind reorients itself to God's reality and God's priorities: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). The will abandons old, destructive habits and adopts new, godly ones.

While we are more readily aware of the private vices we need to turn away from for the sake of our personal formation (like greed, drunkenness, and sexual

immorality), we also need to be aware and repent of public vices which hinder the formation of our faith communities. These are scattered throughout the lists of vices found in the New Testament, including Galatians 5:20-21: "enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy." It is our God-given responsibility to cooperate with God's grace by working on all of these things.

Ultimately, repentance clears the way for us to follow Jesus in the way of peace. We turn away from anything and everything that hurts our relationships with God, others, self and creation. Note the words the priest Zechariah sang when his son John was born, the prophet who would prepare the way for the coming of Jesus by preaching repentance:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, *to guide our feet into the way of peace*. (Luke 1:76-79, emphasis added)

Faith as Receiving a New Identity

There is one more aspect of faith which is vital to spiritual formation: the acceptance of our God-given identities in Jesus Christ. When we become followers of Jesus, we are made new: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NRSV). Those in Jesus are also given a new communal identity, as members of the body of Christ. In order for God's people to flourish

as peacemaking agents of reconciliation we need to understand and receive our identity on both of these levels.

To begin, we need to grasp our personal identity; we will not function well in community unless we are secure as individuals. Knowing who we are in Christ is foundational to the life of discipleship: "I cannot grow in spiritual formation toward Christlikeness unless I know *who* I am and *whose* I am" (Pettit 2008, 271). We belong to Jesus and to his eternal kingdom: "you are Christ's" (1 Corinthians 3:23); "Little children, you are from God" (1 John 4:4); "you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). As people who belong to God, our lives are eternally secure in God's hands. No ultimate harm can befall us. We are God's dear children, holy and beloved: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10, NRSV); "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Ephesians 1:3).

A significant part of the spiritual formation process is learning to receive this good news as we grow in faith. If we do not accept ourselves as beloved, we will constantly be striving to prove our own self-worth, either by becoming people pleasers to earn the approval of others, or by becoming success driven to demonstrate our value to others. If we do not accept ourselves as holy in God's eyes, we will constantly be seeking to earn God's favour, which is counterproductive to the life of grace. But if we accept our identity as holy and beloved children of God, we can relax and mature into our God-given identity, even as we

discover freedom and joy in Christ's service. Jesus himself provides us with the example. As John writes, Jesus was free to humble himself and wash his disciples' feet, and ultimately to lay down his life on the cross, precisely because he was secure in the knowledge "that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God, and was going to God" (John 13:3).

In the fractured world of the twenty-first century, it is equally important to grasp our corporate identity in Christ. In his book *Mirror to the Church*, Emmanuel Katangole writes about the Rwandan genocide as a terrible example of what can happen when God's people are formed more by 'tribalism' (and its close cousins 'nationalism,' 'denominationalism,' etc.) than by their identity as one reconciled people in Christ. Before the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was upheld as the model of evangelization as the most Christianized nation in Africa, with upwards of ninety percent of citizens, both Hutus and Tutsis, identifying as Christians. But during the genocide about eight hundred thousand Rwandans were killed, and most of the violence was Christians killing other Christians. In speaking of Cardinal Roger Etchegaray's trip to Rwanda post-genocide, Katangole (2009, 22) points to what went wrong: "When he visited Rwanda on behalf of the pope in 1994, he asked the assembled church leaders, 'Are you saying that the blood of tribalism is deeper than the waters of baptism?' One leader answered, 'Yes, it is." Obviously something went terribly wrong in the spiritual formation process—the failure to communicate and develop a corporate sense of identity amongst Rwandan Christians.

While Rwanda is an extreme example, it also makes the point—it very much serves as a mirror to the western church, in which individualism flourishes to the detriment of corporate identity. When Christians fail to develop and embrace their corporate identity as one, global, baptized body of believers, every manner of disunity is possible, bringing significant disrepute to the church and its reconciling mission.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus blessed his disciples with a corporate, missional identity when he said to them, "You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world....Shine your light" (Matthew 5:13, 14, 16). The pronoun 'you' is second person plural, referring not just to a group of individuals but to the corporate mission of the disciple community, as is further demonstrated by Jesus' illustration that "a city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14). The light cast by the city refers to the light cast by the community of disciples as a whole. In this we see that God's grace not only empowers individuals, it empowers communities. It empowers us to be reconciled to one another in one body, and as one body to witness to God's reconciling love. It is up to us, together, to respond to such grace. Jesus has commissioned us corporately to embody his teaching, as found in the Sermon on the Mount, in a public way before the world. Our corporate act of faith is to receive this new corporate identity: "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the body of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3-5).

The Holy Spirit: The Primary Agent of Change

As we cooperate with God's grace in faith, as expressed through intentional effort, active repentance and the joyful acceptance of our God-given identity, the Holy Spirit works in and among us and changes us into an ever more unified body of believers who are growing into the likeness of Jesus. This is one example of what Howard (2008, 204-205) calls the "initiation-response-response" pattern of the divine-human relationship. God invites us to grow spiritually, we respond in faith, and the Holy Spirit responds to our response by increasingly shaping us into the likeness of Jesus. As we came into the world formed by God, and animated by the breath of God's Spirit, the natural corollary is that God is also the chief architect at work in our spiritual reformation. While God can work through many different people or groups to further our spiritual formation, the Holy Spirit is God's primary agent of change.

This was well recognized among the early Anabaptists. Consider Menno Simons (c. 1536, 58), after whom the Mennonite church is named, who made a direct connection between the Holy Spirit and the spiritual growth of the believer: "He is clothed with the same power from above, baptized with the Holy Ghost, and so united and mingled with God that he becomes a partaker of the divine nature and is made conformable to the image of his Son." Likewise, German Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier (1526-1527, 74) wrote, "I believe in the Holy Spirit....In him I place all my trust that he will teach me all truth, increase my faith, and kindle the fire of love in my heart by his holy inspiration,

that my heart may burn with true, unfeigned and Christian love toward God and my neighbors."

As we cooperate with God's grace, it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes God's work in and among us. Without the Holy Spirit our efforts to facilitate spiritual growth are fruitless, for only the Holy Spirit can produce the fruit of the Spirit. Similarly, only the Spirit can give us the gifts of the Spirit (listed in Romans 12:6-9, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13), gifts which are essential to enable God's people to participate in God's kingdom purposes. Simply put, the Holy Spirit is God's indispensable presence in our lives. What does the Holy Spirit do? Gordon Fee lists an extensive biblical response:

He acts as a divine personal agent in myriad ways. The Spirit searches all things (1 Cor. 2:10), knows the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:11), teaches the content of the gospel to believers (1 Cor. 2:13), dwells among or within believers (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14), accomplishes all things (1 Cor. 12:11), gives life to those who believe (2 Cor. 3:6), cries out from within our hearts (Gal. 4:6), leads us in the ways of God (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), bears witness with our own spirits (Rom. 8:16), has desires that are in opposition to the flesh (Gal. 5:17), helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26), intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27), works all things together for our ultimate good (Rom. 8:28), strengthens believers (Eph. 3:16) and is grieved by our sinfulness (Eph. 4:30). (Fee 2010, 41)

Furthermore, Michael Glerup (2010, 253) speaks of the Spirit as "the agent of intimacy"; through the Holy Spirit, God's love is poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5), and we experience fellowship with God. The Spirit is also the "bond of peace" which unites believers in fellowship with one another (Ephesians 4:3). Therefore if we want to grow spiritually, in communion with God and one another as we participate in God's mission, we must be committed to a life of walking with the Spirit, listening to the Spirit and being led by the Spirit.

Unfortunately in some Mennonite circles today, as in some other denominations, the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church has been underemphasized or neglected. Karl Koop (2012, 4) has written that "Mennonites generally have steered clear of matters related to the Spirit" other than obligatory references at Pentecost. In the Anabaptist journal *Vision*, Cheryl Bridges Johns (2012, 6) speaks of "Holy Spirit shyness" in the church. Dintaman critiques the mid-twentieth century Anabaptist renewal movement, noting that while it faithfully recaptured the historic sense of Anabaptism as discipleship, it neglected the early Anabaptist emphasis on the Holy Spirit. He wonders if what some Mennonites have been left with is "the ethical shell without the spiritual heart" (Dintaman 1995, 313). To the degree that this is true, the Mennonite church is impoverished. In this regard, Fee lays down a strong challenge for churches and church leaders (of all denominations) which tend to ignore the role of the Spirit in the life and witness of God's people:

I would make a general plea to church leaders to throw away the boxes in which they have kept the Spirit securely under their own control, and to trust the Spirit to guide the whole community to a life in the Spirit that leads to genuine *Spirituality* in the believers' daily lives. And even more so this plea would be for a similar genuine *Spirituality* in the gathered believing community that remains open to the Spirit to do things his way rather than to be invited in to be the silent partner of the Trinity so that we may continue to "do church" our often ineffective and powerless way. (Fee 2010, 43)

Regeneration

The early Anabaptists repeatedly stressed that it is reasonable to follow Jesus daily and radically in a life of practiced discipleship precisely because of God's gift of the Holy Spirit. They linked this to the biblical concept of regeneration, the teaching that God gives new life to all who receive Jesus by giving them the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. For example, Leonhard Schiemer, an early Anabaptist writer and martyr, in "A Letter to the Church at Rattenberg," connects regeneration to the possibility of obedience:

This is the secret, subtle, hidden, true power of the almighty God and well known only to the true surrendered children of God and hidden and unknown to all the children of this world. Those who do not feel in themselves a power about which they have to say that things that were once impossible are now possible are not yet born again of water and spirit, even the Holy Spirit. (Schiemer 1527, 75)

Schiemer references the prominent biblical image of regeneration, which comes from the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, in which Jesus referred to God's gift of new life as being "born again," saying, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5).

There are other biblical images of regeneration. In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote: "He saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Eugene Peterson translates this very colorfully: "He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit" (The Message translation). In Ephesians 2:1-7, Paul spoke of God raising us up from death to life, and in 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote of the "new creation." All of these images of regeneration picture a radical change in the life of those who receive Jesus. This change isn't a result of anything we do; it's a result of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The main point of this new life, to which the Anabaptists did not hesitate to draw attention, is so we can live a new way today. In speaking of regeneration, Willard writes that it is vital teaching which contradicts the non-biblical notion that salvation is merely about forgiveness and securing one's place in a heavenly future:

Eternal life in the individual does not begin after death, but at the point where God touches the individual with redeeming grace and draws them into a life interactive with himself and his kingdom. A new, nonhuman activity becomes a part of our life. Our life is now interwoven with his and his with ours....In regeneration...God imparts his own life to the fallen life of the human being apart from God. (Willard 2010a, 50-51)

With the very life of God present and active in us, we are able to engage confidently in the journey of reconciliation. As bearers of new life, God delights to work through us to renew shalom in creation. Our hope and joy as we walk in the Spirit is indeed God's promised future, the reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ, the new heaven and the new earth, the coming day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Resurrection Life

Another vibrant biblical image of the life which the Holy Spirit imparts to us is to speak of resurrection life. Myron Augsburger (1976, 71) points out that the early Anabaptist confession of faith, the 1527 Schleitheim Confession, contains "a unique phrase, rarely found in confessional statements. They spoke of those who desire 'to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'" This metaphor would be all too presumptive if the apostle Paul had not signified that the followers of Jesus are identified with his death and resurrection: "We were buried

therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). It was Paul's own great desire to know Jesus "and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). He also boldly proclaimed the great hope of the future bodily resurrection of all who die in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:35-49).

A great privilege of the Christian life is to be able to relate to the risen Jesus. The one we follow, the one we obey and the one we worship now reigns over creation as Lord of all. He makes the power of his resurrection life available to all who are in him (Ephesians 1:18-23). It is the Spirit who imparts this life to our mortal bodies, the indwelling Spirit who enables us to "put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:11-13).

As followers of Jesus we surely need to avail ourselves of this surprising, gracious and unsurpassable resource. When we can walk in the resurrection and experience the power of the risen Jesus, we are foolish to choose to walk in our own strength. In his article, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Spiritual (Trans)Formation," Anthony Thornhill's (2012, 243) thesis is that the basis of our own spiritual formation is to identify with our Lord's death and resurrection, submit to his Lordship, and sustain hope in the future resurrection of our own bodies. He concludes, "Christian maturity must occur through a firm rooting in and identification with the resurrection of Jesus" (Thornhill 2012, 244). As we walk in the resurrection, we ourselves are continually renewed.

The Result of Change

This brings us to the final stage of the spiritual formation process presented in figure 3—spiritual growth. As we have seen, the process of change A→B occurs in the context of everyday life, as God invites us to change through our circumstances and experiences, as God empowers the change with the gift of strengthening grace, as we cooperate with God's grace through faith, through all of which the Holy Spirit is actively at work in the followers of Jesus and their church communities to bring about the growth God desires to see. The end result of this process, 'state B,' then becomes the 'new state A,' and in this way the cycle continues and spiritual growth becomes an ongoing process throughout our lives. We can have great confidence that God will see this process through to completion: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

As we engage the journey of spiritual formation, it is good to know what trail markers we can rely on to know that we are making progress. In this regard Pettit (2008, 273) writes, "The results of Christian spiritual formation are ever increasing levels of love and peace (shalom, wholeness) in our life and in our communities as we partner with God and his people in our exciting journey of faith." This further indicates that spiritual formation is not only about our own growth. As noted earlier, in tripolar spirituality the inward journey, the Godward journey and the journey with our fellow human beings is inseparable. As we ourselves are formed spiritually, the result will be expressed in the love of God through loving our neighbours and seeking peace. As I stated in my personal

definition of spiritual formation, it is "for the sake of others and ultimately for the sake of the kingdom of God." This is in keeping with the great commandment of Jesus, to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 1:30-31).

The Means of Spiritual Formation

Since spiritual growth results from God's initiative and our response, what does the human side of the equation look like? In this section of my model, I will look at the means of spiritual formation, the initiatives we can employ to place ourselves in the best position to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. When people speak and write of spiritual formation, this is often what is foremost on their minds—the element of human intentionality. This is reflected in Howard's (2008, 268) definition of spiritual formation: "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional and semi-intentional processes by which believers (individuals and communities) become more fully conformed and united to Christ, especially with regard to maturity of life and calling."

Broadly speaking, I will divide the means of spiritual formation into two major categories: first, I will draw upon the resources of my own faith tradition and examine historic Anabaptist practices; second, I will draw upon the resources of the larger church and consider the classic spiritual disciplines. In general, the Anabaptist practices can be considered a means of working at spiritual formation by focusing on our outer lives; Anabaptists have maintained that we come to

know Jesus by following him. On the other hand, the spiritual disciplines tend to approach spiritual formation by paying attention to our inner lives; we come to know Jesus through spiritual exercises that foster inward devotion.

While many people have a natural propensity for one over the other, it is essential to engage in both outer and inner practices to develop healthy communities of disciples. As Greenman (2010, 27) writes, our inner and outer lives are closely related: "Spiritual formation at its best involves a reciprocal dynamic between gathering and scattering, contemplation and action, silence and speech, being and doing, giving and receiving. Outward-focused spiritual disciplines such as hospitality and 'works of mercy' complement inward-focused disciplines." This is simply to mirror the life of Jesus himself, who engaged in regular rhythms of encounter and withdrawal. While Jesus lived a very active, public life of teaching and healing, he also regularly retreated to quiet places to spend private time in silence and prayer with the Father.

A vibrant spirituality for Jesus' followers will include times of action as well as times of contemplation, seasons of engaging the social order as well as seasons of rest. We need to avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on one to the abandonment of the other. Hull (2010, 115) is correct when he writes, "The impulse to place *being* before *doing*—to insist on the internal to the exclusion of the external—should be resisted because this presents a false choice." The opposite is also true, and likely a greater temptation for action-oriented spiritualties like Anabaptism—we need to resist the impulse to place doing before being. Psalm 24:3-4 presents a holistic approach: "Who shall ascend the hill of

the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts" (NRSV). A spirituality pleasing to God includes paying appropriate attention both to outer practices ("clean hands") and inner concerns ("pure hearts"). In this regard, Averbeck (2010, 288) provides a helpful metaphor when he compares the inner and outer dimensions of spiritual life to breathing. We inhale when we focus on spiritual disciplines, and we exhale when we exercise our faith in practical obedience. Both are essential to life.

Anabaptist Practices

Historically, Anabaptists have tended to emphasize a life of active discipleship over a life of quiet contemplation; Anabaptists have been more interested in walking with Jesus than in pursuing ascetic practices. While Mennonites do have a strong tradition of prayer, Bible reading and singing, they have been hesitant to adopt other spiritual disciplines. As Smucker (1989) writes, "Mennonite spirituality has been embedded in an ethical and communal way of life more than in self-conscious practices of piety, such as meditation, fasting, contemplation, rituals, or keeping of holy days (Christian calendar)," a way of life "concerned more with doing the will of God than with religious experience as such."

There are numerous occurrences in the Bible where God voices displeasure with the worship of God's people which does not lead to concrete acts of obedience. This is particularly true in the prophets: "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I

will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:15); "Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:23-24). So often is this theme found among the prophets that Arthur Paul Boers (1991, 61) writes, "they spent more time denouncing devotional habits than they did explaining how to pray!" Jesus himself made it clear that acts of justice are to be preferred to correct devotional piety: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). In fact, so important was reconciliation to Jesus that he instructed his disciples to postpone their worship until they had made peace with a sister or brother who had anything against them (Matthew 5:23-24). For this reason Boers (1991, 69) is surely right when he writes, "our lifestyles are more accurate indicators of our spirituality than our devotional habits."

This is representative of Anabaptist spiritual thought at its very core, which stresses that the disciple's path is a comprehensive journey of obedience which is lived out amidst all of life's relationships. Anabaptism insists that Jesus becomes known as he is followed in life: "True spirituality is a spirituality of the road. We know him by following as we make the road by walking it, discover the way in obedient imitation, and participation in his life with us" (D. Augsburger 2006, 21). Just as apprentices learn their trades by practicing them, so too do disciples learn the way of their Master by following him. Consider the well-known rallying cry of early Anabaptist Hans Denck: "No one may truly know Christ except one who follows him in life" (Liechty 1994, 111). This is

experiential learning; in grace God's Spirit works through such active obedience to form us. As Terry Wardle (2003, 19) writes, "People who follow Jesus in life will be changed. They will grow because God has committed to using all that life brings as an opportunity for his transforming touch."

Correspondent to Becker's three-fold summary of Anabaptism as quoted earlier in this paper (Jesus is the centre of our faith, community is the centre of our lives, and reconciliation is the centre of our work), I have chosen to group the historic Anabaptist practices under three headings: discipleship to Jesus, community life and reconciling mission. These will now each be taken up in turn.

Discipleship

If Anabaptist spirituality could be summed up in a word it would be 'discipleship'. Anabaptism is a spirituality of action; early Anabaptists insisted that each and every Christian should follow Jesus in life. They reacted against a Christian spirituality which emphasized intellectual belief but did not result in a holy life. Harold Bender (1957, 43) put it succinctly: "The great word of the Anabaptists was not 'faith' as it was for the other reformers, but 'following' (*Nachfolge Christi*)." What did the Anabaptists mean by discipleship?

In their understanding the individual responds to the call of Christ, forsakes his life of sin and self, receives a new nature, comes under the lordship of Christ, and takes Christ's life and teachings as normative for himself and for the church, and indeed ultimately for the whole social order. His faith in Christ thus finds expression in "newness of life"; this expression and similar ones such as "a new creature" were common. The uniqueness of Anabaptism lies in its conviction that Christ is more than a divine being to be worshiped, more than a Saviour who brings forgiveness through the cross and deliverance from the penalty and power of sin; He is the Lord to be followed and obeyed, and with whom the Christian enters

into a covenant that controls his whole life. Henceforth his life is to be lived so that Christ's life and teachings are to be concretely and realistically expressed by him in principle, in the context of the kingdom of God. (Bender and Huebner 1990)

For Anabaptists such practical discipleship became the standard against which all claims to spiritual experience were measured.

To be a follower of Jesus means to live in the world in a certain way.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into all the ways the

Anabaptists practiced their faith, it can be summarized in three primary ways: in
obeying Jesus and imitating his life; in taking up the cross and suffering with

Jesus; and in surrendering to God's will.

Obeying and Imitating Jesus

Anabaptists have always looked to the life and teaching of Jesus as much as to his death, in correspondence with the belief that salvation is the gift of life with Christ, beginning now, and not only in the afterlife. Jesus is both Saviour and Lord. Further as Lord, Jesus is to be obeyed in daily life. The *Confession of Faith* highlights the obedience of faith as conformity to Christ and non-conformity to the world:

True faith in Christ means willingness to do the will of God, rather than willful pursuit of individual happiness. True faith means seeking first the reign of God in simplicity, rather than pursuing materialism. True faith means acting in peace and justice, rather than with violence and military means. True faith means giving first loyalty to God's kingdom, rather than to any nation-state or ethnic group that claims our allegiance. True faith means honest affirmation of the truth, rather than reliance on oaths to guarantee our truth telling. True faith means chastity and loving faithfulness to marriage vows, rather than the distortion of sexual relationships, contrary to God's intention. True faith means treating our bodies as God's temples, rather than allowing addictive behaviors to take

hold. True faith means performing deeds of compassion and reconciliation, in holiness of life, instead of letting sin rule over us. Our faithfulness to Christ is lived out in the loving life and witness of the church community, which is to be a separated people, holy to God. (Confession of Faith 1995, 65-66)

As is evident in this lengthy quotation, Anabaptists look to the Sermon on the Mount as the primary teaching for how to live in God's kingdom. Anabaptists believe that as we follow the teaching of Jesus, we will be transformed into his image.

Practicing Jesus' commands also leads to the ultimate goal of spiritual formation—the growth of God's kingdom. In Kingdom Ethics, Glen Stassen and David Gushee (2003, 132-145) helpfully highlight what they term Jesus' "transforming initiatives" in the Sermon on the Mount, by pointing to a consistent pattern of "triads" in Jesus' famous sermon. In the first step of each triad, Jesus states what was considered to be traditional righteousness (for example, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,'" Matthew 5:21). This is followed by a diagnosis of what leads to a vicious cycle—anger: "But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister you will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:22, NRSV). This anger, if left unchecked, is what leads to the violence. The third member of the triad is the transforming initiative, the way out of the cycle of anger and violence: "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24, NRSV). In this way Jesus teaches that the way to break out of the cycle of anger which gives rise to violence is to take the initiative to approach an offended brother or sister and work things out. These triads are repeated consistently, with different applications, all throughout the Sermon. In this way Jesus graciously invites us, as his disciples, to join in the transforming work of God's kingdom. As we practice what Jesus teaches, by God's grace we are formed, relationships are healed and God's kingdom grows.

Jesus himself is the model for how to live a God-pleasing life. We not only obey Jesus' teaching, we imitate his example, as the early Anabaptists maintained:

Jesus Christ, the only son of God...is the example to all Christians, ordained by the Father that we might be conformed to him. For godly character, which is to be our pattern, is perfectly reflected and shown in him. Therefore, all those who claim to know the new birth should have the character and nature of Christ and hold firmly to his character from beginning to end. (Philips 1556, 217)

This reflects the Anabaptist concern that Jesus is not only to be worshipped but followed; Jesus is not only the object of belief, but the example of how to live.

The imitation of Jesus is urged throughout the New Testament, instructing disciples to take on many different aspects of his example and character, but above all in the call to love. While imitation is implicit in Jesus' many invitations to follow him, Jesus also made it explicit: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36); "Love one another, just as I have loved you" (John 13:34). Imitation was central to Paul's life of discipleship: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). He also instructed others to do the same: "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Romans 15:7);

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32); "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:1-2). Peter also is unequivocal in his command to look to Jesus as our example: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

To imitate Jesus means more than merely repeating or mimicking his actions. As disciples who live in a different culture and a different era, it is important to think deeply about what reflecting the example of Jesus means in our place in time. Faithfulness to Jesus will often mean engaging in actions which Jesus never did, yet which still rhyme with the spirit of his activity. In this regard Sheldrake (2013, 40) writes about "going beyond Jesus' actions but in a way that is opened up by them."

As we follow Jesus' example in leading a life of love, God blesses us with deeper participation in Jesus' life. While some Christian traditions emphasize seeking union with God as the goal of spirituality, a union which then leads to love of neighbour and following Jesus, for Anabaptists the stress is reversed: practicing communion with God, by walking with Jesus through loving our neighbours, which then leads to greater intimacy with God. As David Augsburger (2006, 51) writes, "Agape love is at first imitative love, then participative love as Christ is formed within the lover." In this way, through the grace of God, disciples are not just those who obey Jesus' teaching and follow his example; rather, disciples are those who participate intimately in the life of Jesus. This gift

is priceless: as Jesus is formed in us, we participate in his very nature, indeed in the nature of divine love which flows eternally among the members of the Trinity.

Suffering with Jesus

Anabaptists stressed that following Jesus was not only practical but costly, for the imitation of Jesus extends to the cross. The cross is not only the means by which Jesus procures redemption and extends reconciliation; it is also an example for us to follow. As we walk in the way of the cross, we will be transformed as we participate in the suffering life of Jesus; the same is true of church communities which suffer together for the sake of the gospel. In faith, we believe that God will work through our suffering to accomplish God's kingdom purposes.

The early Anabaptists suffered terrible persecution because of the near universal condemnation by the European state churches of their era. Thousands died for their faith in their first century, and many of their stories are told in Thieleman van Braght's (1968) perennially popular book *The Martyrs Mirror*. Through it all, suffering came to be accepted and expected as part of normal Christianity. In fact, Anabaptists considered suffering on behalf of Jesus to be a mark of the true church. As Conrad Grebel (1524, 80), one of the first leaders of the Anabaptist movement, wrote: "True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; they must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering and death; they must be tried with fire, and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by killing their bodily, but by mortifying their spiritual, enemies."

As Grebel's quote suggests, suffering is formative. Hans Hut, the most significant Anabaptist leader in South Germany and Austria, developed this further in his "natural theology" of suffering, which has become "a landmark of Anabaptist spiritual writing" (Liechty 1994, 64). He wrote that, just as plants and animals 'suffer' to provide sustenance for humans, so too humans must suffer in order to become purified instruments in God's hands (Hut 1526, 70).

While there are many causes of suffering in the world, whether from human decisions, the bondage of creation (see Romans 8:18-23), or the powers of evil, there is no suffering that is without meaning in our spiritual formation. Suffering always forms people, for better or for worse; trials can either make us or break us as followers of Jesus. How we respond to difficulties depends on our trust in God's redeeming presence with us in all of life's circumstances. Howard (2008, 288) notes that trials become means of spiritual formation when we approach them with a soft heart, a clear mind and a strong will. He further provides a list of how God might work through trials to form us: trials empty us of our false sense of self-sufficiency so that we are more open to receive from God; they have the potential to divert our attention from superficial matters to matters of eternal significance; they cause us to re-evaluate past experience by giving us a fresh perspective on which to view life; and they have the potential to strengthen virtues and weaken vices (Howard 2008, 287). In this spirit, James encouraged the readers of his letter to embrace the potential benefits of suffering: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and

let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4, NRSV).

While the followers of Jesus should not deliberately seek suffering, it is important to acknowledge that suffering is a natural consequence of living out God's love in the world. While some suffering is the result of sickness, accidents or natural disasters, Peggy Reynoso indicates that Christians also suffer directly for Christ:

This pain comes as a result of our commitment to honor Christ, and live by the values of his kingdom. It may result as a consequence of forgiving one who has wronged us, continuing to serve someone who has mistreated us, making a choice of integrity in our work, opposing an unjust authority, or simply loving a difficult neighbor. Literally, we pay a price for the sake of the gospel. (Reynoso 2010, 175-76)

Jesus himself predicted that the world would oppose his disciples: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

Jesus forewarned his disciples so that the world's animosity would not deter the journey of reconciliation. We are called to a hard path, and to be alerted is to be better prepared. At a time in which many Christians in the western world enjoy wealth, comfort and ease, and indeed sometimes consider these to be sure signs of God's blessing, Jesus bluntly challenges our self-indulgence: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:23-24, NRSV).

The way of Jesus is the way of the cross, and those who refuse to walk on that road in service to God and others will not only remain immature spiritually, but will also lose the very life they desire. There can be no resurrection life without first experiencing the cross. But those with the faith and courage to share in the suffering of Jesus, and in solidarity with our broken world, will discover that as they die with Jesus, they will receive the life of Jesus in ever deeper ways in the depths of their beings. Jesus will live in and through them as they are shaped into his likeness, and in their faithfulness they will become a source of life to others. As Paul testified to Timothy regarding Paul's own suffering for Christ: "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (1 Timothy 2:10).

As we practice faithful discipleship to Jesus we can expect to suffer, but we do not suffer alone. Reynoso (2010, 179) writes, "God suffers with His children even when He has chosen to allow our losses." As the head of the body, Jesus suffers when the members of the body suffer. Jesus also comforts us in our fellow brothers and sisters in his body; we are the presence of Christ to each other in the church, to provide the mutual strength and encouragement necessary to remain faithful to Jesus when hardships come. Therefore local churches need to strive to be communities where disciples support one another in a spirit of friendship and mutual accountability. As the author of Hebrews wrote to Christians who were struggling to remain faithful to Jesus in a time of trial: "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). As we practice our discipleship in mutually supportive communities, and remain faithful even in adversity, Jesus will redeem our suffering and shape us together into the faithful body of Christ.

Submitting to Jesus

A key faith practice which enabled the Anabaptists to remain faithful to Jesus, even in the face of suffering, was their emphasis on submitting to the Lordship of Jesus in all things. The Anabaptist word for this was 'Gelassenheit', a German word which essentially means to yield one's will to God, although it is a highly nuanced word with many shades of meaning (Friedmann 1950, 22, note 17). Other common translations of Gelassenheit include surrender, resignation, and abandonment. It is yielding the human will to God's will, and thereby allowing God to work through us.

The Anabaptists discovered the concept of *Gelassenheit* in the writings of the mystics, in which the word invariably meant a passive acquiescence to God's will. But for the Anabaptists it came to mean both passive surrender as well as active obedience, which combined to form a unique spirituality: "This union of self-surrender and radical obedience (is) uniquely Anabaptist....Serenity with tenacity is the heart of Anabaptist spiritual devotion. It unites the passive 'not my will but yours' with the active 'Thy will be done on earth'" (D. Augsburger 2006, 88). The passive side of *Gelassenheit* emphasizes the relinquishment of control

over our own lives, with full trust in God's providential goodness. The active side stresses commitment to obey Jesus regardless of the consequences. The following prison letter of Anabaptist martyr Hans van Overdam to the authorities captures both sides of the concept well:

Hence we would rather, through the grace of God, suffer our temporal bodies to be burned, drowned, beheaded, racked or tortured, as it may seem good to you, or be scourged, banished, or driven away, and robbed of our goods, than show you any obedience contrary to the Word of God, and we will be patient herein, committing vengeance to God; for we know Him that hath said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord." (van Overdam n.d., 492-493)

The practice of *Gelassenheit* promotes spiritual formation at every level: individual, community and kingdom. First of all, at the level of the individual, it is critical that we learn to let go of the need to be in control in order to provide space for the Spirit of God to work in our lives. As long as we walk in the power of our own strength we do not "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16); we need to step aside to allow the love and power of God to work in us and flow through us. As Mulholland (1993, 26) points out, "In the final analysis, there is nothing we can do to transform ourselves into persons who love and serve as Jesus did except make ourselves available for God to do that work of transforming grace in our lives."

In Anabaptist practice, *Gelassenheit* also promotes the formation of the church, for Anabaptists gave *Gelassenheit* concrete expression in yielding to one another in community. As David Augsburger (2006, 93) comments, "The goal of *Gelassenheit* is fulfilment in community, not self-actualization in isolation; it is a commitment to seek consensus through sacrifice, service, respect for others, and

obedience to the collective will of the group." This presents a radical challenge in our individualistic times, in which church members sometimes instigate conflict or even leave church communities if they do not get their own way. As a means of fostering mutual submission to one another in the body, the Anabaptists practiced foot washing, even as Jesus washed his disciples' feet just before his death (John 13:1-5). According to the *Confession of Faith* (1995, 53), "Believers who wash each other's feet show that they share in the body of Christ. They thus acknowledge their frequent need of cleansing, renew their willingness to let go of pride and worldly power, and offer their lives in humble service and sacrificial love."

Finally, God also works through our submission to Jesus to further the growth of God's kingdom purposes. *Gelassenheit* means that we seek the meaning of our lives in God's pursuit of peace rather than in the world's pursuit of power, wealth and pleasure. In this respect, Chris Lenshyn (2014, 20-21) describes *Gelassenheit* as "living into the alternative narrative of the Bible," an alternative reality "grounded in the shalom of God." Anabaptists indicate their willingness to participate in this reconciling mission by submitting to baptism which, among other things, symbolizes the desire to die to self and follow Christ in life: "The early Anabaptists were the first church community in a thousand years—at least since the time of Constantine—to directly and explicitly relate the baptismal vows of believers with the missional vocation of the church" (Driver 2015, 38).

Unfortunately, the concept of *Gelassenheit* is no longer frequently emphasized among Anabaptists today. Yet I believe that it holds particular promise for reviving spiritual life among North American Mennonites. Choosing to yield to God in the face of western society's unbridled autonomy is essential for individual disciples; learning to submit to the body of Christ in an age of rugged individualism is foundational in shaping communities of disciples; and finding our place in God's story of shalom-seeking, rather than in the world's story of self-seeking, is vital for local church engagement in mission.

Community

The Anabaptists' spirituality of discipleship cannot be understood apart from their emphasis on community. Unlike the individual understanding of discipleship prevalent in the western world today, the Anabaptists were persuaded that the Christian life could only be lived together, for believers need each other in order to follow Jesus in the way of suffering, self-giving love. Therefore the Anabaptist practice of community presents a second major means of spiritual formation. In this understanding, community is not only a goal of spiritual formation, it is also a vehicle to facilitate that goal. This is not unique to Anabaptism, as evidenced in Wilhoit's proper insistence that spiritual formation is central to the church's ministry:

Spiritual formation is *the* task of the church. Period. It represents neither an interesting, optional pursuit by the church nor an insignificant category in the job description of the body of Christ. Spiritual formation is at the heart of its whole purpose for existence. The church was formed to form. Our charge, given by Jesus himself, is to make disciples, baptize them, and

teach these new disciples to obey his commands (Matt. 28:19-20). (Wilhoit 2008, 15)

What is more peculiar to Anabaptism is its understanding that Jesus is most truly known in community, for the church is the actual body of Christ in the world. To grow in knowledge of Jesus requires participation in his body, for we experience Jesus in the gift of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In tripolar spirituality, the way we act toward fellow sojourners is the way we act toward Jesus, even as our fellowship with one another is at one and the same time fellowship with Jesus. On account of this understanding, Peter Erb (1986, 119) notes how the Anabaptists gave pre-eminence to the community over the individual: "What is at the core of Anabaptist spirituality is an emphasis on the importance of the community; the individual is made by the group, not the group by the individual."

The Anabaptists developed their life of discipleship through three widespread communal practices: public worship, mutual accountability, and mutual aid. To these we will now turn our attention.

Public Worship

For Anabaptists worship was first and foremost a whole life activity; it was not merely an activity the congregation engaged in whenever it gathered, but a daily walk of obedience with Jesus. Their understanding was very much in keeping with the words of Paul: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1, NRSV). Nonetheless, they "expected their

daily life to climax in the fellowship of the gathered community of disciples" (Bender et al., 1989).

When they gathered and shared communion, their understanding of the Lord's Supper supported whole life worship. While the Anabaptists shared bread and wine as a memorial of the death of Christ, they also emphasized its covenantal dimensions: "Just before the bread and wine were shared, the community was invited to stand together and commit themselves afresh to God and to one another" (Murray 2010, 113). Today's Mennonites also recognize that the celebration of communion includes a pledge to participate daily in the life of Jesus, in a life of love for God, one another, and the world. A vital element of corporate spiritual formation occurs when church members share and pursue the same vision, namely to follow Jesus in life.

The public worship of early Anabaptist communities was very simple, consisting of little more than the basic building blocks of Scripture reading, preaching, prayer and singing. These still constitute the primary elements of Anabaptist worship today, in common with other Christian denominations. Throughout the ages the church has found such corporate worship to be instrumental in forming believers. It serves to lead God's people into God's presence, both to learn of and to experience God's character; it strengthens commitment to the ways and purposes of God; it casts an overarching vision of the meaning and purpose of life. Any spiritual formation ministry must therefore include corporate worship as central, as long as the worship is genuine and not a tool we use in an effort to manipulate growth.

For Anabaptists worship was also a political act which strengthened and declared the community's allegiance to the kingdom of God and to Jesus as Lord; it was a subversive act which prioritized loyalty to God's kingdom above any earthly kingdoms. Consider Millard Lind's (1973, 38) definition of worship: "Christian worship should be defined as the celebration of the rule of God as experienced in the life of the new community in Christ."

One significant reason why the early Anabaptists rejected infant baptism was to repudiate the Christendom system: "All forms of Protestantism...except Anabaptism, as well as Roman and Greek Catholicism, practiced and required infant baptism for the entire population (usually required by law), thus using it as the necessary and effective instrument to continue or establish and maintain a national or mass church" (Bender 1955). In its place, Anabaptists celebrated adult baptism as the voluntary choice to join the community of disciples centered on Jesus. In a similar way, most Mennonite churches today refuse to fly any flags in their sanctuaries: our allegiance to God is in no way to become blurred with allegiance to the state: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). History has repeatedly shown that all too easily the church becomes subverted by the empire and its symbols.

Boers (1991, 72) summarizes the political dimension of worship well: "We distinguish ourselves from worldly political loyalties because our allegiances differ. We are citizens of the kingdom of God. Each worship service should draw us into deeper and deeper fealty to God and away from the petty loyalties and partisan divisions of the world." Subversive worship which includes

teaching, singing and praying on the theme of the church as one reconciled people in Christ, whose allegiance belongs to God and God's kingdom and not any other political construct, is critical to foster the formation of our corporate identity in Christ. The waters of baptism must run deeper than the blood of tribalism. Jesus alone is Lord.

One other formative element of the Anabaptists' worship was their willingness to include all members of the congregation in the giving and receiving of counsel. As their gatherings were not led by a single member of the clergy, the gifts of all were welcomed: young and old, women and men. As Stuart Murray (2010, 106) writes, "The early Anabaptists were outraged by the unhealthy dependence of churches on single voices. They declared that churches where only one person spoke and everyone else was silent were not 'spiritual congregations.' In their own communities, it was expected that many people would participate." This is in keeping with the example of worship in the biblical church communities. Paul, for example, had to write instructions to the church at Corinth for how to conduct orderly worship because so many people were eager to make contributions (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

Multi-voiced worship and congregational life which welcomes the gifts of all members is integral to corporate spiritual formation: "The first step in genuine community formation is the value and worth extended to all people and gifts" (Hiebert 2014, 147). This requires that church leaders be alert to members who may for various reasons be easily overlooked. This is also a plea for churches to reject the model of 'worship as entertainment,' led by a few professionals, who

may devote inordinate amounts of time to multimedia presentations (to the extent that there is no time or space left for lay members to develop and exercise their gifts). While leaders need to give faithful attention to the various liturgical elements of the worship service, all must be welcomed and invited to participate as they offer their gifts to God and community. Churches which prioritize professionalism and sideline the gifts of church members can never achieve the goal of corporate spiritual formation. Each local body of Christ will only grow as a body when all are valued and when all are welcome and invited to exercise their unique gifts.

Mutual Accountability

A second formative community practice among Anabaptists was that of mutual accountability. Many of the early Anabaptist leaders were dismayed as they surveyed the condition of moral life in the state churches. They believed that Christians not only could but must live differently than the people of the world. Their emphasis on mutual accountability is recognition of the fact that they needed each other's help in order to do so. In this they appear to have achieved some success—even their opponents admitted that the lifestyle of the early Anabaptists was exemplary. One of the most surprising admissions came from Franz Agricola, a Roman Catholic theologian and staunch opponent of Anabaptism:

Against the existing heretical sects there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptists. As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no

outward personal display is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God. (Bender 1957, 45)

The Anabaptists discovered mutual accountability in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-18, in which Jesus provides instructions for how to restore a sister or brother in Christ who sins against you. Among Anabaptists this text came to be known as 'the rule of Christ.' They used this rule to help one another remain faithful to their baptismal vows to follow Jesus. In his catechism Balthasar Hubmaier (1527, 349), a Bavarian and one of the most able Anabaptist theologians, directly linked mutual accountability, the rule of Christ, and baptism, noting that through baptism "one publicly and orally vows to God and agrees in the strength of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that he will henceforth believe and live according to his divine Word. And if he should trespass herein he will accept brotherly admonition, according to Christ's order, Matt. 18:15ff."

Mutual accountability became concrete through the development of 'ordnungen,' or regulations governing community life (a collection of 'ordnungen' is known as an Ordnung). This was central to the Anabaptists' approach to what we today call spiritual formation. As Sandra Cronk (Cronk 1989) writes, "The purpose of the Ordnung is not only to provide a list of individually acceptable or proscribed ethical behaviors but to structure a whole way of life, lived according to God's will, as expressed in the gospels. The Ordnung reflects God's order as opposed to the order of the world."

Following an *Ordnung* also put the church community, rather than the individual, at the centre of spiritual life. Today many individuals write a personal rule of life. An *Ordnung* can be considered a community rule of life. It was the community's pathway to discipleship, the community's way to maintain a nonconformist lifestyle. For example, Anabaptists learned how to love their enemies and to forgive their persecutors in communities which emphasized and practiced forgiveness and non-violence. A recent example of this is the remarkable forgiveness demonstrated by the Amish community in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, following a school assault in 2006 in which ten young Amish girls were shot, and five died.

Unfortunately many Mennonite churches today, like churches of other denominations, do not place significant emphasis on mutual accountability. It is a very counter-cultural practice which does not come naturally in an age of autonomy. Yet this is a major loss, for we need to support one another in our common journey with Jesus. In referencing the Reveal study at Willow Creek Community Church, in which Willow Creek concluded that their church programming did not significantly help to develop disciples, Meyer (2010, 147) summarizes their finding: "They concluded that teaching on the practice of the disciplines is not enough. There needs to be deep community in coaching and mentoring relationships with those more experienced in the Christian life." For the Anabaptists, mutual accountability to baptismal vows as expressed through *Ordmungen* served this very purpose—it was a significant form of corporate spiritual direction.

Mutual accountability to practice the teachings of Jesus, in the context of loving community, holds potential to revive spiritual life in all churches. As we follow Jesus together, we together become like Jesus. Furthermore, as Mulholland (1993, 166) writes, this serves as an essential bulwark against being co-opted by society's values: "If we don't have a corporate spirituality of accountability to one another for our pilgrimage toward wholeness in the image of Christ, we are going to be subverted by the values and the perspectives of the fallen order around us. As a church we will fall captive to the culture." But if we support and encourage one another, we live into our God-given corporate identity as salt and light and function, as God intended, as agents of peace and reconciliation in the culture.

Mutual Aid

The greatest threat to the spiritual life of God's people in the prosperous western world may well be our relationship with money. In a consumerist society, God's people are constantly tempted to put their security in wealth and possessions, which hinders personal or corporate spiritual formation. For this reason Jesus frequently addressed the allure of money, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21); "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24, NRSV).

The Anabaptist tradition provides a wonderful resource to help counter the temptation to worship wealth—the practice of mutual aid. It was a core conviction of the Anabaptists that the followers of Jesus should gladly and freely share their resources with one another, so that there is no need in the community of faith. Their practice is well summed up by Heinrich Bullinger, one of their opponents: "They teach that every Christian is under duty before God from motives of love, to use, if need be, all his possessions to supply the necessities of life to any of the brethren who are in need" (Bender 1957, 50). This generosity also extended to those outside the church, as Hans Leopold, a Swiss Anabaptist martyr, wrote: "If they know of anyone who is in need, whether or not he is a member of their church, they believe it their duty, out of love to God, to render help and aid" (Bender 1957, 49).

Mutual aid is still practiced among many Mennonites today. When a church member is in need, there is a strong tradition for others to rally around, sharing both time and resources as needed. In times of disaster, Mennonites stand ready to rebuild homes, barns or businesses, whether or not the damaged building belongs to someone of Anabaptist faith convictions. The practice of mutual aid is often combined with similar economic emphases, like discerning together how to use God-given financial resources, or how to live simply to enable generous sharing.

There is a direct connection between our spirituality and our economic lives. When a community together practices sharing and simple living, coupled with a concern for economic justice, significant resistance is offered against the

temptation of wealth. It is through the reciprocity of mutual aid, sometimes giving and sometimes receiving, that strong bonds are forged within the community of faith. It is through the very practice of generosity, in a mutually accountable community, that generous lives are formed.

Most Christians today are encouraged to practice some form of charitable giving, which is often necessary and beneficial. But Stuart Murray (2010, 121-122) highlights four ways in which the practice of mutual aid runs deeper than charity. First, it is concerned for justice rather than the mere alleviation of need, as it "recognizes the prior claim of others in need" to the possessions God has given us to steward. Second, it reinforces the truth that our churches are not institutions but communities: "if we recognize each other's help in discerning and resisting the economic pressures of our culture, mutual aid will consist not just in sharing resources but also in working out together how to be disciples of Jesus in the area of economics." Third, it is more effective in challenging cultural values: "The practice of charitable giving does not generally raise questions about what we retain or about our lifestyle," but when we discern together what faithful economic life looks like, simplicity and contentment are emphasized. Finally, mutual aid promotes partnership and relationship, rather than dependency, as the sharing of resources is not all in one direction.

In the global church era, mutual aid provides a much better model for global church partnerships than the mere sending of money from the economically rich to the economically poor. Towards this end, Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind (2003) have written the book *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of*

Faith, written on behalf of Mennonite World Conference. It encourages churches in Europe and North America not only to see themselves as givers, but to be willing to receive from among the many gifts of their global sisters and brothers in Christ. This is an excellent resource to help strengthen community and facilitate formative partnerships in the global church.

Reconciling Mission

As the body of Christ experiences reconciliation among its own members, from the local to the global level, it is best positioned to participate in our Lord's mission to restore shalom to all of creation. For Jesus' reconciling mission is our mission, and when we learn to seek and to make peace among ourselves, we offer authentic witness to the world. In this way, we have the immense privilege of cooperating with God as God forms the eternal kingdom of peace.

But engagement in mission not only helps to form the kingdom. Those individuals and churches who participate with Jesus in sharing the gospel of peace will also find themselves transformed. For this reason, following Jesus into mission is not only the goal of spiritual formation, but also an essential means to facilitate God's transforming work in our lives. Mission thus represents the third major means of Anabaptist spiritual formation. As Fuller (2010, 220) writes, "We are formed *in* mission, not merely *for* mission."

This is not always readily recognized. Within the church there has at times been a tendency to emphasize spiritual growth as something that only happens when we disengage from the world, rather than when we engage it.

Meyer (2010, 158) challenges this viewpoint with language that Anabaptists can appreciate: "There is no substitute for what the Spirit of God does as people living in the real world become missionally engaged with the least and the lost as a part of their everyday lives."

In the first place, participating in the mission of Jesus forms us simply through practice. Even as apprentice mechanics hone their skills by repairing cars, so too do apprentices of Jesus develop skills in mission by practicing the reconciling teaching and example of Jesus. Second, mission forms us as we witness the wonder at what the Spirit of God is able to accomplish:

Far too often, many of us shrink back from mission as a critical part of our spiritual formation, but it is precisely in those moments that God reshapes our hearts, minds, and inner beings. As we experience God at work in people's lives and become conduits for his love and power, the gospel of Jesus penetrates our hearts and the places where we are not aligned with Him. As the good news of the gospel flows into the world, it also flows through us, and we are changed from the inside out. (Fuller 2010, 220)

Third, Fuller (2010, 216) notes that mission can also shape us through disillusionment: "It is engagement with God's mission in the real world that debunks the illusions in our belief systems that have debilitating, distorting power in our lives. This process is key to transformation and will only happen as we engage in experiences that carry us beyond the carefully controlled borders of our comfort zones."

For past and present Anabaptists, engagement in God's mission has involved three primary activities: practicing non-violent love toward enemies and persecutors; serving Jesus through serving neighbours; and engaging in the great commission through authentic witness. For Anabaptists radical commitment to

others is non-optional; practiced, concrete spirituality is the indispensable path toward the growth and maturity of Jesus' followers. As we love God by loving others, we discover afresh God's love for ourselves, and become more loving in turn.

Nonviolent Love

Perhaps the most distinctive element of Anabaptist spirituality is a steadfast commitment to nonviolence. While individual pacifists can be found in all church denominations, only Anabaptists and Quakers adhere to nonviolence as denominations. In spite of severe persecution, Anabaptism has maintained a fairly consistent ethic of nonviolence and enemy love throughout its history. The most notable exception is the 1534-1535 tragedy at Munster, a failed Anabaptist attempt to prepare the way for the coming of the kingdom by taking this northern German city by force (cf. Dyck 1967, 77ff.). But the majority of Anabaptists have rejected violence as inconsistent with the values of God's kingdom. For example Peter Riedemann, a leader of the Hutterite branch of Anabaptism, wrote in 1545: "Christ, the Prince of Peace, has established his kingdom, that is, His Church, and has purchased it by his blood. In this kingdom all worldly warfare has ended. Therefore a Christian has no part in war nor does he wield the sword to execute vengeance" (Bender 1957, 51).

For Anabaptists, the pursuit of peace means more than the rejection of violence—it includes a commitment to seek the wellbeing of all, including enemies and persecutors. This is personified in the story of Dirk Willems, well

known in Anabaptist circles. After escaping imprisonment for the crime of being an Anabaptist Willems fled across a frozen canal. When his pursuer fell through the ice and cried for help, Willems turned back and rescued him. His reward for this selfless act was being burned at the stake as a heretic (van Braght 1968, 741). Dirk Willems turned back because he was nurtured in a faith community in which love for enemies was both taught and expected of Jesus' followers.

Anabaptists maintain that such nonviolent love reflects the spirituality of the early church. For the first two centuries Christians largely rejected violence: "Until about 170, the church was predominantly pacifist in teaching and practice" (Murray 2010, 126). Many church fathers spoke against violence and warfare, including Tertullian (On Idolatry 19): "the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier." It was only when the emperor Constantine united church and state in the Roman Empire that the church began to seek theological justification for the use of violence.

Above all, Anabaptists look to Jesus for inspiration, who never advocated or condoned the use of violence. Rather, he taught his disciples, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Jesus also demonstrated enemy love when he prayed for those who crucified him saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Paul reminds us that the death of Jesus was for "sinners," the "enemies" of God (Romans 5:6-10). As a consequence Anabaptists ask, "How can we kill someone for whom Christ died?" Paul also urges nonviolent love: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them;" "Repay no one evil for evil;" "If

your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink;"
"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:14-21).

Anabaptist nonviolence is not based upon the naïve belief that love will never be met with violence, nor upon the supposition that people can easily be persuaded to get along with each other. While there are significant examples of nonviolent strategies resulting in positive change (Mahatma Gandhi's Indian independence movement; Martin Luther King's civil rights movement), Mennonites do not practice nonviolence based upon calculations of success. As Augsburger (2006, 138) writes, "Nonviolence is right not because it works but because it is the way of Jesus. It anticipates the triumph of the Lamb that was slain; it reveals the heart of God." Can there be any better witness to the cross of Jesus than the willingness to die for others, even our enemies?

But the typical challenge of nonviolent love, and consequent opportunity to witness, is found in how we respond to everyday circumstances: How do we react to the 'jerk' who cuts us off in traffic? How do we treat the manipulative colleague who charms her way into the promotion we were in line for? How do we deal with the bully on the playground? The answer is certainly not to do nothing—pacifism is not passivism. We do not fear or avoid conflict. But the refusal to engage in any form of violence, whether physical, verbal or emotional, opens up the door for many creative responses to such challenges. Violence slams the door on reconciliation, while imaginative peacemaking initiatives carry with them significant possibilities for transformation. Jesus himself championed such creative alternatives over the conventional response of retaliation: "If

anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile" (Matthew 5:39-41, NRSV).

Commitment to nonviolence necessitates the innovative pursuit of peace and justice. Whether seeking to reconcile feuding parties, seeking to prevent the beginning of conflict, or seeking to address the root causes of injustice, courage and creativity are required to participate in God's mission to restore shalom to God's creation. We do so in the spirit of *Gelassenheit* and in the spirit of humility, trusting God's guidance and submitting to God's will as we engage nonviolently in Jesus' way of peace. We do not avoid risks to follow Jesus, but we are willing to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:9-12).

To live as Jesus lived is to practice active, nonviolent love as we seek the wellbeing of others in all circumstances. As we do so, we also demonstrate love for Jesus, for love of Jesus and love of neighbour or enemy are one and the same love. As our church communities foster creative alternatives to violence, we are able to offer hope in a divided world.

Concrete Service

Another element of reconciling mission is to incarnate the love of Jesus for the poor and needy in the world. Even as Jesus demonstrated concrete love for outcasts, the sick, and the hungry, through acts of friendship, healing and the provision of sustenance, so too Jesus calls us to embody his example: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first

among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:43-45). Responding to the needs of others is an expression of Christ's love and contributes to the restoration of shalom in creation, for peace is not merely the absence of violence, but the positive presence of everything needed for human flourishing.

Service is the way of Jesus. The early Christian hymn celebrates how Jesus "emptied himself by taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). In fact, throughout the biblical story God demonstrates special concern for the poor and justice for the oppressed. Therefore, as Boers (1991, 39) writes, "Any spirituality that aims to help us abide in God must take seriously God's identification with the destitute." In fact, so closely did Jesus identify with those who suffer that he informed his disciples that whenever they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, comforted the sick, and visited those in prison, they did it unto him (Matthew 25:35-40). Conversely, he also warned his disciples that those who failed to alleviate suffering failed to care for him (Matthew 25:41-46). "Woe, woe to anyone who would try to see God in heaven without loving the needy on earth" (Boers 1991, 49).

When we engage in concrete acts of service we learn new habits of compassion, provided the service is sincerely carried out as an act of solidarity with those in need, rather than in an effort to promote ourselves. Self-centered service is egocentric or even exploitive and is detrimental to spiritual formation, whereas genuine service is motivated by love and leads to spiritual growth. Furthermore, Wilhoit (2008, 150) notes how sincere service predisposes a person

to learn, for as we engage in caring acts we gain valuable insight into what is truly helpful and what is not, which motivates us to do better: "Like every significant endeavor in life, we do not know how well we have understood or observed until we try to actually do what we learned." Service also strengthens the body of Christ, for as we each use our gifts, our valuable contribution to the body is affirmed. Moreover, others will be drawn to the light we shine when they see the good works of the community of disciples serving together.

Authentic Witness

Jesus not only called his disciples to engage in good works—he also sent them to make more disciples by sharing the good news of God's reconciling love and forgiveness. This is evident in the final instruction the risen Jesus gave to his followers before ascending to heaven, in a command that has come to be known as the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The early Anabaptists fulfilled this assignment with utmost urgency. They insisted that the Great Commission applied to all believers at all times and in all places; every member of the church was expected to participate. As Franklin Littell (1947, 12) has noted, "No words of the Master were given more serious attention by His Anabaptist followers than His final command." In the Christendom era, when the state churches presumed the people in their lands were

already Christians, having been baptized as infants, the Anabaptists were the only Reformation group to mobilize for evangelism. This was also a sheer necessity: "Since they controlled no political units as the Reformers did, they had to win others" (Bender and M. Augsburger 1989). Unfortunately heavy persecution eventually took its toll: "By countless imprisonments and executions the Anabaptist movement was throttled, and in many regions extinguished; the evangelistic fires died down. Those who were once flaming evangels and courageous missioners now became the *Stillen im Lande* (the 'quiet in the land') happy to be permitted merely to exist" (Bender and M. Augsburger 1989).

The last century has seen many Mennonites begin to reengage in evangelism. Anabaptists today are well poised to do so, because our peace, justice and service emphases lend authenticity to our witness. David Augsburger (2006, 176) rightly calls for "embodied witness," when the lives of messengers line up with their message; sharing the good news of Jesus must include both words and actions. When we live the way Jesus lived, and obey his command to proclaim the good news, our words fall on much more receptive ears. When we embody the gospel in lives of love for neighbours and enemies, both individually and collectively as the church, our message becomes believable to those who witness it.

Evangelism is essential to spiritual formation, the critical first step in beginning the spiritual growth process in people's lives. If people are not told the good news of Jesus and are not invited to follow him, how can they become disciples? Without evangelism any ministry of spiritual formation will eventually

die out. The benefits of authentic evangelism to God's reconciling mission are evident: as people repent of self-centered living and place their faith in Jesus they are reconciled to God and to others in the body of Christ. They begin the journey of spiritual formation. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, become new creations, and are able to walk in the power of Christ's resurrection. As they follow Jesus through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they too become peacemakers who embody the good news of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Disciplines

While it is vital that our faith demonstrate itself in outward actions of love, justice and reconciliation, apart from which spirituality becomes reduced to idolatry, it is equally true that the outer life needs to be supported by attention to the inner life. The Achilles heel which Anabaptists need to beware of is the temptation to divorce ethics from spirituality. If we do not abide in Jesus who is the vine, we as the branches cannot bear fruit. We lose our spiritual mooring if we seek to obey Jesus without depending on the enabling grace of God's Spirit. While following Jesus is formative in and of itself, we cannot follow Jesus in our own strength.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the Triune God is at the centre of spiritual formation, and that growth in discipleship is impossible apart from participation in the life of the Trinity. For this reason the historic church has emphasized that careful attention must be given to the spiritual disciplines as a major means of spiritual formation, because they facilitate the deepening of

relationship with God. In his seminal work *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster (1998, 1) writes, "The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm."

Jesus himself regularly withdrew from active ministry to focus undivided attention on his heavenly Father, and in this way again serves as our example to follow. Before he began his ministry he spent forty days alone in the wilderness to prepare and strengthen him for what lay ahead (Luke 4:1-13). Thereafter the gospels record many occasions in which Jesus retreated to commune with his Father, which Luke summarized in this way: "He would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (Luke 5:16). Apart from such time spent nurturing relationship with God the adventurous life of discipleship cannot be sustained.

But what specifically is a spiritual discipline? Foster (2008, 16) provides a good definition: "A spiritual discipline is an intentionally directed action by which we do what we can do in order to receive from God the ability (or power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort." This definition draws attention to the fact that more than human willpower is needed to follow Jesus. On our own, for example, we cannot love our enemies, but when we engage in the disciplines and place ourselves in God's presence God is able to work in us and help us overcome our own weakness. As Foster (1998, 5) writes, "Willpower will never succeed in dealing with the deeply ingrained habits of sin." Only God can work the changes needed within us, and the spiritual disciplines are a key means of grace God provides so we can die progressively to sin and become ever more alive to the

transforming Holy Spirit we received at regeneration. The disciplines enable us to keep Paul's injunction to "walk by the Spirit" so we do not "gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

Precisely because the spiritual disciplines are a means of grace, it is essential that we do not turn them into a law, for by doing that we undercut the purpose of the disciplines by relying on our own ability to perform them. Foster (1998, 9) is unequivocal in this matter: "The Spiritual Disciplines are intended for our good. They are meant to bring the abundance of God into our lives. It is possible, however, to turn them into another set of soul-killing laws. Law-bound Disciplines breathe death." Therefore, the disciplines must never be approached legalistically—God does not reward us for keeping them, nor punish us for failing to keep them. They are simply a means to an end, a gift God gives us to immerse ourselves in God's transforming love. The key is that we do not place our trust in our ability to maintain the disciplines, but in the merciful God we meet when we engage in them. It is good to remember that it is God who in grace motivates us and provides us with the strength to live in a disciplined manner in the first place.

At the same time, we recognize that it is our responsibility to employ the disciplines. While God provides the grace we need, we must receive and apply this gift in faith. Just as we have to be intentional in the outer practices of discipleship, community, and mission, so too we must be intentional in cultivating the inner life. We see this in the manner in which Paul challenged Timothy, "train yourself for godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). Matthews builds on this by stressing that the transformation process consists of training and not trying:

Vast numbers of Christians live with guilt, failure, and futility as they practice daily this 'trying' model of change, trying to be more loving, patient or joyful or trying not to be angry, lust-filled or greedy. Certainly we have to want to be different—we want to live and reflect Christ with our actions—but our direct efforts often fail....That is the futility of a "trying" approach to change. We must embrace a "training" approach to match our unique life situation. (Matthews 2010, 99-100)

Spiritual training brings us into God's presence where God can strengthen our will, whereas human striving is an exercise in frustration.

While there is no definitive list of spiritual disciplines, and while just about anything that facilitates relationship with God can serve as a discipline, the church has recognized certain spiritual disciplines which have proven to be very effective for the body of Christ throughout history. While we should be very much encouraged to experiment with personalized disciplines, Mulholland (1993, 104) astutely notes that the classical disciplines "form the scaffolding, the structure, the support network within which we then exercise the distinctive, personalized disciplines into which the Spirit of God leads each of us as we journey toward wholeness in Christ." The classical disciplines I will consider in this model include prayer, Scripture reading, *lectio divina*, solitude and fasting. Each of these represents vast fields of study, so I must necessarily keep my comments both general and germane to spiritual formation. Furthermore, while I will primarily focus on the individual application of these disciplines, the personal growth they foster most certainly contributes to the development of the corporate body of Christ and subsequently to the kingdom of God.

Prayer

Surely, the foremost discipline to consider is prayer, which simply defined is communication with God. Prayer is the gift God gives us in loving and gracious condescension so we may have the immense privilege of relating directly to our holy creator. Jesus warmly encouraged us to make use of this gift in childlike trust in God's goodness: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you....If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7, 11).

Unfortunately, in the popular imagination (both inside and outside the church) prayer is often thought of merely as a way to get something from God. It is sometimes reduced to little more than a shopping list, combined with the hope that the right words will be spoken to get God to release God's blessings. This is nothing new—Jesus warned his disciples not to seek to manipulate God through the sheer volume of words they used in prayer. Rather, he informed them that "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7-8).

In this regard, Mulholland (1993, 106) wisely writes that prayer "is primarily relational, not functional." As in any relationship, prayer consists in turn of listening, speaking, or simply enjoying the presence of another in silence. In prayer, we may listen quietly to discern God's guidance or we may shout out our pain in frustration. Sometimes we are purely still in the awesome awareness that we are in God's company.

Ultimately, prayer is the sharing of our whole selves and lives with God. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Psalms, the perennial prayer book of the church: "Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray" (Psalm 5:1-2, NRSV). The Psalmists did not put on masks, but shared the depths of their very beings with God. At times, they offered up glad prayers of praise and thanksgiving; at times, they lamented bitter losses. At times, they expressed firm confidence in God's protection; at times, they admitted their helplessness and fear. At times, they rejoiced over gifts of friendship and unity; at times, they vented angry words and the desire for revenge. For the Psalmists there was no area of life outside of God's concern and care, and therefore they felt confident to approach God at any time and in any way with anything pressing on their hearts and minds. This is a wonderful example for all those who pray today, whether individually or corporately.

Indeed, prayer is both an individual and a corporate discipline. While

Jesus encouraged his disciples not to make a showy display of prayer before

others in an effort to impress them, but rather to retreat to their rooms and to pray

to their Father in secret (Matthew 6:5-6), he also taught them to pray by

addressing God with the corporate "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). The rest of the

Lord's Prayer provides content for the church at prayer: for God's name to be

lifted up and God's will to be done; for daily sustenance for the community (give

us this day our daily bread); for forgiveness and for deliverance (Matthew 6:9-

13). The book of Acts contains numerous references to the church at prayer (Acts 4:31; 8:15; 13:3).

Fixed-hour prayer is a form of prayer which joins the prayers of the individual or the local church to those of the global church. It is deeply rooted in the Scriptures. One of the earliest references to a fixed pattern of daily discipline is the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6 ("Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might," Deuteronomy 6:4-5), which the people of Israel were to recite twice a day, "when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). The Psalms contain plentiful references to prayer at particular times, both morning and evening, and in the New Testament we also read of Jesus praying at morning and at evening (Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23).

Scot McKnight describes the fixed-hour prayer which the church developed from the biblical tradition:

(It) consists of set prayers that the Church has written down and prayed for centuries. The Church has always prayed at fixed times with set prayers, and in so praying it creates a sacred rhythm of prayer. I call this praying with the church....We are joining hands and hearts with millions of other Christians to say the same thing at the same time. (McKnight 2006, 1)

Fixed-hour prayer can be joined alone at home or together with fellow disciples. To help facilitate it, many denominations have produced their own prayer books. A great benefit of prayer books is that they provide rich vocabulary to teach us how to pray. A recent and welcome Anabaptist addition to this tradition is *Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book, Ordinary Time* and *Volume 2, Advent through Pentecost* (Boers et al., 2007, 2010).

Prayer effectively contributes to spiritual formation in two ways: by changing those who pray, and by making those who pray channels through whom God chooses to advance the restoration of shalom in the world. Regarding the former, Foster (1998, 33) writes: "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we desire to be conformed to Christ." Regarding the latter, Howard (2008, 327) writes: "But prayer, and especially petitionary prayer, aims to produce effects not merely in those praying or in their relationship with God, but also in the earth. And indeed, these effects are produced. Scripture and history affirm these effects." Whenever and however we pray, "Prayer becomes a sacrificial offering of ourselves to God, to become agents of God's presence and action in the daily events and situations of our lives" (Mulholland 1993, 108).

Scripture Reading

In the Scriptures we read the story of God's loving intent for and interaction with humanity throughout history. The Bible is God's gift to us, originated through human authorship, yet inspired and superintended by God so that it graciously and faithfully reveals to us everything that God wants to communicate regarding God's character and will. Since the Bible is God's revelation to us, we find ourselves directly addressed as we encounter it. We do not approach the Scriptures as neutral readers encountering impersonal words; rather, we humbly and reverently seek to understand how God has spoken and is

speaking to us today. Spiritual formation is therefore based upon God's authoritative self-disclosure as revealed in God's Word. As Foster writes:

It is God's book. No one owns it but God. It is the loving heart of God made visible and plain. And receiving this message of exquisite love is the great privilege of all who long for life with God. Reading and studying and memorizing and meditating upon Scripture have always been the foundation of the Christian Disciplines. All of the Disciplines are built upon Scripture. Our practice of the Spiritual Disciplines is kept on course by our immersion in Scripture. (Foster 2008, 8-9)

We read the Bible in order to hear God's voice and obey God's word; we read it in order to discern God's will so we may faithfully follow Jesus. As we do so we are not left to our own devices—God's Spirit is present as we read, to illuminate our hearts and minds, and to motivate and strengthen our wills. As Christopher Hall (2010, 147) writes, "Christ has spoken and continues to speak as the Holy Spirit enlivens the words of Scripture, applying them to our minds and hearts as we allow his divine speech to sink down within us, seeping into every crack and cranny." As he prayed for the saints at Ephesus, Paul asked that God would grant them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened (Ephesians 1:17-19). The presence of the Spirit as we engage the Scriptures necessitates a posture of listening: "We read the text with an ear for the Composer who not only is revealed in the text, but whose Spirit whispers to us as we read, reminding us of the heart of Christ" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 35-36).

Since the Holy Spirit is able to address both our minds and our hearts, it is important to read the Bible both in a studious and a meditative manner—indeed the Bible itself promotes both approaches. Regarding study, Paul gave these

instructions to his young mentee Timothy: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). The opening song in the Psalter encourages meditation: "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2, NRSV). Bible study serves the critical importance of explicating the meaning of a text, while meditation or spiritual reading seeks to allow that meaning to sink deep down into one's being, where it is digested and becomes part of one's identity. Averbeck describes well the relationship between the two:

Spiritual reading is not a "less than" but a "more than" approach to the reading of the Bible. Informational and spiritual reading should function together as two nodes that modulate each other—moving back and forth between them, sometimes digging into what the passage means and sometimes stopping to dwell on its implications and impact on our lives....We leave neither our intellect nor our spirituality behind when we do spiritual reading. (Averbeck 2010, 291)

Ultimately, the Word of God as revealed in Scripture forms one large, comprehensive story, a story which invites our participation: "The narrative framework of the Bible consists of a story, and the story of our personal lives follows a trajectory from that one. This story, therefore, instructs us about our lives as we are living them" (Averbeck 2010, 285). As we have seen, the Bible tells the story of God's quest to restore shalom to creation, a story which finds its centre in the reconciling life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the story into which Scripture draws us. As we immerse ourselves in this story it shapes our imaginations, which is critical for the ministry of reconciliation:

Reconciliation is about learning to live by a new imagination. God desires to shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God's new creation, offering concrete examples of another way and practices that engage the everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. That is why the work of reconciliation is sustained more through storytelling and apprenticeship than by training in techniques and how-tos. Through friendship with God, the stories of Scripture and faithful lives, and learning the virtues and daily practices those stories communicate, reconciliation becomes an ordinary, everyday pattern of life for Christians. (Katangole and Rice 2008, 151)

Finally, a few words need to be said about the interpretation of Scripture. The Anabaptist tradition has significant wisdom to share in this regard. Precisely because God's story finds its centre in Jesus, Anabaptists rightly insist that the Bible should be interpreted from a Christ-centered point of view. While many Christians read a 'flat' Bible, giving the same weight to the writings of Moses or the prophets as they do to the words of Jesus, Anabaptists insist that Scripture finds its fulfilment in Jesus, who said as much himself: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). As Becker (2010, 8) writes, this has practical implications: "Thus, when Anabaptist-minded Christians face an ethical question, they go first to Jesus for their primary guidance and then to other Scriptures for further background and understanding. If two passages of Scripture seem to disagree, they let Jesus be the referee!" Additionally, Anabaptists seek to interpret Scripture together in community, especially for significant guidance or decisions. When we limit ourselves to private study, we more easily go astray. When we listen only to the voice of a recognized pastor or church leader, we cut ourselves off from other potential voices of wisdom. Therefore, while

Anabaptists certainly encourage individual study, group discernment is also encouraged as members give and receive counsel in the context of a Spirit-led community: "Generally, community members who come together in small groups, classes and conferences in the Spirit of Christ can best determine what a Scripture is saying to them about a particular situation" (Becker 2010, 12-13).

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (Latin for "divine reading") is an ancient spiritual discipline, derived from the monastic tradition, which combines prayer, both spoken and silent, with Scripture reading, especially with the slow, meditative reading of the Bible. It speaks to a special way of being with the biblical text, a way that consists of four inter-related movements: reading, praying, meditating, and contemplating. These movements do not necessarily occur in sequence—they may happen in any order or at the same time. Peterson (2006, 10) describes such spiritual reading as the "core curriculum" in "the School of the Holy Spirit," because it takes seriously the nurturing words of Scripture and seeks to assimilate them into our very beings:

These are words intended, whether confrontationally or obliquely, to get inside us, to deal with our souls, to form a life that is congruent with the world that God has created, the salvation that he has enacted, and the community that he has gathered....There is only one way of reading that is congruent with our Holy Scriptures, writing that trusts in the power of words to penetrate our lives and create truth and beauty and goodness....This is the kind of reading named by our ancestors as *lectio divina*. (Peterson 2006, 4)

Lectio divina is Scripture reading bathed in prayer. Prayers for illumination, guidance and submission to the text may be prayed before the

reading; prayers may be offered up to God during the reading, as the Spirit brings people and situations to mind; prayers for strength and wisdom to obey what has been heard may complete the reading. The reading itself is done in a meditative manner: slowly and reflectively. Peterson (2006, 1-3) illustrates the meaning of biblical meditation by telling the story of his dog gnawing on bones it finds in the forest, playing with them, growling over them, licking and chewing them leisurely for hours on end, with each bone providing pleasure for up to a week. In the same way, meditative reading is "ruminative and leisurely, a dalliance with words in contrast to wolfing down information." In meditation we ask questions as we dwell in the text: Which words or phrases grab the attention of my thoughts or my feelings? What might the Spirit be trying to say to me through this stimulation? What am I learning about myself? About God? Am I living in the light of this? How is God leading me to respond?

Lectio divina also includes the silent prayer known as 'contemplation'. As simply defined, contemplation is resting in God's presence; when we contemplate we become aware of God's companionship in silence. We do not seek to come before God with words or feelings or imagination—we simply seek to be with God. Contemplation is therefore an act of surrender: rather than request things of God, we place ourselves before God and await any divine initiative God may choose to enact. As Wilhoit and Howard (2012, 118) write, "In contemplation we take our hands off the steering wheel and leave the controls to God."

Contemplative silence can arise spontaneously at any state of the *lectio divina* process, or it can be something that we structure in, typically after meditation.

Contemplative prayer can also be considered a discipline in and of itself which can be practiced apart from *lectio divina*, as in the discipline known as 'centering prayer.' Centering prayer consists of resting quietly in God's presence, and is supported by a chosen sacred word (such as 'love,' 'shalom,' or 'Jesus') which symbolizes our intention to be with God, and which is repeated whenever we discover any thoughts, feelings or images which distract us from simply being with God. Whether contemplative prayer is used inside or outside of *lectio divina*, it is another valuable means of grace: "We are slowly remade just from the intentional exposure to God's heart of love....We are simply present with God, and God completes the work" (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 111).

The practice of *lectio divina* is an excellent means toward spiritual formation. It can play a key role in helping to prevent two common dangers that arise when the reading of the Bible ends with academic study and does not progress to meditation. The first is that of distancing ourselves from the text. When our reading is limited to analysis only, when the text is reduced to information and data, or when it does not go beyond the forming of theological positions, it is easy to keep it at arm's length, and not allow it to influence our being and our doing through enhancing our relationship with God. The second hazard to beware of is that of seeking to remain in control of the text rather than allowing the Word to address us directly; genuine spiritual formation occurs as we allow the Holy Spirit access to our lives. Positively put, *lectio divina* enables God's Word to penetrate to the depths of our being, in order for the Spirit to shape us into the people God desires us to be.

Ultimately, *lectio divina* supports the life of active discipleship by calling us to an ongoing life process of listening for the Word of God and responding to it with acts of obedience. Biblical meditation, with its emphasis on feeding on Scripture, allows the transforming Word of God to become part of us so that the life of God flows through us:

Holy Scripture nurtures the holy community as food nurtures the human body. Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we assimilate it, take it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration to the Father, feet washed in company with the Son. (Peterson 2006, 18)

Solitude

In addition to the silence experienced in contemplative or centering prayer, the church in its wisdom has always advocated for more extended experiences of silence through the pursuit of solitude. We see this in the dedication of the desert fathers and mothers, who withdrew to the wilderness, sometimes for years on end, to practice solitude. This gave rise to the monastic tradition, in which extended periods of silence became a regulated part of daily life. But solitude need not be reserved for monks and hermits—it is available for everyone, even those with many responsibilities in the contemporary world. Foster (1998, 105-106) encourages us to take advantage of the "little solitudes" we encounter every day: before rising from bed, at coffee break, or when stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. These moments can gradually be built upon by

reserving an hour or two on an occasional weekend, and with practice an entire day or more can be set aside for silent recreation in God's presence.

Jesus himself set the example: he occasionally withdrew to lonely places in the midst of an otherwise busy and active ministry. His public life was bookended by solitude: he entered into the wilderness for forty days before he began his ministry (Luke 4:1-2), and before his death he entered into the Garden of Gethsemane to spend time alone in prayer (Matthew 26:36-46). He also sought solitude on numerous occasions during his ministry, as when he received the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded: "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself" (Matthew 14:13).

Tony Jones (2005, 41) indicates the primary purpose behind the discipline of solitude: "The reason Christians are to seek silence and solitude above all else is for the same reason Jesus did—to be able to hear from God....Humble silence opens the ears and causes the listener to hear that 'sound of sheer silence' in which God so often speaks." Solitude and silence are all the more necessary in a world in which we are constantly surrounded by sound, whether from technology (cell phones, internet, television), traffic or power tools. In the absence of silence, we easily become disconnected from God through the failure to hear God's voice; solitude provides the opportunity to meet with God outside the clamour and obligations of daily life.

A second reason to seek solitude is to become better acquainted with ourselves in God's presence. While western society emphasizes external busyness and activity, solitude provides us an opportunity to get in touch with our

own inner being. In the absence of noise and commotion, there is nothing to distract us from self-knowledge: Times of solitude and silence "are times for noticing—noticing what is true about us in a given moment and then being in God's presence with the things we've noticed" (Barton 2010, 57-58). Yet many people find such self-awareness disconcerting—it reveals brokenness and pain and alienation from God and others, and tempts us to rush back into the world of noise and disruption. But Ruth Haley Barton provides us with the encouragement to persevere, as we find grace for our weakness in God's very presence:

This willingness to see ourselves as we are and to name it in God's presence is at the very heart of the spiritual journey. But it takes time, time to feel safe enough with ourselves and with God to risk exposing the tender, unfinished places of the soul. We are so accustomed to being shamed or condemned in the unfinished parts of ourselves that it is hard to believe there is a place where all of who we are—the good, the bad and the ugly—will be handled with love and gentleness. Solitude is such a place, but it takes time to learn to trust it. (Barton 2010, 96)

For this reason solitude should be engaged on a regular basis—when we have sufficient experience with silence we come to the recognition that we not only meet our brokenness there, but deeper yet, we encounter the persistent, underlying love of God.

Such love, in fact, represents the primary benefit of solitude: "Spiritual writers, ancient and modern, are unanimous in saying that silence and solitude lead to a love of God, a love of self, and a love of others" (Jones 2005, 41). Or as Foster (1998, 108) put it, "The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts." Ultimately,

it is as we know ourselves loved in the entirety of our being that we find the freedom to love and serve others.

Fasting

A final significant spiritual discipline to consider is fasting, which has been practiced by God's people throughout both biblical and church history. While the Scriptures nowhere command fasting, it is regularly found throughout the Bible—depending on how you count, there are some fifty-nine references to the practice (Berghuis 2001, 87). Jesus himself fasted for forty days in the wilderness, and also assumed that his followers would fast—when he raised the subject in his Sermon on the Mount he addressed his disciples saying, "When you fast," not "If you fast" (Matthew 6:16). The book of Acts contains numerous references which verify that the first followers of Jesus did indeed observe fasting (Acts 9:8-11; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23). While it was common practice for Jewish people to fast twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, the early church differentiated itself from Jewish practice by choosing to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, a practice continued by many Catholic and Orthodox believers to the present day.

How should we understand fasting? Foster (1998, 48) provides a simple definition: "Throughout Scripture fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes." In order to safeguard against the danger of using fasting as a manipulative tool to move God's hand, Scot McKnight (xx, 2009) provides a more nuanced description: "Fasting is the natural, inevitable response of a person

to a...sacred moment in life." In noting that fasting in the Bible is always our natural response to being in tune with what God is doing in this world, McKnight (xxi-xxii, 2009) lists a number of "sacred moments" which prompted people in the Bible to fast: death, sin, fear, threats, needs and sickness. While such fasting sometimes produced results (like life, forgiveness, safety, hope, answers and health), the guarantee of results is not the primary reason why people fasted.

Romara Dean Chatham (1987, 90) states the same truth bluntly: "No divine formula states, 'Fast and ask equals God's response."

Fasting should be understood as a holistic discipline, one which involves the entire human body. While some western Christians today view spirituality as involving only the human spirit, biblical spirituality is always embodied spirituality: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). As McKnight (2009, 11) writes, "Fasting is the body talking what the spirit yearns, what the soul longs for, and what the mind knows to be true."

The overarching motive for fasting is to help centre our life's longings in God, longings which God's Spirit graciously stirs in us. John Piper (1997, 14) sets the correct tone when he writes, "Christian fasting, at its root, is the hunger of a homesickness for God." When we fast in response to God's stirring, we bring our entire selves before God and discover the joy of a holistic relationship with God. When we align our desires with God's leading, and respond to God's guidance with our very bodies, we create space for God and open the deepest part of our lives to God's presence.

Additionally, while biblical fasting is never instrumental, God does answer prayer when people respond to the Spirit's prompting with prayer and fasting; God often freely chooses to bless those who humble themselves before him with gifts like guidance, healing and protection. Yet this humility should not be confused with sadness or melancholy. Joyce Ann Zimmerman offers up a helpful word when she suggests that fasting should be approached with the same spirit as feasting:

If fasting is to achieve its real purpose—to help us grow more spiritually—it must be embraced as a good, as much more than a pious discipline, and as something positive and desirable that we embrace wholeheartedly....For the committed Christian, fasting is a positive act encompassing, strengthening and supporting a Christian way of living. (Zimmerman 2010, 72-73)

While fasting always includes a deprivation of food, the accompanying hunger reminds us of our hunger for communion with God. While fasting often accompanies solemn and grievous moments ultimately in the end, as we regularly bring all of life before God, God will transform our sorrow into joy.

Spiritual Formation Methods

While this model has primarily been about my philosophy of spiritual formation, I do want to apply it in two practical ways which I consider most relevant in my present ministry context. First and foremost I will consider 'discipleship circles,' my vision of small groups of disciples intentionally gathered around Jesus to support and challenge one another as we learn from Jesus how to live. In a congregation consisting of two very different cultural groups (Western and African), coming together from two very different

denominational backgrounds (Mennonite and Pentecostal), it is imperative to meet together face-to-face to grow in unity, to learn from each other, and to build common understandings of what it means to follow Jesus together. Both sides of the congregation have some experience with and appreciation of small groups, although we have only just started to implement discipleship circles as under consideration here. Second, I will consider how to incorporate spiritual formation into the preaching/teaching ministry of the church, not as an optional add-on, but as something essential and integral to the very act of preaching and teaching.

Discipleship Circles

My vision of discipleship circles can scarcely be called original—it stems directly from the vision of Jesus. Even as Jesus' chosen method to grow the kingdom of God was to call a circle of disciples to follow him, to share his life with them, and to shape them for ministry, so too the Spirit invites disciples today to gather around our risen Lord, to learn from him and to participate together in his life as we follow him into reconciling mission. When it comes to spiritual formation through a team approach, Jesus again serves as our example.

Discipleship circles are deliberately centered on Jesus. He is the head of the church, and we as disciples acknowledge his Lordship as we encourage one another to be faithful to him. At each of our meetings we sit in a circle and place a candle in the centre to symbolize this truth. But we also need each other—we stand hand in hand in the circle around him, attached to him through attachment to each other, even as we experience Jesus in one another. In the circle of

disciples around Jesus we commit to be responsible for one another, at times giving and at times receiving care and counsel. Together we accept responsibility for the spiritual growth of the community and of one another, as we trust the Spirit of Jesus to be at work in and among us.

It requires a supportive and challenging environment to facilitate deep change. To walk together in the resurrection of Jesus we also need to walk together in the way of the cross—Jesus bids us to die in order to live, and we need the love and strength of Jesus present in community to embrace that adventure. The concept of small groups as circles of disciples committed to the way of Jesus incorporates the concern expressed by Chan, who found conventional small groups often lacking in the vital element of challenge:

Recent thinking about the church stresses the need for small groups. But most of these groups reinforce a "feel good" spirituality through group dynamics. They hardly challenge individuals to make deeper commitments to objective and absolute norms apart from themselves. Small group spirituality has come to mean no more than reorganizing the congregation into "cell groups" to make them serve the needs of individual members better. Most evangelical thinking, particularly in the area of church growth, has been along this line. (Chan 1998, 104)

The vision of discipleship circles helps to uphold the Anabaptist understanding of the Christian life precisely as a life of committed discipleship, lived out in mutually supportive community, as we nurture and challenge one another to grow both into Christlikeness and into our corporate identity as salt and light, for the sake of God's reconciling mission to restore shalom to all of creation.

Discipleship circles promote key aspects of spiritual formation. First, the intimacy of a smaller group provides the opportunity to create an atmosphere for

listening; spiritual formation requires paying careful attention to the initiative of God's Spirit in our everyday lives so we can respond accordingly. In discipleship circles, listening can be promoted through practices such as silent prayer, *lectio divina*, and the sharing of our ongoing life stories with one another. As we listen to each other's stories and engage God through Scripture and prayer, we offer one another the gift of mutual discernment.

Second, discipleship circles facilitate formation through providing space for the giving and receiving of counsel. As we share our lives with each other, and in particular those things which affect our walk with Jesus, we humbly look to one another, in a spirit of *Gelassenheit*, for wisdom to live faithfully. Corinne Ware (1997, 71-72) provides some helpful questions which group members can ask one another on a regular basis: "What has happened in your world recently that has made a difference in your spiritual life?"; "Where do you see God working in all this?"; "How is your life changing?" As we share our life journeys, we help each other follow Jesus by offering our own experiences, knowledge and assistance.

Third, discipleship circles support spiritual growth through accountability to mutually chosen or agreed-upon expectations. These expectations include group dynamics: regular attendance, confidentiality, and preparation for the group meetings. They may also extend to the means of spiritual formation considered in this paper, both outward practices and inward spiritual disciplines. Such accountability can only be sustained in a spirit of love. When we know that others in the group will not judge us but sincerely care about our progress, and

look forward to hear about how we are doing week by week, we will find the motivation we need to move forward together with Jesus.

Finally, as trust is built in the group, it is well worth exploring such mutual accountability through the development of a group Ordnung, or community rule of life. While the list of things to include in such an *Ordnung* are endless, and depends upon the will of the group, an Anabaptist *Ordnung* for discipleship circles should emphasize God's overarching purpose to reconcile all things in Christ, together with God's call upon the church to be a peacemaking community of reconciliation. It should be encouraged to include such practices as commitment to mutual aid both within the group, the congregation and in global partnerships; a commitment to reconcile differences with one another in a spirit of love; a commitment to discern God's will together through listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit; a willingness to submit to God and one another in the spirit of Gelassenheit; a commitment by each member to explore individual spiritual disciplines; and a community recognition that the body of Christ is called to sacrificial service, peacemaking and authentic witness for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Transformative Preaching and Teaching

In most Anabaptist congregations, the ministry of the Word is an expected and integral part both of the Sunday worship service and midweek meetings like small groups, even as much of the ministry of Jesus was characterized by preaching and teaching. Correspondingly, pastors and other teachers invest

significant amounts of time every week in preparation for preaching and teaching. For this reason it is vital to consider how the ministry of the Word relates to the ministry of spiritual formation. Sally Brown (1998, 29) properly situates preaching within the overall context of church ministry: "Preaching alone cannot be expected to transform the imagination and lifestyle of a congregation. Preaching must function as but one of a web of formative corporate and individual Christian practices that function together to shape the vision, habits, and lifestyle of Christians. But neither should preachers underestimate the formative potential of preaching."

To begin, sharing the Word of God is indispensable for birthing new believers: "Throughout the pages of Scripture, especially the New Testament, preaching was the primary means that God used to transform people from those who were under God's wrath to a people made new by his grace" (Shields 2008, 248). But preaching and teaching are also vital to promote the understanding of spiritual formation as part of the anticipated growth process following conversion. Willard (2010a, 60) advocates that "responsible leaders at all levels of Christian activity begin to exemplify and teach, in their official activities, spiritual formation in Christlikeness as something essential to the condition of 'being saved'—not as a *pre*condition but as a natural development." To facilitate spiritual formation, preachers and teachers must be clear and intentional about the purpose of their gifts—to make disciples. The goal of proclaiming the Word is not to entertain, but to shape followers of Jesus and their communities. Willard (2010a, 60) extends this thinking to church growth ministries, urging "that efforts

in evangelism and toward increasing 'church membership' be very purposively oriented toward bringing people to the point of regeneration and discipleship."

To further this goal ministers of the Word first need to pay careful attention to their own spiritual development. In dependence upon God's Spirit they need to make regular use of the means of grace—both Anabaptist practices and classical spiritual disciplines—in their own lives. For it is as they grow in Christlikeness that they are better able to communicate the new life that is pulsing within them. It is far better to be an experiential witness to the words proclaimed than a dispassionate lawyer reciting doctrinal facts. George Herbert (1652, 219) expresses this well—regarding preaching he gave this advice for how to stir one's congregation: "by dipping and seasoning all our words and sentences in our hearts before they come in our mouths, truly affecting and cordially expressing all that we say, so that the auditors may plainly receive that every word is heart deep."

At the same time preachers and teachers need to be serious students of the Word, for they need to be intimately familiar with truth, both intellectually and emotionally. It is truth which is communicated and commitment to the proclamation of truth requires sound exegesis and serious preparation. Preachers and teachers also need to be committed to study and proclaim the entirety of God's Word. Some genres of the Bible are readily suited to the proclamation of doctrinal truth which provides a necessary mental framework for understanding life with God, like the epistles; others speak more of relational truth which influences the heart, like poetry; while still others speak narrative truth which

enables us to situate ourselves in and enter more deeply into God's story, like the gospels. Above all ministers of the Word must keep the life, death, resurrection, ascension and current reign of Jesus always before others, as well as Jesus' gift of the indwelling, enabling Holy Spirit.

All preparation to preach and teach should be bathed in prayer, in humble acknowledgment that only God can ultimately transform lives. In prayer we ask the Holy Spirit for enlightenment to understand the text, and for inspiration to communicate it well. We pray for those who will hear the Word, that the Spirit would already be at work in their hearts and minds to assist them to receive it, and in their wills, to strengthen them to apply it. We pray that, in the very act of preaching or teaching, we remember that we speak as those who stand in the very presence of God. In the Anabaptist tradition, we also pray for and welcome voices other than the pastor to address members of the congregation, not jealously guarding our pulpits but trusting the Spirit to work through other gifted members of the body of Christ.

The content of our proclamation can be as varied as the content in the Bible itself, provided it is rooted in the soil of the reconciling mission of God in Jesus Christ, and our call to participate in it. It is wise occasionally both to teach on the practices and disciplines which support the life of discipleship, as well as to remind the members of their individual and corporate identity in Christ. As for teaching methodology, this can also be varied, but it is wise to bear in mind that Jesus frequently taught with stories and parables, and made use of many questions, in order to engage his listeners at a deeper level.

A particularly valuable method of storytelling for spiritual formation is to share aspects of our own life stories with church members, or to invite church members to share their testimonies with one another. As we do this we become ministers of Jesus the living Word, who is with and within us, and whose presence is discerned in the stories of our lives. We can share our stories in various contexts: in the worship service, in small groups, in committee meetings, or at informal gatherings. These stories can cover any aspect of our lives with God, including joys and sorrows, answered and unanswered prayers, and faithfulness and frustrations in our efforts to follow Jesus. As individuals consider their own stories, they discover God's presence and activity in their lives, which provides a rich source of identity, purpose and meaning, even as I discovered in the writing of my spiritual autobiography Orbit (chapter 2). As we share our stories with our faith communities, against the backdrop of the biblical story (God's metanarrative), it helps to unify the community as we learn to recognize that each of our stories is part of the bigger story. Our stories become sources of encouragement and challenge for one another. Further, as we consider our stories in light of God's Word, in which we encounter God's holiness, goodness and grace, we are better able to recognize and thus reframe any distortions in our understanding of both ourselves and of God, which improves our image both of God and of ourselves. There is also missional value in sharing our life stories with one another:

As my story intersects with your story as a part of his story, we become story keepers of God's story and offer, in community, his story to the world. Story is a catalyst tool of God, growing the individual and building

community so that they bring him glory and offer the visible presence of Christ to a watching, needy world. (Seidel 2008, 218)

Finally, in an age in which the ministry of the Word is often disparaged,

Brown provides motivation for pastors to persevere:

Perhaps nowhere else can the pastor offer spiritual guidance to so many. If we maintain a broad understanding of the church as ecology of Christian formation, and an understanding of preaching as one of the essential formative practices of the church, the preaching ministry will prove to have great formative power and potential....It continues to be a crucial means by which the Spirit of God transforms us into communities that bear the *imago Christii*, embodying the way of Jesus Christ and working for the redemption of all things. (Brown 1998, 30)

Final Words

There is no greater privilege than the call of Jesus to follow him and participate in his mission to reconcile all things. This is the greatest adventure life has to offer, accompanied by the greatest gift—the gift of life with God, which includes the indescribable gift of participating in the very life of the Triune God.

The journey of spiritual formation is initiated by God, accompanied by God, and completed by God. As we engage this journey with the community of God's people, we discover grace behind us, grace with and within us, and grace before us. In light of the empowering grace of God's Spirit we grow into Christlikeness; so too do our congregations grow in love and unity and into the reconciling communities in which God delights to dwell. As we love our neighbours, and love our enemies, we love God and discover God in the faces of others. As we love one another in the body of Christ, we love Jesus and discover Jesus in the faces of our sisters and brothers.

Therefore, we do not need to be afraid to answer Christ's call. Jesus is our constant traveling companion, and we are never alone. The journey will at times be difficult, and we will encounter major challenges on the way. I for one would not want it any other way—the way of personal ease and comfort and selfish pursuit is boring and ultimately deforms us by making us less and less into the awesome beings God has created us to be, while the way of the cross shapes us into holy and beautiful people and communities, those who learn the joy of loving like Jesus loves.

Since all is of grace, there is no more important intentional element of spiritual formation than abandoning ourselves to our Father's goodness in childlike trust as we follow Jesus. This response of faith includes our participation in the means of grace, both outward practices and inward disciplines. We do not put our faith in our ability to sustain these means; we simply bring ourselves into God's presence, pray for strength and seek to obey God's will, and humbly wait for the Holy Spirit to transform us. God will complete this work, because God has promised to do so. So let us journey with joy, even as we await the final transformation on the great and coming resurrection morning: "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

CHAPTER IV:

ACTION RESEARCH INTO MUTUALLY

ACCOUNTABLE DISCIPLESHIP

This research project examined how mutual accountability to a cooperatively drawn up covenant influenced discipleship formation for members of the discipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church. In an age of individualism, disciples may find themselves following Jesus alone yet, as Jesus' calling of the twelve disciples indicates, the journey of discipleship is intended to be a corporate one. There is therefore a need to find ways to support one another on the common journey. The methodological approach for this study was participatory action research. At each bi-weekly meeting of the discipleship circle members reported on their efforts to keep the covenant. Further data were generated through a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire and focus group. Key research findings indicate the following: the members perceived that their intention to follow Jesus was strengthened; the members perceived that they became more aware of their identity as disciples; and the members perceived that they grew modestly in the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship. The members also acknowledged they have room to improve in the area of challenging one another.

Introduction

In our individualistic times, the journey of discipleship can feel more like a solo expedition than a corporate adventure. While the life of following Jesus is intended to be a group pilgrimage, made in the company of dedicated traveling companions, many disciples walk alone. In his book on Anabaptist discipleship David Augsburger (2006, 64) points out the problem: "Contemporary spirituality has become an individual quest that must be pursued outside community. No longer is each necessary to the other." If we walk alone, we bypass the unique grace God extends to us through the presence of Jesus in and among our sisters and brothers in Christ.

In the acknowledgment that God has called us to share the journey of discipleship together, Holyrood Mennonite Church developed discipleship circles in September 2015 (small groups with a discipleship focus which continue to meet bi-weekly), in order to provide a context for members both to study what it means to be followers of Jesus, and to share the questions, struggles, joys and concerns of our daily discipleship with one another. The journey of discipleship is demanding, and disciples need one another to engage it:

Companionship in the pilgrim people of God is the essence of what it means to be a Christian disciple. We are called to the journey of faith in God, and we are blessed to have fellow travellers. These are not simply people going the same way, on a parallel path, each following Jesus. We are given to and for each other to be channels of grace and agents of formation for one another. (Walton 2014, 156)

The intended purpose of this research project was, therefore, to examine in what ways mutual accountability to a mutually drawn up covenant would help the

members of the discipleship circle to grow as disciples. While it was anticipated that the members would experience some growth as a result of this intervention, there was no *a priori* expectation of what that growth would look like. Rather, the objective was for the members to engage in the research, examine the data together, and then indicate their perception of what growth actually happened. As the members shared their stories of covenant keeping at the bi-weekly discipleship circle meetings, and analysed these data (gathered through participant observation), together with the data generated by the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires and focus groups, they perceived that growth had indeed occurred.

For the purposes of this research it is necessary to define the term discipleship. While in some church circles discipleship refers to the initial training given to new believers, Anabaptists understand discipleship as the lifelong commitment to follow Jesus, which includes faithfulness to the vows made at baptism. The Mennonite *Minister's Manual*, used at Holyrood Mennonite Church, asks baptismal candidates the following five series of questions:

Do you renounce the evil powers of this world and turn to Jesus Christ as your savior? Do you put your trust in his grace and love and promise to obey him as your Lord?

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; in Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Lord; and in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life?

Do you accept the Word of God as guide and authority for your life? Are you willing to give and receive counsel in the congregation? Are you ready to participate in the mission of the church? (Rempel 1998, 48)

These commitments form a framework for the Anabaptist understanding of discipleship. Readers are further referred to my model of spiritual formation (chapter 3), in which I consider in more detail the specifics of discipleship in the section titled "Anabaptist Practices." There I enlarge upon discipleship as obeying Jesus and imitating his life, as taking up the cross and suffering with Jesus, and as surrendering to God's will. These commitments are lived out in the mutually supportive community of disciples, the body of Christ, the church, which is committed to engaging in God's reconciling mission.

As the pastor of Holyrood Mennonite Church, I received permission to do the research for this project from the Board of Elders, to whom I am directly accountable. Two members of the Board of Elders were also participants in the research. This research project was also approved by the Tyndale Research Ethics Board in September, 2017.

Context

As a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale Seminary, I facilitated this action research project at Holyrood Mennonite Church. The project was conducted with the members of the discipleship circle at Holyrood, a merger of the two original discipleship circles which had met separately the previous year. While I facilitated the research, I also participated as a fellow member of the circle. I am well familiar with all of the participants, as they are with me; our lengthy relationship has helped to establish trust between us.

As a Mennonite church, Holyrood holds to the central tenets of Anabaptism. In stating three core values, Palmer Becker (2010, 2) summarizes well what it means to be an Anabaptist Christian: Jesus is the centre of our faith; community is the centre of our lives; and reconciliation is the centre of our work. As a church we desire to follow Jesus together in the journey of reconciliation.

Holyrood Mennonite Church is located in Edmonton, the capital city of the province of Alberta, Canada. In recent decades Edmonton experienced significant and sustained economic growth, which has attracted a large immigrant population. Holyrood itself has benefited from this immigration—about one third of the members come from five different West African countries, with the majority of these coming from Liberia. Holyrood has done a good job integrating and sharing power and leadership between our two primary cultures (Caucasian and African): our leadership teams, music teams, and discipleship circles, as well as the visible leadership at our Sunday morning worship services, are represented by members of both cultures. This represents a deliberate commitment from Holyrood as a Mennonite church, in keeping with the strong Mennonite tradition of valuing justice and reconciliation.

The first year's experience of the discipleship circles provides another important contextual piece for the research. The circles were formed to help fulfill Holyrood's vision statement: "Training apprentices of Jesus to share God's abundant hospitality with people of all ages and cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Ladd 2008, 10). The circles provided a critical context for such discipleship training to take place. Furthermore, the various elements of the

meeting, as outlined below, contributed to the development of an atmosphere of trust and a willingness to be more vulnerable with fellow members. Such trust and vulnerability has helped to form the foundation upon which the risk of being mutually accountable to one another can be built.

Each of the first-year bi-weekly meetings began with the members seated in a circle in the Holyrood church basement, around a lit candle representing Jesus, with the reminder that Jesus is our centre, and we are his followers. We then proceeded to share stories from our lives related to that evening's Bible study, which for the entire first year came from the Sermon on the Mount. During the study time we reflected together on what the Scriptures taught about following Jesus. Afterwards a series of discernment questions were asked: Since we last met, where have you seen Jesus at work? What have you heard from Jesus? Space was also provided to help one another discern how we should respond, as disciples, to everyday situations we encounter. The meetings typically closed with the members praying for one another.

The first year of the discipleship circles ended in June 2016, at which time the members expressed interest in conducting research into the question of mutual accountability (in anticipation of my DMin research project), out of a desire to make support for one another more concrete. This is also in keeping with the baptismal vow "to give and receive counsel in the congregation." In September 2016, the members of the discipleship circles decided to merge into one group for the year, as there were too few members in one of the groups to sustain it. This resulted in an initial group of fourteen participants who agreed to engage in the

research together. The participants drew up a 'discipleship circle covenant' to which all agreed to be mutually accountable. A full copy of the covenant is found in appendix 1. The covenant contained three common or group items to which all members agreed to be accountable: to have an intentional time of prayer daily, to engage the Bible daily and to witness to Jesus' love daily, whether through words of encouragement, acts of service or direct evangelism. The covenant also required each participant to include three personalized items to be accountable for, in the hope that these would further help the participants to grow as followers of Jesus, in areas of their discernment and choosing. Each individual's personal covenant items can be found in table 1, which is included in the "Methods and Methodology" section of this report.

Just as the research project began, two young adults from Germany arrived at Holyrood to volunteer for a year with church related ministries. Each expressed a desire to join the discipleship circle, and they were warmly accepted, resulting in a group of sixteen participants. While the group was larger than I had hoped for research purposes, I reminded myself that I was first and foremost a pastor, and the discipleship circle was first and foremost an ongoing church ministry to which all were welcome.

Before we began to keep each other accountable to the covenant, we discussed two potential dangers which could derail our efforts, namely legalism and judgmentalism. We did not want our covenant keeping to become legalistic, nor did we want our mutual accountability to turn into an occasion for judging

one another. We acknowledged that the best way to guard against these dangers was simply to remain aware of them.

Models

The purpose of this section is to describe how the model outlining my understanding of spiritual formation (see chapter 3), as well as additional relevant literature, informed the way I conducted this research project. To begin, this research project flowed directly from my model of spiritual formation, in which I examined how Anabaptist spirituality is a concrete, practiced life of following Jesus together in community, as we engage in God's missional purposes. The current research was an effort to examine if mutual accountability in a circle of disciples can help to support this vision. In figure 3 of my model (chapter 3, p. 129), I outlined my understanding of the stages of the spiritual formation process. Mutual accountability represents one corporate way to engage stage five in that process (faith as cooperation with God); it represents our effort as a group to participate in the strengthening grace which God offers to us, in the hope that through it we will grow as followers of Jesus.

Background from Theology, Scripture and History

The theological framework for this research is found in the interlocking relationship between the biblical doctrines of discipleship and mutual accountability. The overarching biblical vision to support the life of discipleship is Jesus' repeated call to "Follow me" (e.g. Matthew 4:19). Rather than envisioning discipleship as a solo calling, Jesus himself provides us with the

model of establishing a circle of disciples to journey together: "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him" (Mark 3:14). The twelve disciples traveled with Jesus wherever he went, and Jesus mentored them on the way, teaching them through both word and example.

Krallmann expresses well the advantages of Jesus' chosen approach:

Jesus opted for a team setting. This decision brought certain group dynamics to the fore which he took advantage of. A team milieu provides a sense of belonging and security, facilitates mutual encouragement, stimulation and challenge. It creates a favourable atmosphere for relational bonding and accountability. Within a circle of like-minded persons it is easier to keep vision alive, maintain motivation and commitment, smooth away character edges and compensate one another's weaknesses. Group backing enhances performance, producing better results through cooperation than would be achievable through solitary endeavor (cf. Eccl. 4:9-12, Lev. 26:8). (Krallmann 1992, 58)

Even as Jesus worked with a team, so too Jesus anticipated that his disciples would adopt his partnership model as they carried on his mission.

Furthermore, Jesus stressed that we are accountable for the way we live. In the first place we are accountable to God, from stewardship of our gifts (Matthew 25:14-30) to guarding our speech (Matthew 12:36). Jesus further reinforced accountability by gathering his followers, after he had sent them out to practice what they were learning, for times of reporting and debriefing (cf. Luke 10:1-24).

Jesus not only highlighted accountability to God, he also taught that we are accountable to one another. This is found pre-eminently in Matthew 18:15-18 ("If another member of the church sins against you…"), in which Jesus instructed his disciples that they were responsible for one another's behaviour. Among

Anabaptists this text came to be known as 'the rule of Christ'; the early

Anabaptists used this rule to help one another remain faithful to their baptismal vows. Jesus provided similar teaching in Matthew 5:23-24 and Matthew 7:3-5.

The teaching of Jesus can be summarized like this: as disciples we are responsible for one another and are therefore to keep each other accountable.

Mutual accountability is further found throughout the New Testament epistles, most of which were addressed to small groups of believers who met in house churches. The apostle Paul, for example, instructed Christians to help one another if they fell into sin: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). This is but one of dozens of 'one-another' texts in the New Testament. Other examples include "live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16); "forgive one another" (Colossians 3:13); "encourage one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11); "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24); "pray for one another" (James 5:16); "love one another" (1 John 3:11).

There is also abundant historical precedence for mutually accountable discipleship; a brief and very incomplete survey of church history must suffice. A significant development during the fourth century was the settlement of the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the Egyptian wilderness and other remote areas to escape worldly entanglements and seek God in silence (King 2001, 17). They sought simplicity in the effort to renew their faith, yet in spite of their intentional pursuit of solitude it is noteworthy that they began to choose to live in close proximity to one another. According to Corinne Ware (1997, 12), "Their gift to us was their

understanding of the value of individual inner perception and of shared experience. In their writings they remind their successors that even the solitary among us need from others accountability and companionship."

The desert phenomenon gave birth to the monastic movement as these individuals increasingly sensed the need for corporate spiritual life and guidance. Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-547) established a 'rule of life' (which has become known as the Benedictine Rule) to provide a framework to govern the lives of those monks who chose to live together. Still in use today, it provides a daily pattern of prayer, study, work and community (Ware 1997, 77). In a similar way, other monastic movements have been guided by their own rules.

An intriguing medieval movement of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries was the rise of the Beguines, "laywomen who lived an ideal of Christian spirituality in self-sufficient communities in different parts of Europe" (King 2001, 88-89). The Beguines dedicated their lives to God through prayer, worship and engaging in good deeds, particularly caring for the poor and the sick. They chose not to join a religious order or live the cloistered life under the authority of a monastery, preferring to be free to move about and to support themselves through activities like weaving, embroidering and teaching. While the Beguines did not take formal religious vows, each 'beguinage' (as their communities came to be called) developed its own rule (King 2001, 90). Regarding mutual accountability, the Beguines thus represent an interesting movement between monastic and lay life. According to James Harpur (2005, 84-85), "The attraction

of the Beguines...was that they answered the need of women who wanted to lead mutually supportive spiritual lives but did not want to join an order."

This research project was pre-eminently based on two particular historical models, both of which are non-monastic in nature. Of inspirational relevance is the Anabaptist movement, which arose out of the Protestant reformation. The early Anabaptists did not think that the ongoing reform efforts were leading to a genuinely transformed life:

The Anabaptists were concerned most of all about "a true Christian life," that is, a life patterned after the teaching and example of Christ. The Reformers, they believed, whatever their profession may have been, did not secure among the people true repentance, regeneration and Christian living as a result of their preaching. The Reformation emphasis on faith was good but inadequate, for without newness of life, they held, faith is hypocritical. (Bender 1957, 40)

The Anabaptists engaged in mutual accountability to help facilitate this desired transformation. As noted in my model of spiritual formation, the Anabaptists practiced accountability through a set of regulations governing community life known as an *Ordnung*: "The purpose of the *Ordnung* (was) not only to provide a list of individually acceptable or proscribed ethical behaviors but to structure a whole way of life, lived according to God's will, as expressed in the gospels. The *Ordnung* reflects God's order as opposed to the order of the world" (Cronk 1989).

The particular form of mutual accountability under consideration in this research project (accountability in small groups rather than in the local body of Christ as a whole) also has close affinity to John Wesley's covenant discipleship groups through his 'class meetings.' Wesley (1703-1791), an Anglican minister and theologian, organized disciples into small groups under the leadership of a

class leader, who was in regular touch with each member. Each class met weekly to study, pray, confess their sins to one another, and consider how to stir each other up to love and good works. The intent was to help one another become better followers of Jesus. As Walton (2014, 136) notes, these groups of mutually accountable disciples became a significant means of transformation. The early Anabaptist movement grew quickly (Bender 1957, 31), as did the Methodist (Wesleyan) movement, growing from some 19,000 Methodist societies in 1766 to some 53,000 societies in 1791 (Watson 2002, 56), a testimony to the potential of small groups which are not afraid to challenge their members to be sources of both attraction and formation.

Research Resources

The core texts used to support this research can be divided into two groups: those which provided vital background to the spirituality, theology and practice of discipleship, and those which supplied the framework for the research design and implementation of the project. Regarding the former, a good overarching introduction to Anabaptist spirituality is Arnold Snyder's *Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition* (Snyder 2004). Snyder considers, through the lens of historical perspective, key Anabaptist understandings of community, spiritual disciplines and discipleship. In *Dissident Discipleship*, David Augsburger (2006) advocates for a practiced, concrete spirituality in which lives are formed in the midst of daily life, and in which Jesus becomes known as he is followed in life. He presents the disciple's path as a

comprehensive journey of obedience, in a community of fellow disciples, which is lived out amidst all of life's relationships: with God, with others, and with self.

An excellent resource for the consideration of mutual accountability in small groups is David Watson's *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Watson 2002). Written from a Methodist perspective, Watson provides a handbook for those interested in keeping each other accountable to a discipleship covenant. Notable suggestions which helped shape the approach to accountability at Holyrood are found in chapters on how to form covenant discipleship groups (chapter 6), how to write up a discipleship covenant (chapter 7), and how to organize the group meeting (chapter 8).

Two key research texts provided the direction to guide the shape of this project: Tim Sensing's *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Sensing 2011) and Ernest Stringer's *Action Research* (Stringer 2014). Sensing lays out the purpose, process and components for conducting a Doctor of Ministry project, while Stringer supplies comprehensive information both to understand and to engage in action research, which is the methodological approach for this study. In keeping with the tenets of action research, this project was a collective endeavour with future action always in sight: the design of the discipleship covenant, the research implementation, and the analysis and interpretation of the data were all done collaboratively by the members of the discipleship circle, with the goal of providing direction for future ministry. Sensing and Stringer also give practical advice for how to gather data. Based on chapters 4-6 in Sensing, and 4-5 in Stringer, the three data gathering

tools (questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation) were chosen and designed.

The book *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research*Approach for Faith Communities, by Carl Savage and William Presnell (2008), provided the theory necessary to understand the story of the members of the discipleship circle to keep each other accountable to a common covenant.

Chapter 3 was helpful in its guidance for how to evoke and learn from the story of the faith community, while chapter 5 gave useful teaching on how to evaluate narrative data.

Finally, the following suggestions were incorporated from Mary Melrose's (2001) article ("Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You?") to improve the thoroughness of the research: maintaining constancy in the research group, negotiating appropriate methods to collect the data, triangulating the data, checking the data gathered with the members of the group, interpreting the data together as those intimately familiar with the setting, and confirming the final report with the participants.

Methodology and Methods

This section includes a description and rationale for the approach adopted to accomplish this project. It begins with a more specific depiction of the research setting and the participants who engaged the research, which is followed by an explanation of the limits and boundaries of the project. The methodological approach (participatory action research) is summarized, together with a discussion

of the research tools (questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation) used to gather the data. A timetable is provided to outline the specific dates and actions of the various phases of the project, while the section concludes with a consideration of ethics in ministry based research.

Field

This project occurred at Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton,
Alberta, from mid-September 2016 to the end of January 2017. The intervention
phase lasted eleven weeks, from September 25 to December 11. While the preintervention focus group for the study took place in the church basement, all
subsequent group gatherings (the accountability meetings, the post-intervention
focus group and the meetings to analyse and interpret the data) took place in the
living room of the church parsonage, located on the church property immediately
beside the church building, from 7-9 PM on Sunday evenings. The participants
found this meeting place more intimate and therefore more conducive to the
sharing required for mutual accountability. Three members of the discipleship
circle resided in the parsonage: the two young adult volunteers from Germany and
a Canadian Ph.D. student.

Of the sixteen members of the discipleship circle, in addition to the two from Germany, two others do not attend Holyrood Mennonite Church, but attend other Mennonite churches in Edmonton. The participants included three married couples, three other married individuals whose spouses did not participate, a widow, and six singles. Only two African members were able to participate in the

Table 1. Participant Information¹

NT	A	A	D 1 C It
Name	Age	Area of	Personal Covenant Items
(Pseudonym)	40.50	Origin	D 7 12 1 1
Evelyn (spouse	40-50	North	Pray Lord's prayer daily; spend one
of Norm)		America	hour/week simplifying possessions; seek to
27	7 0.60	NT 1	build up son every day
Norm (spouse	50-60	North	Keep daily prayer journal; pray at midday and
of Evelyn)		America	compline with online Celtic community;
G 1 /	60 = 0	N	spend one hour/week simplifying possessions
Sandra (spouse	60-70	North	Journal daily; be open daily to be taught by
of Jim)	40 =0	America	God; use God's resources wisely
Jim (spouse of	60-70	North	Learn what brings joy; get physical exercise
Sandra)		America	3x/week; begin each day with silence
Brenda (spouse	60-70	Europe	Keep gratitude list; memorize Scripture
of Terry)			weekly; take regular walks
Terry (spouse	60-70	North	Journal regularly; look for acts of the Holy
of Brenda)		America	Spirit in daily life; rise at a set time daily
Frank (single)	40-50	West	Learn one hymn/week; look for something
		Africa	positive in others every day; be discerning
			about the weaknesses of others
Albert (single)	30-40	North	Say something unambiguously positive about
		America	one person/week; pray hourly during work
			day; keep weekly gratitude list
Nancy (single)	50-60	North	Recognize beauty daily; be more humble and
		America	mindful of others; live more simply
Alice (married)	60-70	North	Reflect or journal on thanksgiving daily; read
		America	material that challenges my faith; enjoy God's
			creation regularly
Sarah (married)	50-60	North	Pray to surrender to God's will daily; watch
		America	for God and listen for his promptings daily;
			take better care of health and creative gifts
Mary (single)	30-40	North	Practice daily achieving freedom through self-
		America	discipline; practice daily simplicity, service or
			submission; choose grace when tempted by
			legalism
Mark (married)	40-50	North	Journal daily; pray with my wife daily; meet
		America	with a non-believer each week
Rachel (widow)	40-50	West	Pray for my home country; pray for love
		Africa	among ourselves in the church; fast
			once/month
Chloe (single)	Under	Europe	Say positive things about others; be a better
_	30		listener; meditate for a set period of time daily
Steve (single)	Under	Europe	Write down one experience of God daily;
	30	_	keep a prayer journal; give thanks to God
			daily

¹ Note to table: Even with the use of pseudonyms it is possible, based on the

research. All were invited but many of the African members at Holyrood have to work evenings, and were therefore unable to attend. Half of the participants were under the age of fifty, and half of the participants were over fifty. Table 1 names the participants (using pseudonyms), supplies basic demographic data, and lists each participant's three personalized covenant commitments.

Scope

The scope of the research was limited to exploring in what ways mutual accountability to a mutually drawn up covenant would help the members of the discipleship circle to grow as disciples. A significant constraining factor in the research was the fact that this was merely an eleven-week intervention, while the journey of discipleship formation is a lifelong endeavour; therefore the expectation was not for major growth, but to seek to discern incremental increase. From the outset, the picture I presented to the group was to compare potential growth from the intervention to the progress made by hiking for just a few minutes toward the summit of a very tall mountain: there would still be a long way to go, but it would hopefully be evident that the slope of the land had changed, and that we were at a somewhat higher altitude than when we started. Furthermore, measuring growth was limited to qualitative and not quantitative

demographic data in this table, for members of the Holyrood congregation to identify the participants in this study. All of the participants are aware of this, and I have checked the final report with them. All have granted permission to publish this paper, with the belief that there is no risk of harm in being identified.

means, based on the members of the discipleship circle analyzing and interpreting the data together, to discern what, if any, growth was indicated.

The primary delimiting boundary of the research was to restrict measurement to the impact of mutual accountability to the covenant as a whole, rather than assess the impact of each of the individual items in the covenant, whether group or personal items. While the data generated in this research project could perhaps speak to the efficacy of the individual items in the covenant, both constraints of time and purpose limited the analysis and interpretation of data to the impact of mutual accountability.

Methodology

The overarching methodological approach for this study was that of participatory action research. Stringer (2014, 8) defines action research as "a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems." With participatory action research, communities work together to address a specific challenge which they face—the very act of participating together in the research itself serves as a catalyst toward the desired change: "Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve those problems" (Patton 2002, 221).

This made action research particularly appropriate for this study, as the members of the discipleship circle worked together to discern how we could help

each other follow Jesus on our journey of discipleship. Action research is also very appropriate in an Anabaptist context, as Anabaptists stress that discernment is a basic community activity, an ongoing vocation which the church engages in together.

The journey of discipleship is best told through stories, as the four gospels demonstrate. Many narratives were told and collected during this research intervention, particularly at the accountability session meetings, which served to enhance the methodology of participatory action research. We tell stories in order to understand our lives: "Who we are, what we think and how we act are all shaped by the many large and small stories that make up the discourse embedded in our multi-sensory social experience" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 25). As Sensing (2011, 157-158) writes, "Narrative is primarily a vehicle for understanding and explaining lived experiences....The purpose of narrative research is to examine how participants impose order on their lived experiences thus making sense of the events, thoughts, and actions in their lives."

A great value of stories is that they join us to our everyday reality: "As individuals are telling their stories, they are not isolated and independent of their context....Narratives, therefore, capture both the individual and the context" (Moen 2006, 4). Postmodern scholarship has encouraged the exploration of knowledge beyond the traditional empirical or historic approaches, new methods in which "one seeks meaning and wholeness in community and relationships" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 39). In contrast to the scientific method, which deals primarily with 'facts' or 'truth,' narrative research methods seek 'discernment' in

a social context: "The discoveries come in learning new interpretations, not necessarily new knowledge" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 39). The narrative quest is not to produce hard facts that support scientific theory, but social wisdom which has consequences for the life of a particular community in a particular setting: "one actively engages the story to sense its fit for 'a healthy lifestyle' or 'a preferred future'" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 44).

Methods

Three tools were used to collect the data for this research: questionnaires, focus groups and participant observation. Through this triangulation of data the voices of all participants were heard multiple times throughout the study, as is suitable for participatory action research. The triangulation also provided a way to cross-check the data and enable a "thicker interpretation," thus helping to validate the results (Sensing 2011, 72).

Both the questionnaires and the focus groups were utilized pre- and post-intervention, using the identical questions each time. The questions posed in them were based on advice from Sensing (2011, 86-90) and Stringer (2014, 105-110), who provide instructions for how to ask questions suitable for qualitative research, questions that are neutral and non-leading. Both pre-and post-intervention, the participants filled out the questionnaire before joining together for the focus group discussion, in order to enable the provision of answers for the questionnaire that were not unduly influenced by listening to the stories of others.

The questionnaire (see appendix 2) contained just one open-ended question, designed to encourage the participants to consider their current practice of discipleship: "How do you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus in your everyday life?" Both this question and the questions posed during the focus group sessions assume that the participants do indeed seek to express their discipleship in their daily lives. This is a safe assumption in our context as the participants had already belonged to the discipleship circle for a year, during which we regularly talked about discipleship as following Jesus in our ordinary lives, and shared stories of our efforts to do so. The questionnaires were not given to the two young adults from Germany, as they did not join the discipleship circle until the first focus group session, by which time the questionnaires were already due.

The pre-intervention questionnaire was distributed to the members of the discipleship circle on September 11, 2016, with the request that participants email me their reply (by attaching a Word document, if possible) by September 25, 2016. The only other instruction given the participants was with regard to the length of their answer—the participants were told their reply could be up to one page, single-spaced, using normal font (Times New Roman, 12-point). The post-intervention questionnaire was distributed on December 11, 2016, with the request that it be returned by January 8, 2017, with the same instructions. One member of the group preferred that I ask her the question in person, which I did both pre- and post-intervention, while writing down her response verbatim.

The focus groups were used in a parallel way to the questionnaires, to elicit responses both before and after the intervention, with five questions being posed (see appendix 3). The advantage of focus groups is that they allow participants to inspire and learn from one another: "The synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if the group had been interviewed separately" (Sensing 2011, 120). Both Sensing (2011, 120-124) and Stringer (2014, 111-113) provide guidelines for how to run effective focus groups. Useful recommendations which I followed include: providing ground rules for the conversation at the beginning of the meeting (see appendix 4); having a separate facilitator for the discussion (which was me), and a note-taker, someone I trained using the protocol in appendix 5 (Evelyn was the recorder for the first focus group, and Mary for the second), and establishing clearly defined roles for each; having the recorder convert the notes taken to an expanded form, in conjunction with the facilitator, as soon as possible after the meeting; ensuring that each participant had ample opportunity to share; and being prepared to manage issues that frequently arise in focus groups.

The format of the focus group was intended to be a "semi-structured interview" (Sensing 2011, 107), which makes use of set questions with the freedom to probe more deeply with spontaneous questions as need arises. But in reality the large size of the group (fifteen members participated in the pre-intervention focus group, and twelve in the post-intervention focus group), combined with the intention to allow all members the opportunity to answer each of the five pre-set questions, left no time for follow-up questions. As it was, each

focus group meeting lasted the full time allotment of two hours. The first focus group took place in the church basement on September 25, 2016, from 7-9 PM, while the second was conducted in the living room of the church parsonage on January 8, 2017, from 7-9 PM.

The reason why the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires and focus groups were chosen as data-collecting tools is three-fold. First, both the questionnaires and the focus groups provided a way to hear directly from the participants themselves regarding their practice of discipleship. Second, the use of these tools pre-intervention was a way to establish a baseline of the group's life of discipleship at the outset of the research: the questionnaire provided individual data for this, while the focus group supplied group data. Third, the use of the tools post-intervention was to assess if there were any changes in experiences or stories told, in order to help discern the influence of mutual accountability on the journey of discipleship.

The third data-gathering tool used for this project was participant observation, employed during the bi-weekly discipleship group meetings, when the members shared stories and interacted with one another over their efforts to keep the discipleship covenant. The task of observing the participants was shared between the recorder, who took the notes, and I, as the facilitator of the meetings. The field notes were reviewed, and expanded as necessary, by both the recorder and I in the first day or two following each meeting. Evelyn recorded the notes at the first meeting, while Mary recorded notes in the subsequent meetings, as she

was a better typist; each was provided the instructions described in the protocol found in appendix 6.

Sensing (2011, 93) gives the reason why I chose to employ participant observation for this research: "By observing the interactions of the participants in the study, the researcher can understand more about their relationships, ideas, norms, habits, and practices" (Sensing 2011, 93). Observations were recorded as 'field notes': "Notes give the advantage of capturing what is going on in a given setting at a specific moment. Field notes work because implications for theory only become visible as one observes and records, over time, particular practices of ministry" (Sensing 2011, 182). Field notes were deemed to be sufficient, rather than a transcribed audio recording, as the preferred data was not to be found in exact recall or the precise order of words spoken, but in the underlying themes and experiences of the participants.

Sensing (2011, 93-102) and Stringer (2014, 113-115) supply information on what elements to observe in the setting. In reflecting on their advice, the data documented during the taking of field notes in this study included the stories of people's experiences at keeping the covenant, their thoughts and feelings about these experiences, as well as their interactions with one another as these stories were told.

During each of the five accountability meetings, the members of the discipleship circle gathered around a lit candle, representing the presence of Jesus. After opening in prayer, the members read a discipleship liturgy written by Albert (appendix 7). Following this I gave a brief devotion, as the time required for the

mutual accountability sharing did not permit time for a full Bible study. The bulk of the time was then devoted to covenant reporting and interacting. A course correction took place after the first meeting, in which each member gave account for their progress on all six items in the covenant (the three group items, and the three personalized items). This took a long time, and allowed the participants almost no opportunity to interact with one another. At the end of the meeting, the participants agreed that this approach made the meeting too long and too boring, and it was decided that at subsequent meetings each participant would share one highlight and one difficulty related to covenant keeping, while also recording on a chart how they had fared with the six covenant items (see appendix 8). This new approach, which provided much more time for group interaction, was felt by the group to be adequate, and continued for the duration of the intervention.

According to the principles of action research, the data generated throughout the study were analysed and interpreted together by all of the members of the discipleship circle. But before the group engaged the data I first coded it, as the research facilitator, a process of looking for common themes in the data based on the participants' own perceptions and experiences. Then I presented the coded data to the group by organizing it in tables. The group suggested a few minor adjustments to the codes in the tables, which were incorporated.

Altogether there were nine sets of data to code: the two questionnaires, the two focus groups, and the five accountability meetings. I read through each set of data multiple times to familiarize myself with it before attempting to code it. All coding is in itself an act of interpretation, so in order to minimize my own

potential bias as much as possible my primary approach to code the data was to apply what Stringer refers to as the 'verbatim principle':

To minimize the propensity to conceptualize events through their own interpretive lenses, researchers should, whenever possible, apply the *verbatim principle*, using terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants themselves. By doing so they are more likely to catch the meanings inherent in people's experience. (Stringer 2014, 140)

As the coding for the first questionnaire and focus group began, it soon became apparent that a natural way to begin coding the data was to provide codes that represented an answer to the various questions asked, particularly as most participants answered the questions in a rather rote way, especially with the questionnaires. But the codes for the participants' answers to the various questions posed were not pre-determined: they were derived inductively, by analysing each participant's responses, and providing a code that closely mirrored their own words. These codes were then examined for similarities between responses, and gathered into larger groupings, which are represented in the codes displayed in the tables in the 'Findings' section of this report (see tables 3-14). These codes themselves were gathered into still larger categories, represented by the column headings in the tables.

The codes used for the data generated by participant observation were all derived inductively, again beginning with codes that closely reflected the participants' own words, which were subsequently gathered into larger categories based on commonalities. After sifting through the data multiple times, I determined that a useful way to envision it was to group these categories of codes into six 'lenses' through which to look upon and analyse what occurred as the

members of the discipleship circle reported on their efforts to keep the covenant (see table 15).

All of the participants engaged the coded data together to seek to find meaning in it, based upon two steps proposed by Savage and Presnell (2008, 124): observing change and discerning transformation. Regarding the observation of change they pose a simple question: "Has there been a change in activity, habits, stories told, etc.?" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 124). Regarding transformation they advocate that, in narrative research, transformation is discerned and not measured: "We may ask: What is the Spirit doing? What is emerging? What has been called forth?" (Savage and Presnell 2008, 125). Both sets of questions were used by the participants to help analyse and interpret our stories.

The act of communal discernment itself is a process, sometimes with no clear end point other than remaining in conversation. It is a matter of sifting through possibilities and testing interpretations. The apostle Paul encouraged the disciples in Rome "to test and approve what God's will is" (Romans 12:2). At Holyrood Mennonite Church we have no singular decision-making process, but we strive for consensus. With regard to this research project, some key discernment questions were asked to test our interpretation: Do our stories validate it? Is it in keeping with the arc of Scripture? Are there other alternatives? In the end there was general consensus regarding our research findings, together with the acknowledgment that a longer period of research, or another action-research cycle, would deepen and provide more nuance to our interpretations.

Table 2. Phases and Timetable

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
	Exploration of project interest	June 2016	Werner	Discipleship circle discussion
	Writing up of mutual covenant	Sept. 2016	All participants	Discipleship circle discussion
	Obtain signed consent letters	Sept. 4-	Werner and participants	Passed out by Werner and returned by hand to him
	Hand out questionnaire 1	Sept. 11	Werner	Distributed at discipleship circle
	Fill out and return questionnaire 1	Sept. 11- 25	Participants	Participants filled out and emailed reply to Werner; Werner interviewed one member in person
	Conduct focus group 1	Sept. 25	Werner, recorder, participants	Werner facilitated, and trained recorder who took notes
Intervention	Accountability Meetings 1-5	Oct. 16, 30, Nov. 13, 27, Dec. 11	All participants	Werner facilitated, and trained recorder who took field notes. All recorded data reviewed within 2 days for accuracy
	Hand out questionnaire 2	Dec. 11	Werner	Distributed at discipleship circle
	Fill out and return questionnaire 2	Dec. 11- Jan. 8	Participants	Participants filled out and emailed reply to Werner; Werner interviewed 1 member in person
	Conduct focus group 2	Jan. 8	Werner, recorder, participants	Werner facilitated, and trained recorder who took notes
	Code data for questionnaire 1	Sept. 25- Oct. 16	Werner	
	Code data for focus group 1	Sept. 25- Oct. 16	Werner	
	Code data for participant observation	Within 2 weeks after each meeting	Werner	

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
	Code data for questionnaire 2	Jan. 8- Jan. 15	Werner	
Interpreting the Data	Review coded data	Jan. 15	All participants	Discipleship circle meeting
	Interpret coded data, session 1	Jan. 22	All participants	Discipleship circle meeting
	Interpret coded data, session 2	Jan. 29	All participants	Discipleship circle meeting
Reporting	Draft written report for participants to review	Feb. 1- March 20	Werner and all participants	Draft written by Werner, reviewed by all participants
	Final written report	March 30	Werner	

Ethics in Ministry-Based Research

As pastor-researcher, I held a measure of power over the other participants in the study. This is somewhat lessened in my Mennonite church context, in which decision-making power is shared by all members of the local church's leadership team, and in which all church members together make major church decisions. As a pastor in my context, my power over others is more influential than institutional; I have no institutional authority to compel anyone to do anything, yet as a pastor I do have spiritual influence in the congregation.

The power differential in this study was addressed by the fact that this was an action research project, in which all participants owned the research: together we shared our stories, analyzed and interpreted the data. Although I wrote the final report, this was done in consultation with the participants. This is what Moschella (2008, 108) describes as "power with" and not "power over" the people. Furthermore, an information/consent letter (see appendix 9) was sent to

all participants, seeking their voluntary participation, a letter in which I acknowledged my dual-role as both pastor and researcher, and pledged not to pressure potential or actual participants in any way. Each member signed and dated a separate research study consent form (see appendix 10). Throughout the project I also remained accountable to the Holyrood Board of Elders.

My dual-role as pastor researcher was managed in two ways. First, in any situation of conflict between the two roles, I prioritized my pastoral role: "DMin students are pastorally connected to the participants in their projects. Your first priority is always to your ministry and to the service of the people in your parish" (Sensing 2011, 42). This mandate led me to accept more members into the research study than I considered to be ideal, as I would not have hesitated to include these members as a pastor. Second, I sought to be honest and transparent regarding my research motives, both with the discipleship circle and with myself, to help avoid the temptation to use my power, whether consciously or unconsciously, to sway the results. This required critical self-reflection on my part throughout the research project: "All researchers have an agenda. Honesty about that agenda brings objectivity due to an ability to bracket those items, or at least an acknowledgment of subjectivity....To summarize, researchers should not pour data into a preset mold but should minimize the distortion of the meanings presented by openly acknowledging their role as researchers" (Sensing 2011, 46-47). To facilitate this reflexivity, I kept a research journal throughout the study, in which I considered my motives.

Findings, Interpretation and Outcomes

In this section I outline the results of our research, explain our understanding of what these findings mean, and consider their implications for our ongoing ministry. While I am the author of this paper, the work of analysis and interpretation was very much a corporate effort.

Findings

The major findings of this research project are presented in tables 3-15. In this 'Findings' section, the tables are displayed, and some basic observations relevant to the interpretation of the data are pointed out, particularly data which support the major findings of this project (that the members of the discipleship circle perceived that they grew in their identity as disciples, in their intention to live as disciples, and in the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship); the actual interpretation of the data begins in earnest in the 'Interpretation' section. The codes in the tables which need defining are found in appendix 11, while the numbers in brackets next to each code represent the number of individuals who cited that coded aspect of discipleship. These numbers are for rough comparative purposes only; too much should not be read into the figures, as they do not indicate factors like frequency, intensity or depth of practice.

Table 3. Pre-Intervention Questionnaire: How do you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus in your everyday life?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Praying (10)	Attending Sunday worship	Relating to neighbours (9)
	(4)	
Engaging Scripture (7)	Participating in small	Serving others (7)
	groups (3)	
Discerning God's will (4)	Serving in the church (3)	Economic life (6)
Reading/Study (4)		Witnessing to faith
		verbally (5)
Journaling (2)		Family/home life (3)
Listening to Christian		Working life (3)
music (2)		
Other (7)		

Table 4. Post-Intervention Questionnaire: How do you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus in your everyday life?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Praying (9)	Attending Sunday worship	Relating to neighbours (7)
	(3)	
Engaging Scripture (11)	Participating in small groups (4)	Serving others (9)
Discerning God's will (8)	Serving in the church (3)	Economic life (5)
Reading/Study (3)	Mutual discernment (2)	Witnessing to faith
		verbally (8)
Journaling (4)	Mutual support (2)	Family/home life (4)
Enjoying God in creation		Working life (2)
(2)		
Other (6)		

After coding the data for the questionnaires, it became apparent that almost all of the responses could be placed into one of three dimensions of discipleship, the inner, the communal, and the outer, each of which is a way of relating and responding to Jesus who calls us to follow him. These same dimensions are also exhibited in the focus group data. The inner dimension has to do with following Jesus, at the individual level, both through nurturing a relationship with God, and seeking to develop one's own inner character or

spiritual growth; the communal dimension has to do with following Jesus through relating to the local church, the body of Christ; and the outer dimension has to do with following Jesus through loving others or contributing to the well-being of society. These three dimension are in keeping with Becker's three-fold summary of Anabaptism cited earlier: Jesus is the centre of our faith; community is the centre of our lives; and reconciliation is the centre of our work (Becker 2010, 2). They can also be found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: the inner dimension is evidenced in Jesus' teaching on prayer (Mt. 6:5-15), fasting (Mt. 6:16-18) and not worrying (Mt. 6:25-34); the communal dimension can be seen in Jesus corporately identifying his followers as "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world," "a city set on a hill" (Mt. 5:13-14); and the outer dimension is witnessed in Jesus' instructions on reconciliation (Mt. 5:21-26), divorce (Mt. 5:31-32), truth-telling (Mt. 5:33-37), loving enemies (Mt. 5:43-48), and giving to the needy (6:1-4).

The pre-intervention questionnaire provides a snapshot of the group's aggregate life of discipleship before the research project began. It indicates that the members of the discipleship circle sought to live out their faith in Jesus in multiple ways. We were not a group of cultural Christians, or "Sunday only" Christians, who viewed our faith obligation as fulfilled if we attended the Sunday worship service. Rather, as table 3 illustrates, the group as a whole expressed a range of ways in which we sought to follow Jesus in everyday life. Jim stated how he viewed his work with immigrants and refugees as service to God, a statement representative of how the members of the discipleship circle sought to

integrate their faith with their daily living: "Throughout my working life...I have always seen my work as more than just a job where I can collect a pay cheque.

As a follower of Jesus I've tried to do this work in response to the biblical call to 'welcome strangers' in our midst."

Regarding the communal dimension in the pre-intervention questionnaire, it is a little surprising that not more was written about this. As the pastor of the church I know that every member of the discipleship circle attends Sunday worship and small group regularly, and most members offer up their gifts for the benefit of the community, yet this was not well indicated in the data. This 'underrepresentation' of the communal dimension can also be seen in many of the tables which follow, and is especially pronounced in the pre-intervention data; in the post-intervention data there is often an uptick in the number of participants referencing the communal dimension.

Unfortunately the data from the questionnaires, whether pre- or post-intervention, indicate little about members' attitudes toward their discipleship practices; nor does it indicate the reasons why they engaged in these practices, or the depth to which they engaged them. Rather, the data primarily portray the routine actions which the members engaged in. In reflection I have realized that this is because the verb in the question, "How do you *live out* your faith as a follower of Jesus in your everyday life?" invites only action responses. Indeed, in rereading my own responses to the questionnaires I realize that I myself responded in such a rote manner! In any future research it would be wise to add a

question or two which also asks the respondents to reflect on their discipleship practices: How do they feel about them? Why do they practice them?

In comparing the two questionnaires, it is evident that there is no major difference in the activities reported pre- and post-intervention, or in the number of respondents who indicated each activity. Yet there are some minor differences, differences which will be further borne out in other data sets: regarding the inner dimension the data reveals a post-intervention increase in the number of those who responded that they engaged Scripture (a corporate covenant item) and sought to discern God's will, while in the outer dimension there was an increase in those who witnessed verbally to their faith (another corporate covenant item). In addition, two new responses were coded in the communal dimension: mutual discernment and mutual support.

Furthermore, in the post-intervention questionnaire six of the participants made statements indicating their perception that they benefited in some way from engaging in the accountability covenant. These statements were freely volunteered, and not asked for in any way. For example, Alice wrote concerning a personal covenant item, "I have become more mindful of living simply, of being more content with what I have," while Rachel stated that "the discipleship circle helped me connect to God by taking special times to read the Bible and pray every day, by making it a habit. That is also part of how I live out my faith now."

The data from the five questions asked in the pre- and post-intervention focus groups are represented in the tables below. Observations relevant to the

discipleship circle's interpretation of the research are made following each set of questions.

Table 5. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 1: What joys do you experience as you follow Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Experiencing God's	Attending church	Serving others (7)
presence (6)		
Engaging Scripture (2)	Seeing people mature in	
	faith	
Friendship with Jesus		
Receiving God's strength		
Gardening		

Table 6. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 1: What joys do you experience as you follow Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Experiencing God's	Fellowship (4)	Serving others (2)
presence: (4)		
Life direction (2)	Racial reconciliation	Seeing God reconcile
		others
Seeing the Spirit at work	Singing at church	Obeying God
Engaging Scripture		Using spiritual gifts
Repentance		

The pre-intervention question reveals two primary sources of joy for the group as a whole: experiencing God's presence and serving others. Post-intervention these were again both named, but the group discussion shifted more to the communal dimension, with fellowship also highlighted as a source of joy. As Sarah commented, "Being in community—there's a real joy in getting together and hearing other points of view and getting into Scripture. Now that I am part of this church my appreciation for community has matured. I didn't used to appreciate it the way I do now, or think it was all that important."

Table 7. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 2: What challenges do you face as you follow Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Sin/self (2)	Institutional church	Affluence in a world of
	dogmatism	need
Maintaining a disciplined		Distractions from focusing
prayer life (2)		on Jesus
Maintaining sense of		Applying God's Word
God's presence		
To experience more joy		Gossip in work
		environment
Struggle to forgive		Vulnerability to being
		judged
Seeing the world through		Verbal witness
God's eyes		

Table 8. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 2: What challenges do you face as you follow Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Understanding spiritual	Life together as broken	Verbal witness (4)
mystery (4)	people	
Making space for Jesus	The risk of trusting others	Following Jesus at work
within (3)		
Sin/Self (2)		
Being more Christlike		
The question of suffering		
Pursuing God		
Humility		

In the pre-intervention question, the challenges named by the participants were diverse, and did not coalesce around a common challenge. In the post-intervention question, the conversation centered on three challenges in particular: understanding spiritual mystery, making space for Jesus within and verbal witness. In analysing the data numerous members of the group noted that challenges like 'understanding spiritual mystery' and 'making space for Jesus within' tend to heighten as people engage the inner dimension of discipleship.

Chloe spoke of the challenge of opening up the inner life to Jesus: "It's hard to incorporate Christ into yourself. Yet this is the only way to be a disciple: you are a disciple *out of* Christ within you."

Table 9. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 3: How does the church support you as you follow Jesus?

Fellowship	Teaching/Preaching	Providing Ministry
	Ministry	Opportunities
Mutual support (5)	Teaching/preaching (4)	Provides opportunities for
		service
Women's retreat (2)	The church provides focus	Provides opportunity to use
	for life (2)	spiritual gifts
Learning from the		Discernment of spiritual
example of others		gifts

Table 10. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 3: How does the church support you as you follow Jesus?

Fellowship	Teaching/Preaching Ministry	Providing Ministry Opportunities
Mutual support (6)	Teaching/preaching (2)	Provides opportunities for service
Learning from the example of others (3)	Weekly worship and teaching forms identity	Bi-cultural church facilitates witness
Mutual accountability	•	
Provides training ground for Christlikeness		
Women's retreat		

This is the only question in the focus group in which the responses are not categorized according to the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship, as the codes did not lend themselves to such organization. Rather, the larger categories represent overarching ways in which the church community provides support for its members. The data indicate that there was little difference in the answers given to the question pre- and post-intervention. In our

group analysis the participants concluded that the reason for this is that the church itself did not change during the eleven-week intervention, so it makes logical sense that the ways in which we felt supported by the church would not change.

As the pastor of the church, I would concur with the fact that the church did not change the way it supported its members during this time period.

The one reference to "mutual accountability" refers to the discipleship group itself, even as one member responded to the focus group question: "A group like this provides accountability."

Table 11. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 4: What has helped you to grow as a follower of Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Christian music (2)	Example of fellow	Doing the Word/obedience
	Christians (2)	(2)
Engaging Scripture (2)	Small groups	Challenges from non-
		Christians
Prayer		Being in secular
		environment
Reading Christian books		
The faithfulness of Jesus		
The Holy Spirit		
Doubt		
Journaling		
Christian TV		

Table 12. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 4: What has helped you to grow as a follower of Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension
Engaging Scripture (5)	Fellowship (6)	Being in secular
		environment (3)
Prayer (4)	Attending church (2)	
Practice/routine (2)	Sermons	
Awareness of need for	Interpreting Scripture	
change	together	
Silence		

In the pre-intervention question the members of the discipleship circle, as an aggregate, primarily named items related to the inner dimension of discipleship as facilitative of their growth as followers of Jesus. Most items in this category are related to spiritual disciplines, but there was no discipline highlighted frequently. Post-intervention the inner dimension was also named frequently, but this time there was a noticeable increase in the number of participants who named engaging Scripture and prayer as beneficial to their growth. Another visible difference is the fact that fellowship was named six times post-intervention, but not at all pre-intervention. As one participant (whose name was not captured in the notes) stated, "The support of the community has helped me grow. This is where I want to be. I want to be with the community."

The nature of question 4 also led some members to indicate, post-intervention, that the research project itself, with its emphasis on mutual accountability to a covenant, facilitated their growth as disciples. As Nancy noted, "I find getting into a routine helpful. Doing a routine of daily Bible reading has helped me. I did it to be accountable to this group but now when I don't do it I miss it." Similarly Steve stated, "Practice helps—practice reading Scripture, practice praying. Something you do every day and through that growing in Christ-likeness."

Table 13. Pre-Intervention Focus Group, Question 5: How would you like to grow further as a follower of Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension	
In ability to surrender to	I desire intentional	To be more visible as a	
God's will (3)	community (1)	Christian (1)	
In ability to hear God's		Relationship with wife (1)	
voice/discern God's will			
(4)			
In the gifts of the Spirit (1)			

Table 14. Post-Intervention Focus Group, Question 5: How would you like to grow further as a follower of Jesus?

Inner Dimension	Communal Dimension	Outer Dimension	
In ability to hear God's	In deeper community (3)	To be less judgmental of	
voice (2)		others (2)	
In consistency in doing		In ability to see people as	
God's will (2)		Jesus sees them	
In trust in God		In having service become	
		more natural	
In Christlikeness		In willingness to take	
		more risks	

There was little change in the pre- and post-intervention responses to question 5. One limiting factor to question 5 is the fact that it was the final question of the evening, and at both focus groups there was little time left for it, and people were tired and running out of energy to respond. This explains why this table contains less data than the others. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is that a number of members expressed the desire to grow deeper in community, as exemplified by Norm: "I want to be part of community—to grow in it. This group has been good but we can grow deeper." In the same manner Evelyn said, "I would like to be a part of community more. It's hard to be in community when we all live so far away. I feel like my friends are more my

coworkers. This group is great community but we don't actually live life together very much."

Table 15. Six Lenses of Analysis for Accountability Meetings

Lens 1: Statements of Challenge and Struggle	Lens 2: Witness Stories	Lens 3: Feelings	Lens 4: Statements of Benefit	Lens 5: Participant Interaction	Lens 6: Statements of Illumination
			Practical benefit (13)	Suggestions (15)	
			Benefit of community (5)	Challenges (7)	

The five accountability meetings, at which field notes were taken as members shared and interacted with one another over their efforts to keep the covenant, provided rich data for this project. The data were summarized in table 15, by being condensed into six 'lenses of analysis,' six ways to look upon and seek to understand what transpired as the members of the discipleship circle sought to keep each other accountable to the covenant.

The first lens consists of 'statements of challenge and struggle.'

Statements of challenge are aspirational, and refer to participants' expressions of a

desire to learn how to do something related to discipleship, like listening to God as part of prayer, or how to grow in it or do it better, while 'statements of struggle' refer to participants' expressions of difficulty or failure to keep aspects of the covenant. Basic observations include the facts that many statements of challenge and struggle were named, and that these statements primarily fell into the main areas of the covenant: prayer, engaging Scripture (and other spiritual disciplines), and witness. Another frequently mentioned challenge was how to deal with interruptions to establish daily routines to set aside time to be with God.

Following are two representative statements of the challenges expressed by the group members. Concerning daily prayer and Bible reading Sarah said, "I did those things each morning. But I see the need to challenge myself more, and come up with a more structured way of doing things. I am a little bit rushed in the morning, so maybe I need to think about doing something more formal in the evenings." Regarding witness Evelyn stated, "Someone at work asked me why I was so positive and then followed it up with questions about Bible studies... what they are, how they operate, etc. I was taken so off guard that I didn't have good answers. Where and when do I actually challenge someone in their faith?" Brenda shared an example of a struggle: "I didn't really want to do this covenant this week. I did pray a bit for wisdom, safety and my family. But with our schedule as it was, I didn't really do it. And we are so busy looking after the grandchildren."

The second lens is composed of 'witness stories,' which are the stories participants told recounting specific experiences or incidences of witness.

Witness is defined in our covenant as "words of encouragement, acts of service or direct evangelism," which are engaged in to testify to the love of Jesus. The data reveal that many witness stories were told at the accountability meetings and that, on nine occasions, those sharing the stories explicitly linked their experiences to their efforts to keep the covenant. While the majority of the witness stories were not explicitly stated as being engaged in to fulfill the covenant, it was likely implied, as the stories were shared during the accountability meetings as examples of covenant keeping.

Chloe narrated a short story of how the covenant made her a more intentional servant: "I witnessed to a person who came to the Food Bank with two little children. The mother was handling ten things at once, so I distracted the children so she could focus on what she was trying to do. Because of the covenant, I was a little more intentional to serve her." On a number of occasions the group members who shared their witness stories further talked about how the covenant's requirement to witness also made them more aware of witness opportunities in their daily lives. Here is an example from Sarah: "Regarding seeking to witness, I am more aware of opportunities to witness than I used to be. For example, there was a lady at work with self-esteem issues, and because intentional witness was on my mind, I did not hesitate to enter in."

At the accountability meetings the participants occasionally gave direct expression to their feelings related to engaging the covenant. These feelings, which provide the third lens of analysis, tended to be more positive than negative, although both positive and negative feelings were named. The positive feelings

flowed both from the ability to keep the covenant itself ("I'm glad I was able to keep the covenant this week"), as well as from the good feelings that arose when engaging in specific covenant activities ("It felt good to witness"). Terry spoke of feeling heartened at his initial efforts to keep the covenant: "I prayed 14 of 21 days, read the Bible 15 of 21 days, and witnessed 15 of 21. I am encouraged because this is a significant increase from my normal routine." During the post-intervention meeting to analyze and interpret the data Terry added these words: "I felt satisfied. It was having an impact on my life and I could see it was having an impact on others in our group too." Brenda spoke of her gladness at remembering God's goodness in her efforts to keep a daily gratitude list, a personal covenant item of hers: "I felt grateful for my family, for the uplifting report when I heard that my grandson was doing better, grateful for the emergency doctor. I'm glad I was able to write these things I was grateful for down."

The negative feelings arose from the inability to keep the covenant, or from feeling inadequate while actually engaging the covenant. To give one example, Mary reported on her early efforts to keep the covenant: "As far as keeping the covenant, I felt close to an abysmal failure."

The fourth lens considers 'statements of benefit,' which are participants' expressions of how keeping an element of the covenant was perceived in some way to be helpful for the participant, or how the discipleship circle accountability meeting itself was perceived to be beneficial. Twenty-nine statements of benefit

were coded in the data, and organized into three categories: practical benefits, spiritual benefits, and the benefit of community.

Practical benefits refer to participants' indications of a perceived benefit which worked itself out in actual practice in a participant's life. In speaking of one of her personal covenant items, Evelyn provides an example of a practical benefit: "I am living simply because I said I would. Before I was just thinking I should clean something out but never did. I'm finding this simple living and purging discipline is spilling over into my purchasing habits. I am a lot more intentional about whether or not I buy things that I might want. I'm noting that being intentional does change things." Another example includes one member's daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer, leading both to the reminder as well as to the actual forgiveness of another.

Spiritual benefits are participants' expressions of a perceived benefit which demonstrated itself in their understanding of or relationship with God.

Nancy gave voice to one way in which she considered herself to benefit spiritually from her efforts to pray, read the Bible and write in her gratitude journal: "I've been tired a lot lately. When I don't get enough sleep, I struggle with negative stuff. The disciplines of Bible reading and prayer have been helping me. Thinking of things I am grateful for in my gratitude journal focuses me on God."

The 'benefit of community' is defined as those perceived benefits which participants expressed as a result of belonging to the mutually accountable discipleship circle itself. Norm related how the members' watchful concern for

each other gave him the extra motivation needed to pray: "Knowing that I am accountable to the group is especially helping me with my evening prayer. There are many evenings when I feel too tired to pray, but then I remember that I am accountable, so I pray. Most of the time, these prayers are not legalistic. I enjoy it once I do it."

A fifth lens through which to view the accountability meeting data is that of 'participant interaction,' words spoken by the participants to one another as they were updating their efforts to live out the covenant. According to the raw data, and my own personal observations in my research journal, all of the interaction between the participants at the accountability meetings was supportive (or at least neutral). The data record no evidence of participants judging other participants, or trying to make them feel guilty if they did not fulfill all of the covenant obligations between meetings. This was also confirmed by the participants in their post-intervention analysis.

The categories of participant interaction include suggestions, words of encouragement and challenges. Throughout the intervention numerous suggestions were made by the participants in an effort to help one another, but two examples will suffice. First, to someone wrestling with prayer, Mark noted, "Prayer books can be helpful when we struggle to pray. They can teach us to pray, and give us words to pray. They can become your prayers over time." For someone struggling to maintain spiritual disciplines while away on vacation Norm suggested, "When I was away at my son's wedding, I kept up my journaling routine by simply writing two sentences a day, while at home I usually write two

pages a day. The very act of consistently writing, even if just a little bit, helps me to maintain the routine."

The members of the discipleship circle also frequently spoke words of encouragement to one another. To one member who did not keep the covenant on a day when she was ill, Sarah stated, "It is good to be gracious with ourselves when life's circumstances (like sickness) prevent us from keeping the covenant. It is good not to judge ourselves." Numerous members encouraged Albert in his personal covenant commitment to change the gossip in his work place environment through positive speech, saying that they believed his efforts would be successful in the long run. Even though Albert perceived his efforts were not bearing immediate fruit, the group noted that his uplifting words were like seeds planted in the ground, seeds which would eventually bear fruit.

The last category of participant interaction consists of the words of challenge the participants spoke to one another at the accountability meetings.

Not very many challenging words were spoken during the research intervention, and most of them fell into the same category: to reflect on our struggles to bear verbal witness, in order to be better prepared the next time a similar situation arose.

On a number of occasions during the accountability meetings, the participants indicated that they had learned something about themselves. This gave rise to the sixth and final lens of analysis, 'statements of illumination,' which fell into two broad categories, the inner and the outer dimensions of discipleship. Concerning the inner dimension, Nancy reflected on what she was

learning about how her level of rest influenced her relationship with God: "These last two weeks were very busy. I was feeling drained and empty, which affected my prayer and witness. But I am recognizing that when I feel this way, I need to go closer to God." As a result of his efforts to speak positive words into his gossip-filled work environment, Albert realized he was also learning something about himself: "Now I notice when I say something negative." The following statement of illumination concerns the outer dimension of discipleship: "I felt like I missed the opportunity to witness. I'm thinking about what holds me back—sometimes not being prepared."

The findings observed in this section will be related to one another in the next section. It is necessary to consider how the data are meaningful, both in the context of the ministry of the discipleship circle, as well as in the context of my model of spiritual formation.

Interpretation

In keeping with the principle of participatory action research, the members of the discipleship circle met together (for three consecutive Sundays) to analyse and interpret the research data, beginning one month after the research intervention had ended. As a group we asked ourselves what, if any, growth in discipleship had occurred as the result of our experiment with mutual accountability. Through a consideration of the data we perceived that a measure of growth had occurred in the following areas: a strengthening of our intention to live as disciples, an increased awareness of our identity as disciples, and modest

growth in the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship. We came to these conclusions through a process of open discussion, which generated the research findings, and then coming to agreement that we indeed considered these outcomes to be valid.

According to my model of spiritual formation, some growth should reasonably be expected if we succeeded in helping each other to keep the covenant. In the section titled "Means of Spiritual Formation," my model considers two overarching means of spiritual/discipleship formation by which we can intentionally choose to cooperate with God's grace in our lives and thereby grow in Christlikeness: inner practices (like the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer and engaging Scripture), and outer practices (like loving our neighbours). The group items in our common covenant covered precisely these points of prayer, Scripture and witnessing to God's love. Each member's personal covenant items also fell into these two broad means of grace. Mutual accountability to our covenant could thus be considered a means to help one another to engage in these crucial inner and outer practices.

A simple diagram illustrates the relationship between mutual accountability, inner and outer practices, and desired growth:

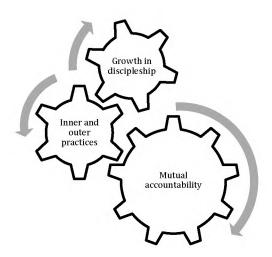


Figure 4. Geared for Growth.

In theory, as the 'gear' of mutual accountability is engaged, it helps spin the 'gear' of the inner and outer practices, which in turn helps promote growth in discipleship (the direction arrows in the diagram simply indicate that the gears are being engaged). Mutual accountability thus functions as a communal means of grace. Engaging in it is the recognition that God has given us to one another to be agents of God's grace in each other's lives. As the circle of disciples develops regular habits of gathering and expressing genuine interest in one another's spiritual progress, motivation is found to carry on with the formative practices of discipleship. In her book on small groups, Corinne Ware expresses well the relationship between accountability and discipline:

Have you ever promised yourself that you will walk a certain amount of miles each day? We tend to fall by the wayside unless we have a friend who says, "I'm coming by, so be ready." The secret of Weight Watchers and the twelve-step programs is found in the groups' support and expectations. How many people skip a dessert because they know they will be weighed-in right in front of others? It's not that we don't want to do what we set out to do. The spirit is willing but we are easily overcome by our very human inertia. Someone waiting for us, expecting to see us

and hear about our progress, can provide the extra motivation we need to keep on moving down our path. (Ware 1997, 18)

Theory is one thing and practice is another. The goal of the research project was to examine if this theory would work out in the reality of our own context. With this in mind, I began the first data analysis meeting with a simple series of questions: What do you think happened? Did any growth in discipleship take place as we kept each other accountable to our covenant? What did it look like?

Even before we examined the data all of the members stated that, in their opinions, some growth had indeed occurred. Individuals began to volunteer specifics—the following examples are included as they cover all of the main areas in which the group perceived that growth had occurred. Sandra pointed to the inner dimension, "Now prayer and Scripture reading isn't as much of a chore, it's a joy. Before I was sporadic about it, now I'm more consistent." Steve concurred saying, "For me, adding to that, by reading God's word, it made me get to know God better. To know his character and what he's like." Sarah indicated progress in the communal dimension: "I feel a lot closer to the people in the group than I was before. I think it's given me a glimpse into people's lives and it's more than just a Sunday service. You can't have a heart to heart with everybody each Sunday." Albert identified the outer dimension: "I think it heightened my sense of the need to be witnessing, sensitive to sharing my faith." He also clarified how he became a little more aware of his identity as a follower of Jesus: "It's helped me to be a bit less compartmentalized. I'm not in 'discipleship mode' and then

out of it. I don't think that I necessarily used to live counter to discipleship, but now I'm more integrated." Finally, Jim noted how mutual accountability helped to strengthen his good intentions: "It was helpful for me. Not so much about being legalistic, but accountable. Not letting other time pressures crowd out my intention to have the specific intentional time with Scripture, prayer, silence and regular exercise. And I think I've carried through with most of them."

These findings are backed up by additional research data. In turning to the inner dimension of discipleship, the group's perception of growth finds support in all of the data sets. The questionnaire data (in tables 3 and 4) indicate a postintervention increase in the number of those who stated they engaged Scripture as part of their discipleship, as well as in those who sought to discern God's will, a complex process which the members agreed involved both prayer and searching the Scriptures, as well as simply listening for the stirrings of God's Spirit in one's inner being. In the focus group data, tables 11 and 12 indicate that prayer and engaging Scripture are not only named as activities which increased in frequency, but as activities which the members believed helped them to grow as followers of Jesus. This was also borne out in the accountability meetings, as is seen in the following statement by Steve, which was coded as a "spiritual benefit" in table 15: "There's greater focus in my prayers as I'm working on the prayer journal. My thoughts were drifting off more in the past. The last two weeks I have been more focused. And I am finding the words to express what I want to say to God." Further evidence is seen in this comment by Sarah, which indicates her growing awareness that prayer involves the willingness to ask things of God and not just

presume on his goodness (which was coded as a "statement of illumination" in table 15): "Regarding prayer, the Bible says that we should *ask* God. Even as a human, I don't do things for others who don't ask, even if I know they could benefit. So I think that I need to ask God more for things simply because he wants me to—to quit just working under the assumption that he will take care of me."

Watson (2002, 110) highlights growth in the inner dimension as a benefit his readers can anticipate if they join covenant discipleship groups: "If you know that you have to give an account to someone each week for something you know you should be doing, there is a much better chance that you will do it. Thus, you can expect to become much more regular...in your prayer life and in your Bible study."

The data also provide evidence of the discipleship circle's perception of growth in the communal dimension. First, at the most basic level, the communal dimension was simply named more often in the post-intervention questionnaire and focus group meeting. At an analysis meeting, while the members expressed puzzlement as to why the communal dimension was not named more frequently, especially pre-intervention, and could not agree on a single explanation for it, the members did agree that the post-intervention bump represented an increased appreciation of the importance of fellow disciples for our common journey. A comparison of tables 5 and 6 shows that fellowship was discussed as a source of joy post-intervention, but not pre-intervention; a comparison of tables 11 and 12 shows that fellowship was frequently named as an element which contributed to

the members' growth as followers of Jesus post-intervention, but not preintervention; and a comparison of tables 13 and 14 also indicates an increase in those who expressed a desire to grow closer in community. The data from the participant observation at the accountability meetings (table 15) further round out this picture: the willingness of the participants to share their challenges and struggles with one another (lens 1) suggests a growing level of honesty in community, as pointed out by several members at an analysis meeting; the frequent sharing of witness stories (lens 2) motivated others to witness, as voiced by Sarah: "One of the things that struck me was how frequently witness was named as a highlight for people each week. So it was more encouraging for me to be more inclined to do it as well"; the very act of keeping each other accountable, of watching over one another in a spirit of love, was itself named as a benefit (lens 4), as expressed by Rachel in a statement coded as a "benefit of community": "I'm starting to feel more connected to the Spirit. I used to feel close to God, but was weakened in every way during my husband's illness and death...Coming to this group, and working on the covenant, I am trying to get connected again... There's been some healing in my relationship with God. That's because I'm part of this accountability group"; and the data on participant observation (lens 5), particularly the many suggestions and words of encouragement given, indicates, in the words of Evelyn, that we genuinely "want each other to succeed." Finally, when the group considered the question of what the Holy Spirit may be calling forth among us as a result of the research, numerous members pointed to the communal dimension. Evelyn said, "A hunger

for deeper community." Norm said, "A hunger to follow Jesus with others." Sarah said, "Enjoying the company of other Christians, being in the presence of others who are like-minded." Sandra said, "The Spirit prompted me to pray more for each one. If someone was struggling with something I prayed that God would lead and guide."

Regarding the outer dimension of discipleship, the most frequently named area of growth had to do with increased engagement in verbal witness. First, in comparing tables 3 and 4, there was an increase in those who named verbal witness as one way they lived out their faith in Jesus in their daily lives. Second, in comparing tables 7 and 8, more members indicated that verbal witness was a challenge post-intervention, which is a likely indication of actual engagement in it, for we do not tend to name as challenges those things which we do not attempt to do. This is further borne out in the data from the accountability meetings. First, under lens 1, witness was coded nine times as a "statement of challenge," and most of these codes were related to verbal witness. More pointedly, lens 2 indicates that many witness stories were told at the accountability meetings. These were not all related to verbal witness, but many were. In considering these stories at an analysis meeting Sarah noted, "For me witness has been easy in terms of serving others, but I grew in evangelism a little bit, which has always been hard for me." Norm then stated, "I agree with this. It has become a little bit easier. I mean, I started by sharing my faith more with my family, but before I would not even have done that." Growth in the outer dimension also occurred in an increased awareness of openings for witness, as indicated by Nancy during an

accountability meeting: "There seems to be more opportunities for witness. I have been speaking words of encouragement to others. I am trying to reach out to my niece. I had the opportunity to talk to my brother about God, and he almost came to church."

The awareness of greater opportunity for witness extended beyond verbal witness to acts of service. At one accountability meeting, Norm related a story of how a young immigrant family mistakenly came to his office, arriving on foot after a lengthy walk, believing it to be an office offering immigration help. As Norm went to get the phone number for the actual office to give to the family, he suddenly remembered his covenant promise to bear witness to God's love daily, and instead of merely providing a phone number he provided the family with a ride to the immigration centre, and also made arrangements for them to have a ride home.

Watson (2002, 110-111) indicates such increased awareness as an expected benefit of mutually accountable discipleship: "You will find new ways of serving God and your neighbor in the world. For many group members, this proves to be the most exciting dimension of covenant discipleship." Indeed, many members of Holyrood's discipleship circle expressed enthusiasm both at their own experiences of seeking to witness, and also at hearing the witness stories of others. To give one example, Nancy narrated how good it felt to be able to have a conversation centred on questions of faith and justice with a Lebanese woman who gave her a pedicure, and who had recently experienced a racist assault.

Taken altogether, the breadth of data thus backs up the discipleship circle's perception of growth in the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship. Yet this perceived growth should not be overstated. In the analysis meeting, none of the members indicated that they experienced major growth, nor does the data itself suggest major growth. In fact, in a number of the participants' quotes above, words like "little" were frequently used to modify the experience of growth: "I was a little more intentional;" "It's helped me be a bit less compartmentalized;" "I grew in evangelism a little bit;" "It has become a little bit easier." The relative similarity between the two questionnaires further suggests that the research intervention did not result in any dramatic changes in the various ways the group members lived out their faith. Rather, any growth which occurred was more a deepening in already existing practices.

The other perceived areas of growth for the members of the discipleship circle relate to an increased sense of identity as followers of Jesus, and strengthened intention to follow Jesus. Concerning identity, Albert's previously cited quote about feeling "less compartmentalized" and less in and out of "discipleship mode" and "more integrated" characterizes the heart of the matter. As Albert identified, discipleship can become an 'on-again, off-again' activity, but as a group we discerned that one of the benefits of keeping each other mutually accountable to follow Jesus is precisely that such accountability served as a daily reminder of our identity as disciples, that we have decided to follow Jesus, which is to be lived out in all of our being and doing.

For further evidence, the 'statements of illumination' from table 15 represent group members growing in their self-awareness, which forms part of our identity as disciples. To give an example, at an accountability meeting Norm updated the group that he was learning, through his personal covenant item to keep a daily prayer journal, how he was recognizing his need to trust God more, especially to trust that God loved him, rather than allow feelings of self-condemnation to control him. At the analysis meetings members gave further testimony to their perceived growth in identity. Nancy related, "For myself, I have to say there became more of an awareness. I thought I was aware, but it became more obvious or striking—an awareness of the good things, the positive, and also where you fell short." For Evelyn, "It increased my sense of identity. Even though I know I'm a Christian, meeting together and talking about what it means to be a disciple and how disciples act reinforced my identity."

Concerning the strengthening of intention to live as disciples, Albert noted how he found it odd that he grew in this way in the outer dimension of discipleship: "I mainly grew in intentionality. It's a strange way to grow in this dimension, but that's where I felt the growth." Perhaps such growth in intentionality should not be surprising, as in theory it is reflective of the very purpose of mutual accountability. As figure 4 indicated, the gear of mutual accountability is engaged precisely so followers of Jesus can increase each other's motivation, or strengthen each other's good intentions, to follow through on the inner and outer practices to which Jesus calls us. The members' experience of

strengthened intentions is confirmation that, in our context, the theory became at least somewhat actualized in reality.

The evidence for strengthened intention is difficult to summarize, as it is almost ubiquitous in the data, for it lies behind so many of the covenant actions the group members engaged in. The members' increased efforts to engage in spiritual disciplines bears witness to it. So too, do the many witness stories that were told at the accountability meetings, a number of which were directly linked to intentional effort to keep the covenant. The mutual accountability chart (appendix 8), which the group members filled out each week in front of one another, further demonstrates that the members actually sought to engage the covenant, which requires intentional effort. At an analysis meeting Chloe summed up the point, in reflecting on how she experienced the Holy Spirit moving in our midst: "I have observed that many people want to be more intentional about the ways they witness and follow Jesus."

In addition to perceiving growth, members of the discipleship circle also wondered if we were strong enough in our challenges to one another. The data (table 15, lens 5) does reveal that few statements of challenge were made during the accountability meetings. Most of these statements related to the need to think carefully through why we struggled to give verbal witness to our faith, in order to be better prepared the next time. No statements of challenge were made with respect to individuals not keeping the entirety of their covenant commitment week by week. Yet while we recognized there is room for improvement in this area, we also recognized that if we were too strong in our challenges we risked making one

another feel judged or condemned, which could derail our efforts, especially as we were just beginning our experiment with mutual accountability. I believe Albert spoke a good word when he commented that "perhaps we were not weak, but embryonic in challenge." It takes time for trust to grow.

A final question that needs to be addressed is whether or not there were alternative explanations for the growth we perceived, other than that it could be attributed to mutual accountability. As a group we could name only one potential alternative, but we did not find it convincing. This is the possibility that the growth we perceived might have occurred anyway, quite apart from keeping one another accountable to the covenant. As the pre-intervention questionnaire indicates, the members of the discipleship circle who entered into the covenant did note that numerous inner and outer practices were already part of their lives. Could the growth not be attributed to this ongoing activity? Certainly it would be anticipated that followers of Jesus who engage in the inner and outer practices of discipleship would experience growth throughout their lives, which would include the period of the research intervention. Yet it is the opinion of the group that something more than this happened. This is particularly indicated by the concept of 'increase,' as is indicated in many of the quotes and other data above. In the inner dimension, numerous members reported an increase in frequency of engagement with spiritual disciplines, or an increase in joy when engaging them, or simply an increase in understanding what a discipline like prayer is about. In the communal dimension, there was an increase in appreciation of fellowship with fellow disciples who support us as we journey together, and an increase in

motivation to witness through hearing the witness stories of one another. In the outer dimension, there was an increase in those who engaged in verbal witness. Regarding the concepts of identity and intention, the members reported an increased sense of identity as disciples of Jesus, amounting to an increased sense of integrating their efforts to follow Jesus into their everyday lives. Finally, supporting all of these other 'increases,' there was a perception of an increase (or strengthening) in intention to live as disciples. As Steve stated, "I don't think there are alternative interpretations because I don't think we would have tried to accomplish all this if there was no positive peer pressure behind it." To which Sarah added, "It was not just pressure, but also encouragement, which gave you more desire to do it." Therefore the discipleship circle discerned that mutual accountability, with its elements of positive peer pressure and encouragement, is the best explanation for the growth we believe we experienced, which does not preclude the fact that some growth might have occurred anyway during this period, regardless of the experiment with mutual accountability.

There is still another alternative explanation for the discipleship circle's perceived growth, one which was not raised by the group itself. This is the possibility of 'desirability bias,' which is the idea that the group members only found growth because they expected to grow and wanted to grow. While it is true that we hoped to grow, and while it must be acknowledged that desirability bias can never be completely eliminated, as humans are subjective beings, there are at least three factors which mitigate against desirability bias as the primary explanation for the growth observed. The first is the sheer breadth of the data

collected (from three separate instruments), data which were not only general but specific in nature. While a general statement such as, "I believe I grew," might readily conceal a bias towards growth, it is much harder to conceal such bias behind many specific statements such as, "It's helped me to be a bit less compartmentalized." Second, while some of the evidence presented for growth is more subjective in nature, and is thus more amenable to desirability bias ("I feel closer to God"), other evidence is more objective in nature, and thus less susceptible to desirability bias (such as those who reported that they read the Bible more frequently than they did before). Finally, the fact that the discoveries of this research into mutual accountability are not unique, but are backed up by others like Watson, bears further validity to the findings.

Outcomes

The primary outcome of this research project is that mutual accountability did indeed help the members of the discipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church to help each other follow Jesus, and that we experienced a measure of growth in our lives of discipleship as a result of it. This is what we anticipated at the outset, although we were unsure what specific growth to expect. The pressing question for the discipleship circle subsequently became, "Where do we go from here? What do we do with these research findings?"

Action research is intended not only to produce research results, but to lead to new or improved practices. In this regard Stringer (2014, 8-9) speaks of action research as an iterative cycle of looking (gathering data), thinking

(analysing and interpreting the data) and acting (implementing the research results). After the discipleship circle gathered, analysed and interpreted the data (looking and thinking), we also considered how we could use the findings to improve our ministry (acting).

The overarching result of our reflection and discussion is that we agreed to continue to support one another through mutual accountability, but with some modifications to the approach we took during the research intervention. First, the group was eager to reinsert Bible study as an element of our gathering time, which we had set aside during the research intervention due to the amount of time it took for all members to update each other on our efforts to keep the covenant. We will approach these Bible study sessions through the lens of discipleship, by consciously asking ourselves what the Scriptures teach us about living as followers of Jesus. Second, to make time for the Bible study we agreed to split into two groups when we transition from the Bible study portion of the evening into the time for accountability sharing. Third, we decided to simplify the covenant itself to include only the group covenant items, primarily because we found these particularly beneficial, but also to streamline the sharing process. We will ask each other questions such as, "How is your prayer life? What are you learning or hearing from God in your engagement with the Bible? How did you witness to the love of Jesus since we last met? Were you able to pray, engage Scripture and witness daily?" Finally, in order gently to increase the element of challenge, the members agreed to follow up with any concerns or struggles shared related to covenant keeping, meeting by meeting. While this did not happen

during the research intervention, the members agreed it would be beneficial to follow up on concerns in a spirit of love, asking questions such as the following: "Last time we met, you shared with us that you struggled to pray daily. How did you do this time? If you still struggled, what steps might you take to improve next time? Is there any way we can help?" There will still be no punitive element for failure to keep the covenant, as we believe this to be counter-productive, but we will seek to be more diligent in following up with one another. At the time of this writing (mid-March 2017), we have already begun to implement all of the above modifications, in the hope that our continued mutual accountability will be an ongoing source of God's grace in one another's lives.

Conclusion

This research project suggests that mutual accountability to a common covenant did indeed assist the members of the discipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church to be agents of God's enabling grace in each other's lives. Our perception that we strengthened one another's intention to live as disciples is particularly encouraging, as intentionality is foundational for followers of Jesus; we do not follow Jesus by accident, but by intentional acts of the will. As we purposefully follow Jesus in the inner and outer practices of discipleship, like the prayer, biblical engagement and witness called for in our covenant, the Holy Spirit shapes us as disciples, as evidenced by the group's perceived growth in our identity as disciples, as well as in the inner, communal and outer dimensions of discipleship.

Our study was rooted in the biblical call to follow Jesus, not alone but in community, and in the many exhortations in the New Testament epistles to love, encourage and help one another as fellow believers. It was inspired by the ample historical precedent for mutual accountability among Christians, from Jesus' first disciples to monastic communities to the Anabaptist movement to John Wesley and his class meetings.

The methodological approach for the study, participatory action research, encouraged us to seek and listen to the opinions and insights of all discipleship circle members in the gathering of the data, whether generated from the questionnaires, the focus groups or participant observation. Furthermore, rather than relying on an outside professional to inform us of the results of our study, we as the actual participants analysed our own data, discussed and interpreted it together, and came to consensus on our next steps forward. In this way, we have experienced a sense of ownership and are walking forward together into the future, with greater motivation than if an outsider had recommended steps for the way ahead.

I myself benefited from facilitating and engaging in this research project. It reinforced my conviction that discipleship formation in community lies at the heart of the pastor's calling. I have gained confidence in ministry-based research, and valuable first-hand experience that ministry efforts can be kept fresh through the iterative process of observing context, designing action, implementing it, then taking sufficient time to reflect on it, before beginning the cycle anew. As a pastor I am encouraged by the active engagement of the discipleship circle

members throughout the process, by their many insights, and by our enriched fellowship as we experimented with mutual accountability to a common covenant.

I hope and trust that we have all grown in the sense of our responsibility to love, serve and support one another as disciples of Jesus.

There is potential for mutual accountability to a common covenant to enrich the ministries of other small groups, but in each circumstance close attention must be paid to local context. The group entering into the covenant at Holyrood Mennonite Church had a common understanding of discipleship, knew each other well, and had built up trust by being vulnerable with one another in the first year of the discipleship circle. The common items in our covenant had the consensus of everyone in the group. We had also engaged an open discussion about the dangers of legalism and judgmentalism before beginning the research. In addition, as Anabaptists we have both a history and a current ethos of acknowledging that we are responsible for one another, as evidenced in our baptismal promise to be willing to give and receive counsel in the congregation. All of these are important elements to consider for any small group considering entering into a mutual accountability arrangement. While mutual accountability must not be entered into lightly, it is the experience of Holyrood's discipleship circle that it helped us make a modest measure of progress on our eleven-week research journey.

There was one question raised early by some members of the discipleship circle which this research did not address: can mutual accountability be sustained in the long run? We could not answer this question for our own context, as our

intervention only ran for eleven weeks. Watson (2002, 163) does address the issue, noting that it is common for new covenant discipleship groups, after a period of three or four months, to enter into a period which he terms the "doldrums," when matters become routine, and "members begin to question the validity and usefulness of the whole exercise." He urges members to push through this period with the recognition that, in a culture which emphasizes self-fulfilment, it requires stamina to maintain discipline in the long run. He also points out that members need to be committed to support one another, not only when the challenge of discipleship feels exhilarating, but also when it becomes routine. He offers encouragement for those who push through the doldrums:

Such times of apparent aimlessness are no more than a test of the commitment which they have made, a searching and tempering of their discipleship, a moving away from self-serving interests to those which are Christ-serving. It is a form of spiritual growth well attested in the history of the Christian faith; but groups need to know about it at the outset, and to be ready for it. (Watson 2002, 164)

Time will tell how Holyrood's discipleship circle will manage the doldrums, but it is good to know that others have experienced periods when the wind lags and progress seems to stall, only to be given a second wind by the breath of the Spirit. Ultimately this is where hope for all spiritual formation lies, as only the Spirit of God can produce Christlikeness in us: "And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more" (2 Cor. 3:18, NLT). It is the perception of the discipleship circle that the Spirit of God was at work through our mutual accountability, and it is upon the Spirit that we must depend as we look to the future.

CHAPTER V:

CONCLUSION

The Spirit blows where it will, and those who desire to participate in the adventure of spiritual formation will weigh anchor and be prepared, with hoisted sail, to catch its gusts and be propelled into God's transforming purposes for their lives, their faith communities, and indeed, for all creation. God is actively at work in this world to renew creation by reconciling all things in Jesus Christ, and it is our privilege, as followers of Jesus, to be transformed as we journey with him, even as we answer his call to engage the ministry of reconciliation.

This research portfolio has emphasized that everything we do in spiritual formation is initiated and supported by God's grace. Our privilege, in intentional cooperation with the grace God provides us, is to receive with joy our individual identity as God's beloved children, and our corporate identity as one people united and reconciled in Christ. Our calling is to participate in community, as we worship together, and love and support one another on the journey. Our opportunity is to engage the inner and outer practices of discipleship, as Jesus both exemplified and instructed us to do. As we purposefully follow Jesus by exercising faith in such ways, we can expect the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives and mature us into the likeness of Jesus.

These three central themes (God's grace, our intentional response, and the work of the Holy Spirit) were illustrated in each project in this portfolio. This becomes evident below, in the consideration of how each of the projects helped to meet the three foci of Tyndale's Doctor of Ministry in Spiritual Formation degree: personal spiritual growth, the academic study of spirituality, and the ministry of spiritual formation.

First, the writing of my spiritual autobiography facilitated personal spiritual growth by revealing and reinforcing my identity as someone loved, called, and gifted by God. It strengthened my faith to look back over my life and see that God has always been faithful to me, that the orbit of my life has revolved around the One who will not let me go. I am heartened by the fact that, as I have responded to God's call to ministry, even if often reluctantly and inconsistently, the Spirit has been at work in my life to bear the fruit of reconciliation. Further, at the academic level, the writing of Orbit (my spiritual autobiography which narrated my search for love and identity) helped me to understand how narrative can benefit the work of spiritual formation. The stories that we believe, shape us profoundly. As we examine our lives, and see the presence of God in our stories, the Spirit is able to reframe the stories we tell ourselves, to realign them with God's reality rather than our distortions of it, thus changing our image both of God and of ourselves. This also applies to the ministry of spiritual formation. As a pastor, writing my own story has helped me to see the potential benefit of eliciting and listening to the stories of others. Intentionally listening for the

presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others is a key part of what pastors can do to cooperate with God in the formation of God's people.

Second, my model or philosophy of spiritual formation aided my growth through the development of personal conviction. Even as I wrote about the importance of intentionality, I recognized that my intentionality in responding to God is critical for my own spiritual growth. If I am not careful, I tend towards passivity, and I have grown much more aware of the need to be actively involved in my own formation, in dependence upon God's grace. One major way this has taken root in my life is through the development of consistent spiritual practices, most beneficially a prayerful journaling as I reflect on various biblical texts, a practice I have engaged in almost daily for the better part of the last year, and during which the Spirit has often spoken both challenging and encouraging words to me. Above all, my model is an academic document, and I found it very helpful to attempt to write broadly on the theology, goals, means and methods of spiritual formation. It has helped me better to understand the spiritual resources offered by my own Anabaptist faith tradition. It has clarified my thinking about the central pastoral task of forming disciples. It has provided a rationale for how to participate in the ministry of spiritual formation. Finally, at the level of the actual practice of ministry, producing the model has stimulated my preaching as I seek to share what I have learned about the transformative journey of following Jesus with my congregation. It has motivated me to initiate the study of spiritual discernment with the elders at Holyrood Mennonite Church. It also led to the

vision, design and implementation of the research project into mutual accountability which Holyrood's discipleship circle conducted this year.

Third, conducting the research project itself was also helpful for me at the personal, academic, and ministry levels. I grew personally through being a participant in the research, and through being accountable to my fellow disciples. It strengthened my resolve to engage in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and engaging Scripture, it made me more aware of opportunities for witness, and it led to increased witness, even as it did for others in our circle. At the academic level, I believe we produced a research document which supports the importance of mutual accountability for the journey of discipleship. We discerned that mutual accountability is a corporate means of grace we can purposely engage to strengthen our good intentions to follow Jesus, and which the Spirit can use to shape us into his likeness. Finally, at the ministry level, the research project was actual ministry, and not merely research. As ministry it benefited all of us who engaged in it, and as research it therefore encouraged us to continue to support one another through mutual accountability.

In drawing to a close, I will highlight some future implications of my studies in spiritual formation, particularly in areas I hope to develop further. At the personal level, my primary spiritual goal is to grow in my ability to discern the voice and the leading of the Holy Spirit. When I entered into these studies in spiritual formation, this would have largely been a foreign way of thinking for me. I have since come to see that seeking the guidance of God's Spirit is basic to the journey of spiritual formation. Even as Jesus depended on his Father's

guidance for the living out of his ministry (cf. John 5:19), so too must we. While I have certainly grown in my desire and ability to discern the promptings of God's Spirit, I recognize that I have much room for improvement. This leads to a related goal, the desire (perhaps especially after three busy years of study and ministry) to spend more time in solitude with God, simply resting in God's presence, enjoying God's company, and listening for God's guidance. Apart from such deliberate times of quiet and reflection, I believe my progress in spiritual formation will grind to a halt.

With respect to future academic study, as the pastor of a congregation with many African members, I hope to learn more about African spirituality. This will both help me to be a better pastor for my members, and also to be a better teacher when I visit our Pentecostal partners in Liberia. While I have picked up a lot through informal interactions with Holyrood's African members, as well as through a willingness to ask many questions of their cultural heritage and spiritual background, I believe that I would further benefit through more formal study. A good place to begin would be to read some books on African spirituality, especially those by African authors. Another area in which I look forward to further study is to learn more about the mystics throughout church history. While I read a few books on mysticism during my studies, I did not read any of the writings of the mystics directly. I especially hope to consider their experiences of the Holy Spirit, and how this influenced the living out of their faith.

My future ministry goals are three-fold. First, I hope to continue the development of the discipleship circle. In essence, we are currently in another

iteration of the action research cycle. Having experienced the benefit of the group analyzing and interpreting its experience, and then discerning the way forward together, I anticipate going through a similar process in a year or so, with the goal of becoming ever more faithful followers of Jesus. Second, I plan to keep working with Holyrood's elders as we enter deeper into our study of corporate spiritual discernment. This is timely, as in the fall of 2017 we plan to evaluate where we are at as a congregation, and determine future directions. Finally, I would like to share some of the key things I have learned about spiritual formation with our church partners in Liberia and elsewhere. I have a standing invitation to return, as well as a new invitation to visit the fledgling Mennonite Church in Uganda. Both invitations offer the opportunity to consider spiritual formation in the African context, together with African sisters and brothers.

And so the journey goes on. By God's grace, I felt led into the study of spiritual formation at Tyndale. By saying yes to God, and striving to take my studies seriously, I have grown and learned much. And by witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit at work in my life and in my congregation, I have abundant motivation to carry on the adventure, in glad fellowship with traveling companions.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Discipleship Circle Covenant

The Bible tells the story of God's relentless quest of love to restore shalom, well-being in every dimension of life, to all creation. At the heart of God's plan is Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who came and lived among us, taught us through both word and example, died for us and rose again, in order to reconcile all that is broken, to renew all of life. In light of God's abundant grace shown to us in Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow him in life, both as individuals and together in community, I make the following covenant, together with the other members of the discipleship circle, to which I agree to be mutually accountable:

- 1. I will seek to have an intentional time of prayer daily.
- 2. I will seek to engage the Bible daily.
- 3. I will seek to witness to Jesus' love daily, whether through words of encouragement, acts of service or direct evangelism.

In addition, I ask the group to help keep me accountable to the following three personalized items, which I have chosen in the hope that they will further help me to grow as a follower of Jesus:

l.	
2.	
3.	

As we keep each other mutually accountable we pledge ourselves to the following:

- We covenant to walk together on the journey of discipleship.
- We will watch over one another in a spirit of love and grace.
- We are willing to speak into each other's lives, and we welcome others to speak into our lives.
- We seek to be faithful in attendance at the bi-weekly discipleship circle meetings.
- When others struggle to keep the covenant, we will not judge them, but pray for them and offer our assistance.
- We will keep confidential everything that is shared in the discipleship circle.

Name:			
Signature:			
Date:			

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

1.	How do you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus in your everyday
	life?

Appendix 3: Focus Group Interview Questions

This will be a semi-structured interview, which provides me with the opportunity to ask any spontaneous or follow-up questions. Since it is a focus group, there will also be opportunity for me to clarify the questions below, should need arise:

- 1. What joys do you experience as you follow Jesus?
- 2. What challenges do you face as you follow Jesus?
- 3. How does the church support you as you follow Jesus?
- 4. What has helped you to grow as a follower of Jesus?
- 5. How would you like to grow further as a follower of Jesus?

Appendix 4: Focus Group Ground Rules and Procedure

The focus group will open with an explanation of the ground rules and procedures for the meeting (adapted from Stringer 2014, 111-113), so everyone knows what to expect.

Ground Rules

- 1. Keep what is shared in this focus group confidential
- 2. Take turns speaking
- 3. Listen to one another
- 4. Do not judge others' responses

Procedures

- 1. Describe the purpose of the meeting: to share our stories and experiences on questions related to discipleship and community, as part of a research project investigating the effect of mutual accountability on our journey of following Jesus.
- 2. Outline the time frame for the meeting
- 3. Invite all the participants to share freely; reassure the participants that everyone's voice is important, and all will be provided the opportunity to speak
- 4. Identify myself as the facilitator of the meeting, as well as my role: to ask the group interview questions, to keep the group on topic, to ask follow-up questions
- 5. Identify the note taker, and explain how the notes will be recorded
- 6. Provide participants with a copy of the pre-determined questions, and let them know that follow-up questions may be asked as well

Appendix 5: Protocol for Recorder of Focus Groups

Thank you for your willingness to take notes for this focus group! The following instructions will help you accomplish this task:

- Familiarize yourself with the set of questions I will be asking ahead of time. I will ask the questions in the order on which they appear on the interview sheet.
- 2. Record the date, attendance and location of the meeting.
- 3. Record each participant's answer to the questions. Record as fully and as accurately as you are able, using the participant's own words.
- 4. Make sure to mark the participant's name or initials next to their response.
- I may occasionally ask follow-up questions which are not part of the initial set of questions. Be prepared to record these questions, and the responses to them.
- 6. If you think it is relevant, record the participants' tone of voice and/or body posture.
- 7. Feel free to ask for clarification if you missed something that was said. It is better to ask a question than to miss something.
- 8. Be willing to assist the facilitator, if necessary, to expand the notes after each meeting.

Appendix 6: Protocol for Observer of Participant Observation

- 1. Record the date, attendance and location of the meeting.
- Record each participant's remarks during the accountability section of each meeting. Record as fully and as accurately as you are able, using the participant's own words.
- 3. Make sure to mark the participant's name or initials next to their comments.
- 4. Feel free to interrupt and ask for clarification if necessary.
- If you think it is relevant, record the participants' tone of voice and/or body posture.
- 6. Be willing to assist the facilitator, if necessary, to expand the notes after each meeting.

Appendix 7: Discipleship Circle Liturgy

We are gathered together this evening, here in this living room, with Jesus as our centre

Jesus promises that where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there

We are gathered together, each with their own work, worries and concerns

Jesus experienced and knows these, but asks us to put his kingdom first

We are gathered together, from our West African and Euro Canadian cultures

Jesus himself is our peace, removing the dividing wall of hostility and indifference between us

And so together we look to follow Jesus in life

To keep in step with the Spirit to live counter-culturally and counter-selfishly and to learn something together

All: To God be the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever! Amen. (written by Albert)

Appendix 8: Mutual Accountability Chart

Name	Date	G1	G2	G3	P1	P2	Р3		
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes		
	16								
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes		
	30 Nov.	(arriary for	the recels on	d did not un	dota oggan	tability reco	ard)		
	13	(away 101	me week an	ia aia not up	date accour	itability lect	oiu)		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes		
	27								
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	11								
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	16								
	Oct.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	30	37	37	37	37	37	37		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Yes		
	27	105	105	1 artially	1 artially	105	105		
	Dec.	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes		
	11								
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	16								
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	30								
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	13 Nov	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Nov. 27	res	res	Partially	res	res	res		
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	11	103	103	1 dicidity	105	103	103		
	Oct.	(away for the week and did not update accountability record)							
	16			1		J	,		
	Oct.	(away for the week and did not update accountability record)							
	30					T	1		
	Nov.	Partially	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Partially		
	13								
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially		
	27 Dec	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially		
	Dec.	res	Partially	res	res	res	Partially		
	' '								
	Oct.	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Partially	No		
	16				2 412 11411 7				
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	30								

Name	Date	G1	G2	G3	P1	P2	Р3		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	13								
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially		
	27								
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially		
	11	37	37	37	37	3.7	37		
	Oct. 16	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	30	168	1 65	1 65	165	168	1 65		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	13	103	103	103	103	103	103		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes		
	27								
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes		
	11								
	Oct.	No	Partially	Partially	Partially	N/A	Partially		
	16								
	Oct.	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes		
	30								
	Nov.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	N/A	Yes		
	13		1 1	1 11 1		1			
	Nov.	(away for the week and did not update accountability record)							
	27 Dan	(arrow for the great and did not undete account bility man 1)							
	Dec.	(away for the week and did not update accountability record)							
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A		
	16	103	103	1 artiarry	103	103	11///		
	Oct.	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	30		1,0	1,0	105	105			
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	13								
	Nov.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Partially		
	27								
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	11		<u> </u>						
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A		
	16								
	0-4	Vor	Vos	Dor#:=11	Vor	Vor	Vor		
	Oct. 30	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	13	168	1 68	rainany	1 62	1 62	1 68		
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	27	103		1 arciarry	103	103	103		
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes		
	11								
	1 * *	I	I .	I .	I .	1	<u> </u>		

Name	Date	G1	G2	G3	P 1	P2	P3
Nancy	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially
	16						
	Oct. 30	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Partially	Yes
	13	103	105	1 artially	laitiany	laitiany	103
	Nov.	Partially	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially
	27	•			•		,
	Dec.	(away for	the week an	d did not up	date accoun	tability reco	ord)
	Oct.	Partially Partially	Partially	Partially	No	Yes	Doutiolly
	16	Partially	Partially	Partially	INO	1 es	Partially
	Oct.	Partially	Partially	Partially	No	Yes	Partially
	30	,	,	,			
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	No	Yes	Yes
	13	37	37	D .: 11	D .: 11	37	37
	Nov. 27	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Yes
	Dec.	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially
	11	lartially	larcially	1 dicidity	larcially	103	
	Oct.	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially
	16	-	-	-	_		
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially
	30 Nov.	Yes	Partially	No	Partially	Partially	Partially
	13	res	Partially	INO	Partially	Partially	Paruany
	Nov.	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	No	No
	27						
	Dec.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	No
	11	**	**	D : 11	**	**	7.7
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	16 Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	30	103	103	1 ditidily	103	103	
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	13						
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially	Yes
	27 Dec.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	11	168	1 68	rainany	168	168	1 68
	Oct.	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
	16						
	Oct.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	30	D .: 11	T 7	D .: 11	37	37	7.7
	Nov.	Partially	Yes	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
	13				1		

Name	Date	G1	G2	G3	P1	P2	P3
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Partially	Yes
	27						
	Dec.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	11						
	Oct.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Yes
	16						
	Oct.	Yes	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Yes
	30						
	Nov.	Yes	Yes	Partially	Partially	Partially	Yes
	13						
	Nov.	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially
	27				-	_	
	Dec.	Partially	Partially	Yes	Partially	Partially	Partially
	11				•	·	

Legend:

G1, G2, G3: Group covenant items. G1 is prayer, G2 is engaging Scripture, G3 is witness

P1, P2, P3: Personal covenant items. In table 1 each member's choices are listed in order

Yes: An indication that the member kept almost all or all of the covenant requirement

Partially: An indication that the member kept part of the covenant requirement No: An indication that the member did not keep the covenant requirement N/A: An indication that the member did not think the covenant requirement was applicable

Appendix 9: Information Letter for Research into Mutual Accountability

Dear friends in Christ,

As the pastor of Holyrood Mennonite Church I invite you to participate in a research project which I will be conducting at our church, as part of my studies as a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale Seminary. I will be the facilitator of the project, as well as a fellow participant in it. All those who choose to be involved will also be given the opportunity to help shape the project, as well as to interpret the results.

The research project, titled *Mutual Accountability in the Discipleship Circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church: Helping One Another Follow Jesus*, will include all those who choose to be part of the discipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church during the fall of 2016. The expected duration of the research phase of the project is from October 1-December 31, 2016. During the month of January 2017 your help will be appreciated to interpret the data generated from the research.

The purpose of this research is to study if mutual accountability to a covenant which we create together can help us make progress together in the journey of discipleship. As we look after each other and keep each other accountable in a spirit of grace and love, will our relationship with Jesus grow? Will we grow in our practice of Jesus' teachings?

In order to answer these questions participants will be asked to share their stories of discipleship (following Jesus). Two tools will be used to collect these stories, both at the beginning and end of the research: a questionnaire and participation in a focus group. Furthermore, at each bi-weekly meeting of the discipleship circle all participants will also be asked to report on how they did at keeping the covenant. At these meetings I (or someone appointed by me) will also take notes on the things the participants share, and the interactions among us. The data gathered throughout the study will be used to write the final report.

What are the risks and benefits of choosing to be part of this research? The one foreseeable risk is the embarrassment or guilt we may feel as we share with each other our degree of faithfulness to the covenant. This should be alleviated in significant part by the fact that the mechanism of mutual accountability at our meetings will simply be the knowledge that others who care about us are waiting to hear about our progress. Where we fall short the participants agree, as will be written in the covenant, not to judge or criticize one another, but to offer each other prayer, encouragement and any other help that might be useful.

Anticipated benefits for those who participate include spiritual growth/growth in discipleship, both in terms of our relationship with Jesus, and of our practice of Jesus' teachings. It is also anticipated that the members of the circle will grow closer together in community as each one experiences the support of the others on the common journey of discipleship.

I will maintain confidentiality of all information shared, and all data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my office or stored on my password protected laptop. As will be stipulated in the covenant, all the participants in the research project also agree to keep confidential all sharing which takes place in the discipleship circle. While elements of our personal stories may be included in the final written report, no names or other identifying information will be included in the report. This report will be placed in the Tyndale library as part of my project portfolio. Copies will also be given to all research participants who would like one, and a copy will also be given to the congregation, and likely placed in the church library.

It is important that you know that total anonymity is not possible—Holyrood is a small, intimate congregation, and church members will know who is participating in the research with the discipleship circle. Additionally, church members may be able to identify the participants in the final written report based on familiarity with their stories. No aspects of your story will be included in the final report with which you are not comfortable.

I acknowledge that I am in a dual role throughout this research project, both as your pastor and as research facilitator, which raises the potential for undue influence or conflict of interest. I pledge not to pressure potential or actual participants in any way, and always to seek your best interests and the interests of the congregation. Ultimately I believe that the interests of the church and of the research are the same: to promote discipleship at Holyrood Mennonite Church. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate I will certainly continue to love and care for you as your pastor! You are also completely free to discontinue your involvement in the research at any time without consequence, as well as to withdraw any of your personal data from the study.

If you have any questions, f	eel free to contact me,	Pastor Werner De Jong, either
via my office phone (, email	
(or simp	ply in person. You may also
direct any questions or conc	cerns about the ethical r	nature of this study to the Chair
of the Tyndale Research Etl	hics Board at Tyndale S	Seminary at
You are also welcome to co	ontact my research supe	ervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman,
Associate Professor of Rese	earch Methods, Tyndale	e Seminary, via email
() or	office phone (4	

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. Grace and peace be with you,

Rev. Werner De Jong

Appendix 10: Research Study Consent Form

Mutual Accountability in the Discipleship Circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church: Helping One Another Follow Jesus

Name (please print):

1.	I have read and understood the attached "Information Letter for Research into Mutual Accountability."
2.	I understand that I will be engaging in a research exercise of mutual accountability with the discipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church. I will be asked to share my story of discipleship via questionnaire and focus groups, and I understand that observational notes will also be taken at each bi-weekly meeting of the discipleship circle.
3.	I give permission for my data to be used in the written report, knowing that it will not be included if I am not comfortable with it.
4.	I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard confidentiality of data and personal information. I further understand that complete anonymity will not be possible due to the intimate nature of the congregation.
5.	I understand the risks and benefits of the proposed study.
6.	I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.
7.	I am aware that I may direct any future questions to Pastor Werner De Jong, either via office phone (), email or simply in person. I may also direct any questions or concerns about the ethical nature of this study to the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at I am also welcome to contact Pastor Werner's research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (or office phone (
	read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study by joining cipleship circle at Holyrood Mennonite Church: YES NO
Signati	ure: Date:

Appendix 11: Key for Codes in Tables which need Defining

Some of the codes in the tables in this report are self-explanatory. The definitions below are for the codes in the tables which need defining.

Codes for Tables 3 and 4:

<u>Inner dimension</u>: Refers to the inner, individual dimension of following Jesus through nurturing a personal relationship with God, and seeking to develop one's own inner character or nurture one's own spiritual growth. Includes elements like personal spiritual disciplines

- <u>Praying</u>: Participants' responses that prayer (communicating with God) was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Engaging Scripture</u>: Participants' responses that engaging Scripture (reading the Bible, meditating on the Bible, studying the Bible) was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Journaling</u>: Participants' responses that journaling (keeping a written record which reflects on their life with God) was one way they lived out their faith.
- Reading/study: Participants' responses that reading or studying literature (other than the Bible) for the purpose of spiritual growth was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Discerning God's will</u>: Participants' statements that seeking to discern God's will, or paying attention to the promptings of the Spirit, was one way they lived out their faith.
- Other: Inner dimension codes for tables 3 and 4 which were only named by one individual. For questionnaire 1 these include keeping Sabbath, fasting, caring for one's body, seeking solitude, spiritual direction, exercising faith in God, and celebrating the Christian calendar. For questionnaire 2 these include fasting, practicing silence, repenting, exercising faith, seeking solitude, and celebrating the Christian calendar.

<u>Communal dimension</u>: Refers to the communal, corporate dimension of following Jesus through relating to, participating in and supporting the local church, the body of Christ. Includes elements like corporate worship and attending small groups

- <u>Mutual support</u>: Participants' statements that giving support to and/or receiving support from other church members was one way they live out their faith.
- <u>Mutual discernment</u>: Participants' statements that discerning God's will together in community was one way they lived out their faith.

<u>Outer dimension</u>: Refers to the external dimension of discipleship through loving others or contributing to the well-being of society. Includes elements like verbal witness and service to those in need

- Relating to neighbours: Participants' general expressions that their efforts to treat others with respect, kindness, love, etc., was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Serving others</u>: Participants' responses that serving others (practical actions to demonstrate compassion to others, like teaching refugees to drive) was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Economic life</u>: Participants' responses that economic choices (like tithing, choosing to live simply, avoiding debt) was one way they lived out their faith
- Witnessing to faith verbally: Participants' responses that verbalizing aspects of their faith in God to others was one way they lived out their faith.
- <u>Family/home life</u>: Participants' responses that loving and supporting their families was one way they lived out their faith.
- Working life: Participants' responses that the work they did for a living was one way they lived out their faith.

Codes for Tables 5 and 6:

Inner Dimension:

- Experiencing God's Presence: Represents participants who indicated they experienced joy as followers of Jesus through some sort of experience of God's presence, whether directly, in creation, or in others.
- <u>Engaging Scripture</u>: Represents participants who indicated they experienced joy as followers of Jesus through engaging the Bible, whether through reading it, studying it or meditating on it.
- <u>Friendship with Jesus</u>: Represents a participant who indicated an experience of joy through having an ongoing friendship with Jesus.
- <u>Life direction</u>: Represents participants who indicated joy is experienced as a follower of Jesus through receiving an overarching sense of direction to guide one's life.
- Repentance: Represents a participant who indicated that repenting of sin leads to joy.

Communal Dimension:

- <u>Fellowship</u>: Represents participants who indicated they experienced joy as followers of Jesus through sharing life together with other followers, by supporting and encouraging one another in various ways.
- Racial reconciliation: Represents a participant who indicated joy is experienced as a follower of Jesus through being part of a church body in which people of two different cultures (African and Canadian) seek to follow Jesus together.

Outer Dimension:

 <u>Serving others</u>: Represents participants who indicated joy is experienced as a follower of Jesus through concrete acts of service to others in some way.

Codes for Tables 7 and 8:

Inner Dimension:

- <u>Sin/self</u>: Represents participants who indicated that they experienced sin or self as a challenge or an obstacle in following Jesus.
- <u>Understanding spiritual mystery</u>: Represents participants who indicated that they find it challenging to understand the person and the ways of the God who is transcendent or above us.
- <u>Making space for Jesus within</u>: Represents participants who indicated that they find it a challenge to allow Jesus to live in and through them.

Outer Dimension:

- <u>Affluence in a world of need</u>: Represents a participant who indicated that it is a challenge to know how to respond as an affluent individual in a world of economic need.
- <u>Verbal witness</u>: Represents participants who indicated that they experienced giving voice to their faith in Jesus before others a challenge.
- <u>Vulnerability to being judged</u>: A participant's expression that it is a challenge to open yourself up and be vulnerable as a follower of Jesus in this society, especially as your actions may be judged falsely.

Codes for Tables 9 and 10:

<u>Fellowship</u>: A category of responses in which the participants indicated that the church provides support for their discipleship through the supportive relationships between its members.

• <u>Mutual support</u>: Represents participants who indicated that the church supports them through mutually supportive actions like praying for one

another, caring for one another, or helping each other remain faithful to Jesus.

<u>Teaching/preaching ministry</u>: A category of responses in which the participants indicated that they experienced support through the church's formal teaching and preaching ministry, whether through Sunday school classes, small groups or sermons.

<u>Providing Ministry Opportunities</u>: A category of responses in which the participants indicated that they experienced support through the church providing opportunities for ministry, including the discernment and use of their spiritual gifts.

• <u>Provides opportunities for service</u>: Represents participants who indicated that the church supports them by providing opportunities to serve others.

Codes for Tables 11 and 12:

Inner Dimension:

• <u>Practice/routine</u>: Represents participants' responses who indicated that practicing the spiritual disciples in a regular, routine matter, rather than ad hoc, helps them to grow as followers of Jesus.

Communal Dimension:

• <u>Fellowship</u>: Represents participants' responses who indicated that the support they receive from one another in the church or discipleship circle helps them to grow as followers of Jesus.

Outer Dimension:

Being in a secular environment: Represents participants' responses who
indicated that being in a secular environment, where faith values are
challenged, directly or indirectly, helps them to grow as followers of
Jesus.

Codes for Table 15:

Statements of challenge and struggle:

- <u>Challenge</u>: Participants' expressions of a desire to learn how to do something related to discipleship, like listening to God, or how to grow in it or do it better.
- <u>Struggle</u>: Participants' expressions of difficulty or failure to keep part of the covenant.

<u>Witness stories</u>: The stories participants told at the accountability meetings recounting specific experiences or incidences of witness. Witness is defined in our covenant as "words of encouragement, acts of service or direct evangelism."

• Witness stories directly linked to intentional effort to keep covenant: Indicates those witness stories in which participants stated that their witness directly arose from their commitment to the covenant.

<u>Feelings</u>: Participants' direct expressions of a feeling or emotion related to some aspect of keeping the covenant.

<u>Statements of benefit</u>: Participants' expressions of how keeping an element of the covenant was perceived in some way to be helpful for the participant, or how the discipleship circle accountability meeting itself was perceived to be helpful.

- <u>Practical benefit</u>: Participants' indications of a perceived benefit which demonstrated itself in a practical way in their lives.
- <u>Spiritual benefit</u>: Participants' indications of a perceived benefit which demonstrated itself in a participant's understanding of or relationship with God.
- Benefit of community: Participants' statements that being part of accountable community helped in keeping the covenant, or was helpful to their life of discipleship in some other way.

<u>Participant interaction</u>: Refers to the comments participants made to one another at the accountability meetings.

- <u>Suggestions</u>: Refers to suggestions spoken by the participants to each other during the accountability meetings.
- Words of encouragement: Refers to words of encouragement spoken by the participants to each other during the accountability meetings.
- <u>Challenges</u>: Refers to words of challenge spoken by the participants to each other during the accountability meetings.

<u>Statements of illumination</u>: Participants' expressions of how they learned something about themselves through keeping the covenant.

REFERENCE LIST

- Augsburger, David. 2006. Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Augsburger, Myron S. 1976. *Walking in the Resurrection*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. 2008. Translated by Henry Chadwick. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Averbeck, Richard E. 2010. "The Bible in Spiritual Formation." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 275-301. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. 2010. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Becker, Palmer. 2010. What is an Anabaptist Christian? Revised ed. Elkhart, IN: Mennonite Mission Network.
- Bender, Harold S. 1955. "Baptism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed February 28, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Baptism&oldid=130456
- _____. 1957. "The Anabaptist Vision." In *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, edited by Guy F. Hershberger, 29-54. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Bender, Harold S., and Myron S. Augsburger. 1989. "Evangelism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Evangelism&oldid=133274
- Bender, Harold S., and Harry Huebner. 1990. "Discipleship." *Global Anabaptist Memonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Discipleship&oldid=122479
- Bender, Harold S., Nanne van der Zijpp, Cornelius Krahn and Rebecca Slough. 1989. "Worship, Public." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Worship, Public&oldid=121336
- Berghuis, Kent D. 2001. "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (January-March): 86-103. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

- Boers, Arthur P. 1991. *On Earth as in Heaven: Justice Rooted in Spirituality*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press.
- Boers, Arthur P., Barbara N. Gingerich, Eleanor Kreider, John Rempel, and Mary H. Schertz. 2007. *Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book, Ordinary Time*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- _____. 2010. Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book, Volume 2, Advent Through Pentecost. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Bridges Johns, Cheryl. 2012. "Overcoming Holy Spirit Shyness in the Life of the Church." *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 13, no. 1 (Spring): 6-13.
- Brown, Sally. 1998. "Preaching as Spiritual Formation." *Journal for Preachers* 21, no. 2 (Lent): 26-30. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost.
- Bunyan, John. 1978. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Chan, Simon. 1998. Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Chatham, Romara Dean. 1987. *Fasting: A Biblical Historical Study*. Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos.
- Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. 1995. Authorization by the General Board of Mennonite Church Canada and the Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Cronk, Sandra. 1989. "Ordnung (Order)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed July 4, 2014. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Ordnung (Order)&oldid=102590.
- De Jong, Hielke. 2005. "Brief Glimpses into our Frisian and Danzig Heritages." Unpublished family history.
- 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, 225-249. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Dintaman, Stephen F. 1995. "The Pastoral Significance of the Anabaptist Vision." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69, no. 3 (July): 307-322. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.

- Doctor of Ministry Handbook 2016-2017 Part 1: Administration and Curriculum. 2016. Version 3.3, June. Tyndale University College & Seminary.
- Driver, John. 2015. *Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by John D. Roth. Walden, NY: Plough Publishing House.
- Dyck, Cornelius J. 1967. *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Erb, Peter C. 1986. "Anabaptist Spirituality." In *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, edited by Frank Senn. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Fee, Gordon D. 2010. "On Getting the Spirit Back into Spirituality." In *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, 36-44. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Finger, Thomas N. 1989. "Grace." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed February 11, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Grace&oldid=122408.
- Foster, Richard J. 1996. "Becoming like Christ: What is supposed to happen in the Christian Life." *Christianity Today* 40, no. 2 (February 5): 26-31. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.
- _____. 1998. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- _____. 2008. Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Friedmann, Robert. 1950. "Anabaptism and Protestantism." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24, no. 1 (January): 22-24. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.
- Fuller, Paula. 2010. "Participating in God's Mission." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 195-221. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Glerup, Michael. 2010. "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Formation." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 251-274. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

- Greenman, Jeffrey P. 2010. "Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges." In *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, 23-35. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Grebel, Conrad. 1524. "Letters to Thomas Muntzer." In *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, edited by George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, 73-85. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1957.
- Hall, Christopher A. 2010. "Reading Christ into the Heart: The Theological Foundations of Lectio Divina." In *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, edited by Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, 141-159. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Harpur, James. 2005. Love Burning in the Soul: The Story of the Christian Mystics, from Saint Paul to Thomas Merton. Boston, MA: New Seeds.
- Herbert, George. 1652. A Priest to the Temple: The Country Parson, His Character, and Rule of Holy Life. Reprinted in George Herbert: The Complete English Poems, edited by John Tobin. London, England: Penguin Books. 1991.
- Hiebert, Justin. 2014. "The Ministry of Availability and Community Transformation." In *A Living Alternative: Anabaptist Christianity in a Post-Christendom World*, edited by Joanna Harader and A.O. Green, 143-154. Garden City, NY: ettelloc Publishing.
- Holy Bible. English Standard Version (ESV). 2011. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Holy Bible. New International Version (NIV). 1984. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Holy Bible. New Living Translation (NLT). 1996. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). 1989. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.
- Howard, Evan B. 2008. *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press.
- Hubmaier, Balthasar. 1526-1527. "Twelve Articles." In *Anabaptism in Outline:*Selected Primary Sources, edited by Walter Klaassen, 74. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1981.

- _____. 1527. "A Christian Catechism." In *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, translated and edited by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, 345-365. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989.
- Hull, Bill. 2010. "Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 107-138. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Hut, Hans. 1526. "On the Mystery of Baptism. Baptism as Symbol and as Essence, the Beginning of a True Christian Life. John 5." In *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, translated and edited by Daniel Liechty, 64-81. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.
- Issler, Klaus. 2001. "The Soul and Spiritual Formation." In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ*, edited by Paul Pettit, 121-141. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Jones, Tony. 2005. *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Katangole, Emmanuel. 2009. *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Katangole, Emmanuel and Chris Rice. 2008. *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- King, Ursula. 2001. *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages.* Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring.
- Krallmann, Gunter. 1992. *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ*. Wesel, Germany: Globe Europe.
- Ladd, Brian. 2008. "Administrative Council Report." In *Holyrood Mennonite Church: 2008 Reports for Congregational Meeting*.
- Lenshyn, Chris. 2014. "Gelassenheit: Deepening the Alternative Presence of Jesus." In *A Living Alternative: Anabaptist Christianity in a Post-Christendom World*, edited by Joanna Harader and A.O. Green, 19-27. Garden City, NY: ettelloc Publishing.
- Lewis, C. S. 1956. Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.
- _____. 1966. Mere Christianity. London, Great Britain: Fontana Books.

- Liechty, Daniel, ed. 1994. *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Lind, Millard. 1973. *Biblical Foundations for Christian Worship*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Littell, Franklin H. 1947. "The Anabaptist Theology of Missions." *Memmonite Quarterly Review* 21, no. 1 (January): 5-17. Accessed January 22, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost.
- Matthews, Kevin J. 2010. "The Transformational Process." In *The Kingdom Life:* A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation, edited by Alan Andrews, 85-106. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- McKnight, Scot. 2006. *Praying with the Church: Following Jesus Daily, Hourly, Today*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press.
- _____. 2009. *Fasting*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson.
- Melrose, Mary J. 2001. "Maximizing the Rigor of Action Research: Why Would You Want To? How Could You?" *Field Methods* 13 (2): 160-180.
- Meyer, Keith. 2010. "Whole-Life Transformation." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 139-164. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Moen, Torill. 2006. "Reflections on the Narrative Research Approach."

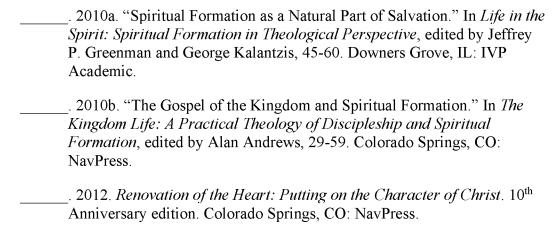
 International Journal of Qualitative Methods 5, no.4 (December): 1-11.

 Accessed June 21, 2016. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.
- Morrow, Jonathan. 2008. "Introducing Spiritual Formation." In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ*, edited by Paul Pettit, 31-50. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Moschella, Mary Clark. 2008. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- Mulholland, M. Robert. 1993. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Murray, Stuart. 2010. *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Nelson, Peter K. 2011. "Discipleship Dissonance: Towards a Theology of Imperfection amidst the Pursuit of Holiness." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 4, no. 1 (Spring): 63-92.

- Nouwen, Henri J. M. 1988. *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- _____. 2013. Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Packer, J. I. 1973. Knowing God. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Peterson, Eugene. 1994. *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Spring, CO: NavPress.
- ______. 2005. Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- _____. 2006. Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Pettit, Paul, ed. 2008. Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Philips, Dirk. 1556. "Concerning the New Birth and the New Creature: Brief Admonition and Teaching from the Holy Bible." In *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings*, translated and edited by Daniel Liechty, 200-218. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.
- Piper, John. 1997. *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Reese, Randy D., and Robert Loane. 2012. *Deep Mentoring: Guiding Others on their Spiritual Journey*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Rempel, John, ed. 1998. Minister's Manual. Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press.
- Reynoso, Peggy. 2010. "Formed through Suffering." In *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, edited by Alan Andrews, 165-193. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Sattler, Michael. n.d. "On the Satisfaction of Christ." In *The Legacy of Michael Sattler*, edited and translated by John H. Yoder, 108-120. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973.

- Savage, Carl and William Presnell. 2008. *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities*. Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute.
- Schiemer, Leonhard. 1527. "A Letter to the Church at Rattenburg." In *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, edited by Walter Klaassen, 75-76. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1981.
- Seidel, Gail. 2008. "Life Story and Spiritual Formation." In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ*, edited by Paul Pettit, 217-244. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Sensing, Tim. 2011. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Sheldrake, Philip. 2013. *Spirituality: A Brief History*. 2nd ed. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Shields, Harry. 2008. "Preaching and Spiritual Formation." In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming like Christ*, edited by Paul Pettit, 245-268. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.
- Simons, Menno. c. 1536. "The Spiritual Resurrection." In *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, *C. 1496-1561*, edited by J.C. Wenger, translated by L. Verduin, 53-62. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986. Accessed January 26, 2016. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost.
- Smucker, Marcus C. 1989. "Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation." *Global Anabaptist Memonite Encyclopedia Online*. Accessed January 23, 2016. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Spiritual_Direction_and_Spiritual_Formation&oldid=110211
- Snyder, Arnold C. 2004. Following in the Footsteps of Christ: The Anabaptist Tradition. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Stassen, Glen H., and David P. Gushee. 2003. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Stringer, Ernest T. 2014. *Action Research*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Teresa of Avila. 1904. *Life of St. Teresa of Jesus, of the Order of Our Lady of Carmel, Written by Herself.* Translated by David Lewis. 3rd ed, Christian Classics Ethereal Library. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

- Thornhill, Anthony C. 2012. "The Resurrection of Jesus and Spiritual (Trans)Formation." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (Fall): 243-256.
- Tshimika, Pakisa K., and Tim Lind. 2003. Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.
- van Braght, Thieleman J, ed. 1968. *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*. 8th ed. Translated by Joseph F. Sohm. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.
- van Overdam, Hans. n.d. "A Letter by Hans van Overdam, which He Sent to the Lords of the Law, at Ghent and to the Councilors, the Day before his Apprehension." In *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*. 8th ed. Translated by Joseph F. Sohm, 491-493. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968.
- Walton, Roger L. 2014. *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups*. London, UK: SCM Press.
- Wardle, Terry. 2003. *The Transforming Path: A Christ-Centered Approach to Spiritual Formation*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers.
- Ware, Corinne. 1997. Connecting to God: Nurturing Spirituality through Small Groups. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute.
- Watson, David Lowes. 2002. Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Wildeboer, Henry. 2013. When God Shows Up: A Pastor's Journey. Belleville, ON: Guardian Books.
- Wilhoit, James C. 2008. Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Wilhoit, James C., and Evan B. Howard. 2012. *Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Willard, Dallas. 1991. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding how God Changes Lives*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- _____. 1997. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God.*San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.



Zimmerman, Joyce Ann. 2010. "Fasting as Feasting." *Liturgical Ministry* 19 no. 2 (Spring): 72-77. Accessed January 23, 2016. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost.