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The Knowledge of God and the Knowledge of Self:
Exploring Spiritual Formation via Discernment and the MBTI®

A Research Portfolio
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Doctor of Ministry
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by
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ABSTRACT

In this Research Portfolio, the author explores spiritual formation through growing in the knowledge of God and in the knowledge of self. The specific avenue for exploring growing in the knowledge of God is discernment, and the specific avenue for exploring growing in the knowledge of self is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®. The Spiritual Autobiography tells the story of the author's personal journey of spiritual formation through the various revelations about God and self that the Lord has brought to his life. The Model of Spiritual Formation theorizes that growing in the knowledge of self can help us to hear from and know God better through discernment, thus aiding in our spiritual formation. The Research Project tested one aspect of the Model with a small group of congregants from Meadow Brook Church in Leamington, ON, and demonstrated an effective process of discernment for the participants. The conclusion of this Research Portfolio is that growing in the knowledge of self can help us to grow in the knowledge of God, which will aid us in our spiritual formation.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with worshipful gratitude to the Former of my soul, my Lord Jesus, who has lovingly led me throughout my life.

I also dedicate it to the congregation of Meadow Brook Church, my brothers and sisters who journey with me on this incredible transforming adventure with Jesus.

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I fully believe that the members of my Doctor of Ministry cohort were hand-picked by God for us to journey together in this season. All of you have influenced my studies, but much more importantly, my life and spiritual journey, in a significant way.

The professors and staff of Tyndale have blessed my life and my spiritual growth immeasurably, and I will never be the same from this experience.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES.....	xi
GLOSSARY	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: TWELVE ROOMS: STORIES OF ILLUMINATION, A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY.....	12
The First Room	14
The Second Room	17
The Third Room.....	20
The Fourth Room	23
The Fifth Room	25
The Sixth Room	31
The Seventh Room.....	35
The Eighth Room	38
The Ninth Room.....	42
The Tenth Room	48
The Eleventh Room.....	52
The Twelfth Room	58
Summary	61
CHAPTER THREE: HELPING THEM HEAR: IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT VIA PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE THEORY, A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION.....	64
The Nature of Spiritual Formation.....	66
The Outline of This Model.....	67
Premise #1: Discernment is Crucial to Spiritual Formation	68
Premise #2: Accessible Discernment via Ignatius' Consolation and Desolation	74
Premise #3: Self-Knowledge Can Aid Our Discernment	80
Utilizing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®.....	81
Narrowing the Scope of the MBTI®	84
The Perceiving Function: How Do We Process Information? (S vs. N) ...	85
The Judging Function: How Do We Make Decisions? (T vs. F).....	89
The Four Mental Functions in Discernment	93
Strategies and Applications of Model	99
Summary	101

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH PROJECT: EXPLORING DISCERNMENT VIA PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE THEORY	104
Introduction	104
Context	106
Field	107
Scope	108
Methodology	110
Methods.....	111
Phases and Timetable.....	115
Ethics.....	115
Findings, Analysis, and Interpretations	118
Outcomes	137
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	140
APPENDICES	156
Appendix A: Data Gathering Instrument	157
Appendix B: Initial Recruitment Email	161
Appendix C: Research Study Consent Form	162
Appendix D: Timeline for Research Project	164
Appendix E: Information Letter for Research	165
Appendix F: Datasets Collected.....	169
Appendix G: Revised Questions for Reflection/Discernment	171
REFERENCE LIST	175

LIST OF FIGURES & TABLES

Figure 1: MBTI® coding example of an ST answer	121
Figure 2: MBTI® coding example of an NF answer	121
Figure 3: Individual coding results per participant	123
Figure 4: Coding results for all participants as a percentage of the whole	124
Figure 5: Participants' weekly preferences as a percentage of the whole	128
Table 1: Participants of the Research Project	108
Table 2: MBTI® coding categories for analysis	119
Table 3: Participant answers according to MBTI® type	123
Table 4: Participant preferences of weekly exercises	127
Table 5: Effectiveness of research process in discerning matters.....	134
Table 6: Most common coding themes from follow-up interviews.....	135

GLOSSARY

Discernment: In this Portfolio, discernment is used to specifically mean determining where the Lord is leading a person in decision-making; “the process of sifting out what is of God, discriminating between that which expresses God’s call and anything that runs counter to it” (Liebert 2008, 8).

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®): A well-known assessment that identifies various aspects of one’s psychological type (Myers 1995, xii). The MBTI® measures “preferences”—for example, everybody has both an Introverted side and an Extraverted side, but type theory states that everyone will have a natural, in-born “preference” for one side over the other (a “default” side). Understanding these preferences can allow broad but reasonable predictions of one’s motivations and actions (Pearman & Albritton 2010, 4).

“In-preference:” A term used to describe a person who is acting in a manner that is consistent with their MBTI® type (Quenk et al. 2001, 69). An Introvert who prefers a quiet night at home, as opposed to going out to a party, is acting “in-preference.”

“Out-of-preference:” A term describing a person acting in a manner that is contrary their MBTI® type (Quenk et al. 2001, 69). These occasions happen for everyone, but are much rarer than “in-preference” actions. An Introvert who would rather be out at a party, as opposed to enjoying a quiet night at home, is acting “out-of-preference.”

Mental functions: These are the two middle letters of a person's MBTI® typology. The “mental functions” measure how one processes information, and how one comes to a decision—two crucial elements of discernment. Everyone has a preference as either a Sensor (S) or an Intuitive (N), with Sensors being methodical and detail-oriented and Intuitives being theoretical and idea-oriented in their information-processing. Everyone also has a preference either as a Thinker (T) or a Feeler (F), with Thinkers being logical and critically-minded and Feelers being empathetic and values-driven in their decision-making. These two letters combine to produce the four “mental function” pairings, of which everyone is either an ST (practical and matter-of-fact types), an SF (sympathetic and friendly types), an NT (logical and ingenious types), or an NF (enthusiastic and insightful types) (Myers et al. 2003, 40). These four different pairings will approach information-gathering and decision-making (and therefore discernment) from different perspectives.

Ignatius' “discernment of spirits:” A historical discernment technique in which one sorts through their thoughts and emotions, paying attention to what is going on within one's soul, in order to determine whether a decision is leading one closer to the Lord (“consolation”) or away from the Lord (“desolation”) (Ignatius 1963, 107–114).

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I noticed a strange fluttering feeling in my chest at various moments throughout the day. When checking my pulse, it began to feel irregular, so it was time to visit the doctor. I was otherwise feeling healthy, but something was definitely “off” with my heartbeat, and my doctor determined to get to the bottom of things. Multiple blood and heart tests later, the culprit was exposed: my vitamin D levels were alarmingly low, and this was throwing off other aspects of my body chemistry, causing the heart palpitations. It was a minor and easily treatable problem, much to my relief.

During that time, I learned more than I ever thought I would about Vitamin D. This substance is crucial to maintaining healthy bones, and has a dramatic effect on our moods, our immune system, and our body chemistry. We can take in vitamin D through diet, but we cannot take in enough of it that way—our stomachs cannot absorb our daily vitamin D needs through food intake alone. Nowadays, we can easily take an over-the-counter supplement to boost vitamin D levels when needed, but the cheapest, most renewable, and most effective way to absorb vitamin D is simply to spend time in the sun. Sunlight has all the vitamin

D that our body needs, and 15–20 minutes of daily exposure to the sun’s light will do all the work that our body requires. Now that I had been diagnosed with a vitamin D deficiency, my new task was to daily get into the sunlight, and the sun would do the life-changing work once I did. So, a new habit began of presenting myself to the sunlight every day, and as I did, my vitamin D levels returned to normal, and my heart palpitations went away.

James Wilhoit shares a similar story of the effects of sunlight as a powerful and effective metaphor for spiritual formation, in which the Holy Spirit does the work of spiritually forming us (2 Cor. 3:18)¹, while our job is to engage with Him so that He can do that work. Wilhoit tells of his infant daughter being diagnosed with jaundice as a newborn, a common condition, and the medical advice at that time was to place her in the sunlight regularly, as the light would help her liver function in the way that it should. The treatment worked, and Wilhoit writes, “What a picture of sun-born healing! Our daughter was completely passive before the cure ... We carried her there and moved her as the sunlight shifted and the day passed; the cure did not depend on her, but on her being kept in the light” (Wilhoit 2008, 78). In spiritual formation, it is undeniably the Holy Spirit doing the formational work in us, just as it was undeniably the sun doing the healing work in Wilhoit’s daughter, and myself. We cannot transform ourselves, just as I could not heal myself from my vitamin deficiency. Our role in spiritual formation is to position ourselves with Holy Spirit, just as I needed to

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references are taken from the 2011 NIV.

position myself in the sun, so that the formational work can happen. Spiritual formation is the process of Christ-followers presenting themselves to the Holy Spirit in various ways, allowing Him to transform us as we do.

Taking this metaphor a step further, from my own story of “sun-born healing,” there was something wrong with me (heart palpitations). In order to deal with the problem, there were two crucial things that needed to happen: I needed a revelation about myself (low vitamin D levels), and I needed a revelation about the sun (it would raise my vitamin D levels). Once I had this revelation about myself, and about the power of sunlight, I had my solution: I could now actively seek out the sun, which would transform my body as I spent time in its presence, and this would fix the problem. But the dual knowledge was needed first. I needed to learn something important about myself, and something important about the sun, before any physical transformation could occur.

To that end, the effects of my sunlight story are a metaphor for my own spiritual formation journey, and for the shaping of this Research Portfolio. In my minor health concern, it was a revelation of self, combined with a revelation about the sun, that allowed me to learn how to put myself in the presence of the sun so that I could be physically transformed. Likewise, in my journey of spiritual formation, dual revelation was also needed: the ever-increasing revelation of the knowledge of self, and the ever-increasing revelation of the knowledge of God, have allowed me to better encounter and experience the power of the living God, putting myself in His presence so that He might do His formational work in me.

After walking with Him in life and ministry for many years, my testimony is that the journey of spiritual formation can be enhanced via growing in the knowledge of self, which will help us grow in the knowledge of God.

This idea has roots in historical Church thought. In his *Soliloquies*, Augustine cried out that he desired to better know himself, that he might better know God (II.I.I). Calvin famously began his *Institutes* with the words, “Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (1.1.1). In *The Interior Castle*, Teresa of Avila wrote that, other than humility, self-knowledge was the most important quality a person on earth could have (II.10). Thomas à Kempis wrote, “Humble knowledge of self is a surer path to God than the ardent pursuit of learning” (Kempis 2003, 4). From a number of the great teachers in Church history, there is a recurring theme that to know and understand God better, we must know ourselves better as part of the process.

Christian psychologist David Benner gives a succinct explanation as to why this is so important when it comes to our spiritual formation: “The goal of the spiritual journey is the transformation of self. As we shall see, this requires knowing both our self and God. Both are necessary if we are to discover our true identity as those who are ‘in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17), because *the self is where we meet God*” (Benner 2004, 14, emphasis added). In other words, since we ourselves are the place where the Holy Spirit dwells, and the very place that we commune with Him is *within* ourselves (Rom. 8:11), then coming to a greater

understanding of this self becomes an important part of our walk with Him. Since we are processing, experiencing, and understanding God within the “temple” of our self in which He personally dwells (1 Cor. 3:16), then we must get to know the temple better, that we might encounter Him better there.

In our desire to discover more about the self, however, we must also acknowledge that the self that we are seeking to know is far from perfect. As fallen creatures, we are mired in what Scripture calls “the flesh,” that is, our sinful nature which desires what is contrary to the things of God (Rom. 8:3-9; Eph. 2:3). Although the Spirit of God is presently transforming our fleshly sinful state (Rom. 8:12-13), the struggle between our sinful selves and the Holy Spirit within us still rages on (Gal. 5:16-17). Thus, although we are “being transformed” into Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18), we have not fully arrived, and so our sinful flesh has the potential to mislead us as we seek to grow in the knowledge of God and self.

One manifestation of the flesh as it relates to the self is what Christian psychologists have called “the false self,” which refers to the self-image that we construct which is steeped in our sin, our ego, our wounds, our defensiveness, and ultimately, our self-deception (Calhoun 2005, 99). We create an image of ourselves that maximizes our perceived strengths, dismisses any perceived weaknesses, and shows ourselves off in the best possible light. This illusory self-image keeps us from having to face our sin and our faults, and we cling to it for this reason.

The problem with the false self, of course, is that it is false, and we who are Christ-followers are called to be transformed by the Spirit of truth (John 16:13). This self-deception must be dismantled, and there can be few things in life as difficult as confronting our own self-delusions (Benner 2004, 61). Part of the journey of spiritual formation involves the discovery of self, and part of the discovery of self must involve confronting the false self and allowing Christ to free us and form us to find our true selves in Him (Benner 2004, 72).

The opposite of falsehood is truth, and so our process to discover our authentic selves will involve communing with Christ, who is Truth (John 14:6), and in exposing ourselves to God's Word, which is truth (John 17:17). Calhoun writes, "God's Spirit of truth longs to help us detach from the lies that shape us. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth of our belovedness and our 'Christ-in-me identity'" (Calhoun 2005, 100). As we commune with God and His Word, experiencing His love and His truth, we can trust His loving grace to expose our self-deception, and we can receive His truth about who we truly are in Him (Mulholland 2016, 74).

Knowing our true self better leads to knowing God better, and knowing God better leads to knowing our true self better; these elements develop interactively, and are a key part of our spiritual transformation (Benner 2004, 30). The more we are formed by Him, the more we can find our true identity in Him. By growing in the revelation of God and of self, we are better able to connect with God and let Him do His transformational work in us.

There are many ways in which we can grow in the revelation of God: through Scripture, through ecclesiastical teaching and academia, through the community of faith, through experience, through Creation, and numerous other ways. As my various doctoral projects unfolded, what emerged of greatest interest to me was growing in the revelation of God through discernment. The word “discernment” in its simplest form means “to distinguish.” Despite all the additional information and theology that we might place upon the topic, “Discernment is not a special spiritual word. In common usage, it means to distinguish one thing from another. A discerning choice is one made by a person with the ability to choose well” (Ackerman 2001, 79). In that sense, we “discern” every time we make a decision about anything, and we are all therefore constantly discerning as we go about our day, processing information and making decisions.

In a spiritual context, however, the definition can be expanded to say that discernment “is the ability to distinguish or discriminate between good (that which is of God and draws us closer to God) and evil (that which is not of God and draws us away from God)” (Barton 2012, 10). As we desire to determine the will of God and to walk in it, we ask the question: How do I know where God is leading, and where He is not? As we learn to discern God’s will and leading more and more, we will learn more about who He is, thus increasing our knowledge of Him, ideas that I will unpack in more detail in Chapter Three.

There are also many ways that we might grow in our self-knowledge: through meditation, counseling, reflection, accountability, through trials and

struggles, and numerous other ways. As my doctoral studies unfolded, I focused more on how our personal psychological makeup affects our spiritual journey, and therefore our formation. If I better understand how I am psychologically wired, I can better understand how I best connect with God, and therefore I can be better formed by the Holy Spirit as I commune with Him.

Mulholland noted that “Psychology does ... have a significant role to play in enhancing our understanding of spiritual formation” (Mulholland 2000, 165). Growing in our self-knowledge can be aided by utilizing psychological tools which can help us in our self-discovery. While we believe that Scripture is our priority in all things, we must also acknowledge that:

... the truthful and authoritative Word of God is not a manual of all possible truths, as a moment’s reflection on disciplines such as astrophysics or endocrinology makes clear. Rather, the Bible contains a set of infallible principles and truths focused on the goal of redemption from which manuals of human learning are produced. The so-called cultural mandate set forth in Genesis 1:28 entrusts to human persons the high task of exploring, researching, codifying, applying, etcetera the worlds of human experience and culture for the glory of God and the good of the creature ... Our conclusion is that Scripture and psychology together contribute to a fuller understanding of the human person. (Beck and Demarest 2005, 108)

This being the case, increasing our self-knowledge through psychological tools can help us in our spiritual growth. One such tool is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, a popular assessment that helps us to know ourselves better (Fryling 2009, 103), and of which I am a certified practitioner. Mulholland believed the MBTI® is an important instrument to help us know ourselves better and saw it as something that could significantly aid our spiritual formation (Mulholland 2000,

165–170). Given my personal experience with the Indicator®, and my interest in this topic, it is the particular psychological tool on which my doctoral studies have focused. I use it to explore how it can help us know ourselves better, and thus know God better, thereby aiding in our formation.

While I am a MBTI® practitioner, my primary ministry role is as the Lead Pastor of Meadow Brook Church, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Leamington, Ontario. In my ministry, I am concerned primarily with the spiritual life of the congregation, and give my time to teaching from Scripture, and leading others in prayer, discernment, communion with God, and other aspects of Christian spirituality. Since my main focus is the spiritual life of the congregation, my role allows me to observe and engage with many different people who are in different places in their spiritual journey, and I have the honour of walking alongside people and encouraging them in their walk with Christ. The MBTI® serves as a helpful tool in my pastoral ministry, as I seek to engage with people in their various MBTI® types, and work with them through the lens of who they are.

My pastoral role, and the MBTI®, have no doubt played a significant role in both my own spiritual formation, and in how this Portfolio has developed. My leadership role, and my personal interest in “what makes us tick,” have caused me to seek projects and studies in my doctoral work that have formed me, and also that allow me to lead others in their own formation. As I have continued to pursue growing in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self in my spiritual

journey, I also desire to help others in their own journey, delighting in seeing God transform them as I do.

At the end of my first year of the Doctor of Ministry program, as I completed my Spiritual Autobiography, I read it over several times to discover any themes that were emerging. My story has numerous moments of encounter with God in various ways, hearing His voice or seeing Him move or observing His power and presence. I realized that much of my own formational journey has involved God revealing Himself to me in ways that have changed me, and much of my journey has also involved Him teaching me about myself, whether it be my sin, my calling, or my personality, among other aspects. The revelation of God has been crucial to my formation, as has the revelation of self, and both themes together emerged strongly throughout my Autobiography. They are an important part of my story, and thus are an important part of my formation.

At the end of the second year of studies, I finished my Model of Spiritual Formation. By that point, I had already noticed the two themes of knowledge of God and knowledge of self that had formed such a part of my own spiritual journey, and I decided to lean into that for my Model. I determined that the discernment of God's will is a crucial aspect of growing in the knowledge of God, as discerning His leading does much transformational work in us. I then combined that premise with using the MBTI® as a tool to help us know ourselves better, that we might discern better out of such self-knowledge. This self-knowledge could cause us to know God better, that we ultimately might be formed better.

In my third year, I tested one aspect of my Model for my Research Project. The expectation was that through the research, participants would learn something about themselves, and out of that knowledge would learn how to discern more effectively, and that they would encounter God and be changed through the experience. Although the short study was too small to determine whether lasting formation has occurred, I am nevertheless confident that the experience did teach the participants new things about God and about themselves, and gave them some new practical tools that, should they continue to use them, can encourage them to continue to grow in their spiritual formation.

Thus, as I look back on the last several years of doctoral studies, the themes of growing in the knowledge of God, and growing in the knowledge of self, have been important to my spiritual journey and formation, and have informed all of my major work. Knowing God better is transformative—and knowing myself better has helped me to know God better. These themes do not stand alone, but work together and inform one another; the more I know myself, the more I can know God, and the more I know God, the better I can understand myself. An ever-growing revelation of God and of self in our spiritual journey can take us deeper in our spiritual formation. The three major projects are woven together under this framework in this Portfolio, and serve as a testimony of the formational work that God has been doing in me, and in my ministry, as I have journeyed with Him in my life, my church, and through these studies.

CHAPTER TWO:
TWELVE ROOMS: STORIES OF ILLUMINATION
A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When I was a child, I was terribly afraid of the dark. I believed that something would snatch at me, grasping at me from the shadows. I always had a nightlight on, and I always ensured that the hallway light was on as well. It was scary to go down into the basement by myself because it was not well-lit, and I hated arriving home in the evening with my parents, because the house was shrouded in darkness. Immediately after my parents opened the door I would go through the house and turn on all the lights, because it felt safer—the house seemed happiest and most comforting when light was filling it. Going room-by-room and flipping switches brought more light with each switch, and with more light came more peace. My father would follow, turning off a few of the lights. “We don’t need to waste money!” he would say, quite correctly. But the fully-lit house felt the safest, and was a most welcome sight.

My fear of the dark passed as I grew, but even today, the sight of an illuminated home warms my heart. A decorated and well-lit house during the cold and dark Christmas season is beautiful. A highlight every December is to pile my family into the car, get hot chocolate from Tim Horton’s, play Christmas carols,

and drive around checking out the Christmas lights, enjoying the beauty of the seasonal illumination contrasting the cold and dark winter night.

Light pushes back darkness. It fills our eyes and makes things clear. It brightens and brings warmth. It is safe and inviting. Not only that, but light also has a way of accumulating—the more light we add, the brighter and clearer things get. One lamp cannot light a whole house, but many lamps together illuminate every corner.

We also sometimes use light as a picture of revelation—a “light bulb” flashes on and we have a clear moment of insight or understanding. Our confusion is removed, and awareness replaces it. A switch gets flipped, and we are different than we were before the illumination came. I love these “light bulb” moments of revelation when I am reading my Bible or listening to a sermon, or when I am writing a paper or doing research. As a teacher, I live for these moments, watching the light of understanding “turn on” as a congregant experiences truth in a new way.

In the most important way, Jesus is our light—that much is clear for any Christ-follower (John 1:5–9; 8:12). He brings us revelation and understanding, pushes the darkness back, and directs where we should go, calling us to walk in His light (1 John 1:7). My own journey with Jesus has felt less like a road or a river or a marathon race, but has been more like coming home to a darkened house, where, as I walk from room-to-room, a light is illuminated. Each new revelation, each new understanding of who God is, each new insight of who I am,

is like a light bulb flashing to life, illuminating the room and showing me something profound about Jesus or myself or both. Each revelation has drawn me more into His presence and has changed me for the better. Each illuminated room is a step in this life-long process of divine discovery and self-discovery. As I move deeper into this spiritual house, the dwelling becomes brighter, the picture gets clearer, the darkness is reduced, and the place feels more like home.

What follows are my greatest life lessons, my biggest “light bulb” moments, the most important illuminations that I have experienced of who God is and who I am. My journey of spiritual formation has been a series of revelations of God and self, increasingly bringing light to my life and to my understanding as I explore my spiritual home—my home with Him.

The First Room

I grew up in Burlington, Ontario, in a home where I was loved, and where my parents always pointed the family toward Jesus. My parents were not Christians when I was born, but shortly after my birth, while in Boston at a work conference, they decided to attend a church service being held in their hotel. There they heard the Gospel presented, and together surrendered their lives to Christ during an evangelical altar call. Growing up, I cannot remember ever not being in church. My parents found a Pentecostal church that was a good fit for them to start their spiritual journey. We would attend a few different Pentecostal/Charismatic churches over the years, as my parents greatly valued the

emphasis on a life-giving and interactive relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

My brother Daniel was born a few years later after a brutal pregnancy. When we were older, our parents shared with us that my mother's doctor had counseled her to terminate the pregnancy, as a healthy baby was unlikely, and my mother was seriously at risk. As my parents prayed about it, they discerned the Lord leading them to continue the pregnancy, and although it was difficult and the labour was frightening, Daniel arrived healthy and strong. It was a true story of God's faithfulness, teaching us that God's Word was more important than any human word, and that miracles really happened.

Growing up in this environment, I always believed that there was a God, but that was where it ended for me. I prayed occasionally, but did not read my Bible, and only went to church because it was required by my parents. I never questioned or had any issue with what we were taught—I never struggled with it, because I honestly never thought about it much. There was no wrestling between faith and doubt—God was probably “real”—but in no way did I consider Him a factor in my life.

Looking back, it is interesting how uninterested I was. Our church worship was loud and enthusiastic, spiritual gifts were in full effect, extended altar calls were littered with bodies laid out on the floor as people were “slain in the Spirit” (overwhelmed by the presence of God to the point where they needed to lie down), and there was always a very real expectation in the church that God was

going to be profoundly encountered at every gathering. Years later, I came to realize how strange Pentecostals seem to many other streams of Christianity, but when it is all you have ever known, it is simply normal.

In the mid-1990's, I was a teenager, and there were stories of a move of God coming out of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (formerly of the Vineyard movement). The Holy Spirit was apparently moving in powerful ways. There was much controversy, with stories of strange behaviours and unusual manifestations happening. Nevertheless, there were also amazing stories of salvation and healing and transformation happening amidst the alleged chaos.

My parents were intrigued and visited the church, and then began visiting repeatedly. As they experienced the Holy Spirit working in their lives, I witnessed their powerful transformation. My father, who was loving but stern, was suddenly softer, gentler, and happier. My mother, quiet and timid, became bolder and more confident. Our house was not unpleasant before, but there was noticeably more joy and peace in the home. My parents experienced God in a new way, and they were profoundly changed. My father later called it “being born-again, again.”

Seeing these changes was the first time in my life that I witnessed the power of God up close. I watched my parents transforming right before my eyes, as they acknowledged that Jesus was the reason that it was happening. This was the first time that I could remember thinking, “This God thing must actually be real—I am seeing the evidence with my own eyes.” God had always been “real”

in the sense that I thought He existed—but this was first time I could clearly see Him impacting our lives in a tangible and profound way. For the first time in my life, I began to actively ponder this God that I had heard so much about.

I spent the early years of my life wandering in darkness, being told that there was something more, something better than what I knew. As I stumbled through the darkness, it is as if I came upon a large house, completely in shadows, without a single light to welcome a visitor. The house is dark and frightening and yet somehow inviting—I know that I need to go inside. I feel my way through the door into the first room, and flick on the first light switch that I find.

With a snap, the first room is flooded with warmth and light. For the first time, I can begin to see clearly. This room is named, “God is Real.” Beyond the Sunday school stories from my upbringing, this truth lands for the first time: God is real, and He is involved in our lives. This first illumination of God has started my formational journey. The first room of this house lights up, and the darkness is pushed back a little bit. The light spills out of the door toward the next room in the darkened house, and I step out in that direction.

The Second Room

My parents worked hard to help me find my “thing” as I was growing up—something that I could be passionate about and work at and enjoy. I tried many activities throughout my childhood: soccer, baseball, swimming lessons,

Boy Scouts, photography classes, and more. It was mostly fun, but I was not very good at any of it, nor did I really enjoy any of it.

When I was 11 years old, my parents signed me up for “Performing Arts Camp,” a two-week summer program in which campers learned various performance skills, culminating in a musical theatre performance at the end of camp. In retrospect, it was an odd choice—I was shy, introverted, and had shown no capacity at all for the stage or the spotlight. I was uncomfortable in front of people, and the idea of being onstage in front of strangers was not something that I ever would have naturally considered.

The camp focused on Broadway shows, and our camp was doing a salute to the musical “L’il Abner.” There were far fewer boys than girls in the program, so out of necessity, every boy got a part. Even though I was completely inexperienced, I was given a handful of lines as the character “Marryin’ Sam.” On performance day, I stood on stage terrified, covered in pancake makeup and sweating under the lights. Through the nerves, I spat out one of my lines and got a loud laugh from the crowd. The audience was our parents, bound to be overly supportive, but the show went off to a stunning ovation, and I was hooked.

Other than family and school, theatre became the focus of my life. I signed up for programs and classes, did workshops, and started performing regularly with a local theatre troupe. I got more confident, both onstage and off, and as I grew older, began to play bigger roles. Over the years I was involved in dozens of performances, loving every minute along the way. I was happy on-stage, the

people I met were amazing, and I felt a sense of real purpose by being a part of a team and by using my gifts for the sake of others.

John Wesley taught about what became known as “prevenient grace” (Wesley 2011, 328). This is a “preparing” grace, extended by God to humanity, that begins to work on people’s hearts before they come to know Him. Before we can know Jesus, our hearts need to be softened, and God has shone His light for this purpose, seeking to draw people to Himself, preparing them to receive His saving grace. Looking back, I can see how this pre-salvation grace was working in my life during those years on the stage. God was at work, although I did not know Him yet.

Everything I learned in those formative years was crucial to everything else that was going to unfold in my life, things that I did not yet know but that God certainly did. The confidence that I gained was transformative. I learned how to connect with an audience, and how to fill a room with my voice. I got rather good at telling a joke. I discovered how to work with a team, and how to follow direction. I learned how to live through disappointment, and how to celebrate triumph. I learned how to collaborate on vision, and how to compromise with others. I realized how to receive criticism without it breaking me, and how to accept applause without it inflating me. On the stage, in my life, in my marriage, in my ministry, and in my friendships and my family, the lessons that I learned from my theatre days were foundational and transformative. I had not yet met

Jesus in a personal way, but I have no doubt that He was leading and guiding this stage, lovingly and graciously preparing me for everything that was to come.

In the second room of my darkened house, I have reached the light switch. The light clicks on and illumination blazes forth; the room lights up, the room that is called “God is at Work.” This season was teaching me many important things about who I was, and important skills that would drive the rest of my life. I was being formed more into who God has made me to be. I bathe in the light of this room, feeling it give me a new sense of confidence for the rest of the journey. Feeling stronger, I move toward the next room.

The Third Room

As I moved through my high school years, Jesus was still of no interest to me. I still believed in God in a general way but was not living for Him or walking with Him. My life was my own, and He was not a consideration—what I really wanted was to enjoy myself. If I paid Him too much mind, or prayed to Him too much, or tried to get more interested in the faith life, He might ask me to give up what I liked doing, and I was not willing to do that. So, I got drunk with my friends on the weekends. I slept with my girlfriend. I lied to and stole from my parents. I mocked the devout faith of Christians I encountered. I knew such things were wrong, and I felt minor guilt, but not enough to stop. But as time unfolded, I noticed little moments of spiritual awareness that were popping up in my life.

Once, I was in a high school production of “Godspell,” which required me to read through the Gospels several times to get more familiar with the show. The musical, which is essentially the teachings and parables of Jesus set to music, made Scripture alive to me in a new way. I found myself pondering Jesus regularly, and although nothing profoundly changed at that point, it seems that Scripture and Jesus were in my thoughts much more than they had been.

Another time, after my grandmother died, I was out one evening for a walk on a quiet road. Every star was visible, and it was silent and peaceful. My grandmother was a wonderful woman, who loved Jesus and loved us, and I missed her greatly. My basic belief was that there was probably a heaven, and I was reflecting on where she might be at that moment. I looked up at the infinite stars and found myself saying out loud, “God, is my Nana ok?” As the words passed my lips, a shooting star crossed the entire sky before fading away. I had never seen such a long or beautiful shooting star, and have not since. Of course, it could have been coincidence, but the timing was perfect, and I felt awed by the experience. Perhaps God had given a sign to bring comfort, which it did.

In another experience, my father dragged me to an evening church service. At the end, the pastor invited anyone who wanted to experience God’s presence to come forward to be prayed for. My dad went up to help pray for others. I sat quietly by myself, just waiting for the whole evening to be over. But my dad came up to me and took my arm. “Come on up,” he said gently. “God’s got something for you tonight.” Out of obedience to him, I went forward. My dad laid a hand on

my head and began praying for God to show Himself to me, to touch me and bless me. And I felt ... something. From within me, there was a feeling that was new. There was an other-worldliness—a sense of something “divine.” I did not have language for it, but for the first time I was personally experiencing the tangible presence of God.

It was a real moment—but I was still not willing to change. My selfish ways continued, and my sins remained. However, there was a tug in my heart that was new. There were greater pangs of guilt that accompanied my sin now. I would remember that feeling in prayer with my father and realized that God was watching me. It was almost as if something was deposited in me that night at the altar, a divine God-seed that had not yet come to fruition, but which was planted and beginning to sprout. One day, I prayed: “Lord, I know you’re there, but I don’t want to really think about any of this until after high school.” Little did I know that God apparently took that prayer, and its timeline, seriously.

In the third room of the house, I have reached the next light switch. The bulb flashes to life, and the room brightens—this one is called “God is Reaching Out.” Whereas previous rooms have taught me that God is real, and that God is working in my life, this room is where God begins to actively intersect with my life in a way that is personal and tangible. No longer merely an abstract idea of a greater spiritual power, now God is becoming evident in my life. I am not yet ready to embrace Him, but this new knowledge of who He is has started to take

root in my life. The room is shining, and the light points to the next one. Standing in the accumulating light that is growing as more rooms are illuminated, I head for the next room.

The Fourth Room

The date was August 16, 1999. I had graduated from high school a couple of months earlier, and I had decided to become a professional actor. I had been accepted into the theatre program of a respected university and was leaving in a few weeks to move on campus. Wanting to enjoy the final days before their firstborn flew the nest, my parents took me out for dinner. During the meal, my father lectured a little, as fathers are prone to do, speaking about adult responsibilities and how I should conduct myself when I moved out. He mentioned sex specifically, saying that if I were ever to get a girl pregnant, it would have a dramatic effect on my life. I felt a little sick. I was not a virgin. My dad spoke about the sanctity of sex and the preciousness of sharing it within the promises of marriage, as they had always taught us growing up. I felt worse.

I had heard plenty of “sex talks” at home and especially at church. My parents had taught me Christian values regarding sex from junior high, values which I had ignored once I reached high school. I had heard it all before, and I knew very well that my sin was wrong. But on this day, the words suddenly cut very, very deep. As we drove home, I was suddenly very aware of my sin in a way that was very new. My stomach churned as I thought about all the many

ways in which I knew better, but still had chosen the selfish and sinful way. What was scariest—what I could not shake—was the overwhelming feeling that I was not right with God, a thought that was suddenly terrifying.

Arriving home, I got alone and found myself on my knees. Not knowing exactly what to say, I kept it short: “Lord, I’m sorry for what I’ve done. I want to know You.” As the simple prayer ascended, I was suddenly overwhelmed with a powerful sense of peace and joy, which felt like waves of water crashing over me. Without language for it at the time, all I knew was that it felt incredible, and weighty, and important. The turmoil fled from within me, and the weight of the conviction was replaced with a deep hope. Wave after wave of this feeling washed over me, and it felt like all the dirt and grit of my sin was being cleansed. It felt like a baptism. I wept and trembled as joy and peace rushed through me.

The whole affair was brief, lasting perhaps ten minutes. And yet I arose feeling completely and profoundly different. That was my turning point, my “born-again” experience that Jesus spoke of (John 3:3–8), when I truly called out to Him for forgiveness for the first time, and when I truly felt forgiven for the first time. It was the dramatic moment that changed everything—my life now had a “before” and an “after”: before I came to Jesus, and after.

My unsuspecting prayer from high school had been answered—I had told God that I did not want to get serious about Him until after high school, and the Lord had recorded that statement—and then graciously and forcefully invaded my life that summer. A New Age (and completely atheist) friend of mine saw me a

few weeks after this experience. I had not told him anything about what had happened, but he looked at me funny, and commented, “Chris, you've changed. Your aura is different—you're glowing with some kind of new and radiant energy.” Transformation was indeed happening, and it was being noticed by others—even atheists!

I arrive at a huge room, the main room of the house, the central room, the room that all the other rooms connect to—the room that is called “Jesus is Lord and Saviour.” This revelation of God is the most important one, and nothing has transformed me more than this. And as the switch is turned on and as an enormous chandelier breaks out into brilliance, I suddenly see that I am not alone—a large and benevolent Shepherd is standing over me, wise and loving and strong. Strangely, it seems clear that He has always been here in the house, although it is only now that I can actually see Him. It is *His* house, and I am a guest here, although this house is increasingly feeling like home for me as well. Together, we keep moving forward toward the next room.

The Fifth Room

As a teenager moving into young adulthood, I was quite certain that I was going to be an actor. In retrospect, it seems silly, but it was what I loved most, and so I planned for my career on the stage. The theatre world can be a very dark

place, with a lot of ungodliness, but having now come to Jesus, I just knew I would glorify God through acting, being a bright light for Him in a dark place.

I had only been saved a few weeks when I went off to the theatre program in Toronto, and it was the first time that I had lived away from home. While living there, I visited the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, the same place where Jesus had done such work in my parents, years earlier. I made it my home church while at school, and I enjoyed wonderful times in the Lord's presence there.

The theatre program was an intense one—the plays we performed were dark, and glorified sin, and it was a difficult place to be a brand-new Christian. My faith was not openly mocked, but if people did find out I was a believer, it was met with raised eyebrows, followed by a different and more distant attitude toward me. I was lonely, feeling like an outcast in a world in which I had once been accepted. I focused on Jesus, on learning and growing, and I certainly did grow in my faith a great deal during this season. My grades were good, but I was not happy in my program. Theatre had once been my whole world, but it did not feel the same. But the lonely times were filled with time spent with the Lord, and even though there were difficult moments, the presence of God that filled my heart easily outshone anything else. I was happy with Him, even if the theatre world was treating me differently.

At the end of my first year, I was told that there was not a place for me in the program anymore. Looking back, this was not surprising—I clearly did not fit in there—but at the time, I was crushed. Theatre had been my dream. I had no

“plan B.” It was already May when I received this news, far too late to apply to another school. Suddenly, I found myself without a plan. With no time or options, I moved back home to Burlington, deciding to take a year off to figure out what came next.

Nowadays, the idea of a “gap year” after high school is somewhat common, but back then, it was very unusual. I moved back to my parents’ home, knowing that I would not be moving out again at the end of the summer. After a year of freedom on my own in the big city, it was not easy to come back under my parents’ roof, as much as I loved them. It felt like a step backwards. With all my friends off having post-secondary adventures, it was not easy to tell people what happened. I got a job as a cook in a restaurant and began to pray earnestly for wisdom and insight as to my future.

One evening, while out for a long walk, wrestling with my love for theatre and my current disappointing situation, I prayed sincerely, with tears: “Lord, I give the theatre over to you. I will never pursue it any further without Your permission. If You want to take me somewhere completely different, I will go anywhere and do anything.” It seemed like I truly might not ever set foot on a stage again. And yet, there was something incredibly freeing in releasing it all to God. Something lifted inside me that night. There was peace in the grief. Somehow or another, I could tell that God was going to work it all out.

A little later, I was out with some Christian friends and was sharing something from a passage of Scripture I had been reading. One friend pulled me

aside afterwards. “You really have a knack for explaining Scripture,” he said. I brushed off the encouragement, embarrassed, but he reiterated: “No, seriously, you have a way of making it clear and understandable.” During sermons at my church, I began to daydream about standing up there myself, explaining God’s Word to people, but I would quickly push away such thoughts, feeling silly at my presumption. I had never been to Bible College, no one in my family was in ministry, and my pastor was a wonderfully gifted Bible teacher. I could never live up to that and dismissed such thoughts as reactionary—I was just longing for the theatre calling that I had given over to God. I would never be a preacher—I just missed being up on the stage!

I worked hard at the restaurant, but hated it. It was frenzied and seemed meaningless. When I got through a stressful shift, I just cleaned up, reset, and got ready to do the exact same thing the next day. I longed to do something more consequential. The nice thing was that it was a fairly mindless job—I clocked in and out, and never brought work home with me. I think the Lord knew that with my tendency to think and sometimes overthink, I needed a mindless job so that my mental energy could be spent focusing on Him instead.

Nagging at me constantly was a growing sense of wanting to help people, wanting to teach Scripture to others, wanting to lead. From deep within questions began to emerge—could I pastor? Could I teach? I wrestled with the idea. In time, I began to envision it. Then I began to secretly hope that it might come to pass. Eventually I began to pray that it *would* come to pass.

One day in prayer, I had a flash of a mental picture—in it, I was sitting at the kitchen table in my friend’s apartment in Grimsby, Ontario, not far from my church. I was studying theology textbooks and writing a paper, and then I was leaving for church, where I would be ministering. It was such a strange thought—why would I be studying at my friend’s place, and why would I be working at the church? It made no sense, but I tucked the image away.

One Sunday night at church, the pastor shared a message about the calling to full-time ministry. By now I had been wrestling through this question for the better part of a year, and to hear a message that so clearly spoke to what was happening in my heart felt both jarring and somehow holy. The pastor issued a challenge: anyone who thought that they might be called to full-time ministry could come forward for prayer from the elders of the church. A few went forward, but I sat in my seat for a long time, not moving. I was both excited and conflicted. It felt like such a big step—a big commitment—but it was what I had been praying into all those months. Finally, I left my seat and stepped forward for prayer. I found myself standing up front, praying, “Lord, if this is what you have called me to, I am willing.”

Church elders laid hands on me and prayed simple prayers, asking God to confirm the calling if that was His will, and to give insight and direction for my life. Nothing remarkable happened in the moment—but something had changed nevertheless. I did not know how it would happen or what it would look like, but I knew, deep down, that this was it. I had found what I was looking for. The closing

theatre door had been divinely orchestrated. I was never meant to be an actor. I was called into the ministry.

I met with my pastor a few weeks later and shared with him the experiences of my past year. He smiled and said that when I came up for prayer that night, something inside him said, “I can see this calling for Chris. I believe it.” He gave me suggestions for further training and laid his hands on me and blessed me. From there I was off to the races, eventually enrolling in our denomination’s Bible College to begin my ministry journey.

There’s a passage in Deuteronomy 32:10–12 where the LORD is likened to a mother eagle, ripping up the nest to force her chicks to leave its coziness, and then catching them and soaring with them as they learn to fly. These verses brought me great comfort in this season, as I felt like my planned and comfortable world had been torn from me when the theatre door slammed shut. Yet God was still with me, forcing me to leave what was comfortable, only for me to find that He was carrying me as I leapt into something new. The disappointment of the theatre door shutting was real, but it was a necessary step to finding my true calling. Out of great disappointment came great blessing, in time.

There is a Scripture verse that gets overused, and it is often opined that it was a promise given to Israel, at one point in time, and not to Christ-followers today. However, I find this an overly simplistic way to look at the God-breathed nature of Scripture, *all* of which is “useful” for the Christ-follower (2 Tim. 3:16). God says, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans to prosper

you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,” (Jer. 29:11).

Through this season, I learned that God always has a plan, and He has an uncanny way of bringing it to pass. The Lord had replaced my mourning with joy!

The next light flashes on, illuminating the next room, bringing the revelation of where I would be spending my life’s labour. This room is named “You Have a Calling.” This room feels a little frightening and yet also somehow completely comfortable—the thought of being a minister was overwhelming, and yet at the same time it was like putting on a worn-in jacket that hangs on you just right. This revelation of self has shown me more of who God has created me to be, and how I may best serve Him. From now on, I will move through my house with greater purpose, and although I do not know what the next rooms are going to bring, I know what my role is going to be as I move into them. With this new sense of hope, I follow the Lord toward the next room.

The Sixth Room

As I continued growing in my relationship with Jesus, I found that reading Scripture brought me a lot of joy, as did studying other Christian teaching. I also felt especially close to God in times of musical worship. I began to think of these times as “meeting places” with Jesus—through worship, reading and study I was connecting with His presence in a real way, finding refreshment for my soul as I did. I joined a small group at my church, and eventually co-led it. I was gobbling

up Scripture, worship music and Christian teaching as quickly as I could. My knowledge and my intimacy with God were deepening, and I noticed my character starting to shift in various ways. I was overwhelmed with feelings of His presence and love, and felt filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. I have never since had a season quite like it, and I wistfully miss those days a great deal.

It soon became clear how my many years in the theatre had been preparing me for ministry—the stage was instrumental in increasing my confidence, public speaking skills, leadership, humour, social skills, etc. That whole previous season was preparation for this new one. I joined the worship team of my church, eventually leading musical worship as well. All my years on the stage had well-prepared me for standing on the worship platform, and I heard the comment more than once, “You seem so natural up there, not nervous at all!” Since worship was one of the places where I felt closest to God, leading others in musical worship was a special joy. Watching others connect with God in worship, as well as seeing others gain new understanding from God’s Word, were quickly becoming especially important to me.

Once, on a weekend spiritual retreat with our small group, I was annoyed with the attendees. I was trying to lead them in worship, but they were not responding. I was trying to teach the Scripture, but they seemed bored. At one point, I asked them to stand for a time of musical worship, and they complained. “Hey! Jesus died for you—you can stand up and sing for Him!” I said with an attitude. Everyone stood up, but the worship time was not overly powerful.

A few weeks later, I went for a walk with a member of the group. He was older than me, and more experienced in Jesus. “You seemed pretty annoyed with us at the retreat!” he said. “What was that about?” I explained my frustration that we had an opportunity to connect with God in worship, and no one was engaging. There was an opportunity to meet Him in the study of the Word, and no one seemed interested. I was annoyed that we had come on retreat to seek Him, but no one seemed interested in meeting with Him after all.

“I don’t really connect with God in worship,” my friend said. “And group Bible study usually goes right over my head. I like meeting with God out in nature—my best God-moment of that retreat was hiking out in the woods, spending that time with Him.” I was shocked. “But ‘God inhabits the praises of His people,’” I said (Ps. 22:3 KJV). “And His Word gives us life! (John 6:63). *Those* are the places that we are supposed to meet with God!”

But my friend disagreed. He mentioned 1 Corinthians 12:12–21, speaking of the Body of Christ metaphor. We are all united in Jesus, but we are also created very differently from one another. Some people are wired one way, some people another. He felt close to God in nature, others felt close to God in serving, others felt close to God in the area of justice, fighting for a cause. I did not know it at the time, but he was pointing me to the idea of “Spiritual Pathways”—that although Jesus is the only way to God, there are nevertheless many pathways through which we can connect with God through Jesus (Thomas 2010). How one

encounters the Lord can look quite different person-to-person, and everyone needs to discover how to engage with the Lord in their own way.

This should have been obvious, but I needed to learn it nevertheless: we are all different. Of course, I knew that, but I did not know that it applied to how we connected with God. I would continue to connect with God deeply through worship and study, but I also began to look at how I might help other people connect with God in others ways, not necessarily forcing them to my own path. By beginning to embrace how He had made me, and understanding how He had made others differently, I was another step closer to being the minister that I was called to be.

Arriving in the next room, another light sparks on, another area lights up—this one called “God Has Made You Unique.” This revelation is not just for me, but for others that I will encounter on my journey. I was not just learning how God made me, but how God made others, and how understanding this can help us to connect with Him better. This knowledge transformed my entire outlook on myself, on others, on ministry, and on how all of us may go deeper with God in our spiritual journeys. With this new revelation, I am feeling more comfortable, more like myself in my home. With a new sense of self, a self that is increasingly well-connected to my Lord, we step into the next room.

The Seventh Room

Since childhood, my father was (and is) a strong spiritual presence in my life. I do not know anyone who has more faith than he has, and his love for the Lord impacts every aspect of his life. He speaks of Jesus the way most people speak of their spouses, as if the Lord were as real and present to him as his wife is, which is indeed the case. My dad is strong and passionate—a Phinehas in his zeal for the LORD (Num. 25). He is logical in his approach to faith, and combined with his strength of will, this makes him a force for the Kingdom of God. He is the type of man that you want to take with you to the car dealership when you are negotiating—his confidence and strength of personality means that you will probably get a better price than you would have on your own.

My mother is gentler, and has always been a source of encouragement. Where my dad is forceful and truthful, my mother is kind and gracious. The balance between the two is beautiful—my dad would push us, strengthen us, and prepare us for life, while my mom was the source of love and kindness that we needed when things got tough. If Dad was the one you wanted with you at the car dealership, Mom was the one you wanted on a bad day. Her faith is quieter, but always present, always hopeful, and always optimistic. She sees the best in everything and radiates a deep sense of abiding with God.

As I continued to grow in my faith, my parents were the most important spiritual guides in my life, a role that they still hold today. However, as I began to prepare for life in ministry, there were now understandable limitations to their

guidance. My parents could lead me in the ways of the Lord, and would continue to do so, but they could not guide me in the ways of ministry—neither one was a minister. They would remain the most important mentors in my life, but that circle necessarily needed to expand.

One day, as I began to prepare to move away to Bible College, our church pastor called me in for a meeting. He was a man deeply devoted to the Word and to the Holy Spirit, and had led the church faithfully for many years. He loved Jesus, loved Scripture, and loved the presence of God. He was a wonderful encourager to his congregation, and we all loved him dearly. We got together, and he shared that he had a proposal that the church leadership had been discussing and praying about. Rather than me going off to school for four years, would I ever consider joining the church staff, and doing my education online from home? I could be trained and mentored in leadership, preaching, pastoral care, and anything else in which I was interested, giving me some real-world ministry experience in a healthy and growing church.

It sounded like heaven! Having already lived a dorm-room life during my year in the theatre program, I was not overly interested in doing it again. And given that my natural inclination in study is for real-world application, rather than just theory alone, I was happy to trade four years in a classroom for four years of hands-on church experience. Our pastor offered to take me on as a spiritual son, and it was an easy decision to say “yes.”

At around the same time, my friend with the apartment near the church was getting married. Earlier I mentioned that I once had a strange picture come to mind in a moment of prayer, and that fall, I found it fulfilled—I did indeed find myself regularly sitting at the kitchen table in my friend’s apartment—now *my* table and *my* apartment—reading theology textbooks and writing papers, and often leaving to go to the church for ministry. The vision had come to pass.

I began a Bachelor of Theology via distance education, and began my position at the church, entering a formal mentoring relationship with my pastor. Calhoun says, “Mentoring is passing on what you have” (Calhoun 2005, 165), and this my pastor did in abundance. He took me under his wing, meeting with me regularly, answering my many questions, sharing from his wisdom and experience. He took me along with him on ministry excursions. He brought me into meetings and counseling times with him. He walked me through how to prepare a sermon, and how to lead a board meeting, and how to interpret a church budget. He invested much in my life. He had rich understanding as it related to people, churches, ministry, and most of all, Jesus. These things he shared with me, and all of it was invaluable. As of this writing, it was 19 years ago that this mentoring relationship began, and it continues to this day. I say with unquestionable conviction that I could not be doing what I am now doing without his ongoing influence, encouragement, and prayer.

I had already learned this to some extent with my parents, but in meeting and learning under this man, another great light switches on, the next great room lights up, this one called “You Need a Guide.” This revelation was something I needed to learn about myself, and it greatly transformed my outlook on life and ministry. I simply cannot do this on my own, in life or in ministry. I need someone who is further ahead of me, and someone who knows more than I do, who can teach me how to get to where they are. As I move through my house room-by-room, it is as if my parents and my mentor are already ahead of me in the next rooms, calling me forward, telling me how to get to where they are in the Lord. I have been blessed with other spiritual guides through the years, but my parents and this mentor have been the most important. With them calling me forward, and the confidence that comes from trusting that they already know the way, the Lord and I step out toward the next room.

The Eighth Room

During this time, I was working at the church and moving through my studies. One evening, a beautiful young woman walked into the service. We were introduced and began casually dating. Things began to get more serious, but we were cautious—she was leaving at the end of the summer to move across the country for a one-year Bible College program. We decided to keep seeing each other, but both committed to prayer before we moved into anything too serious.

One evening we went for a long walk, accompanied by a long talk. I was nervous as I shared with her that as much as I was smitten, my sense of the Lord's leading was that we should not pursue a relationship. This was not what I wanted, but it felt like it was what God wanted. I worried about hurting her, but to my relief, she shared that her sense of discernment was exactly the same. We were both disappointed, but decided that we would enjoy one another's company until she left, without pursuing things romantically any further.

However, upon hearing this news, many of our friends and even our respective parents questioned the decision. "You're not getting *married*, for crying out loud, just explore the relationship, see where it goes! Don't put so much pressure on it. You never know where things might go, but just go with the flow and enjoy yourself!" We heard these things repeatedly, and they started sounding very wise. We heard them so consistently that one evening we went for another long walk, with another long talk, and asked ourselves, "Did we miss God on this, maybe?" The voices of the many, coupled with the fact that we had true feelings for each other, meant that we ultimately decided that we would indeed date, and see what developed before she left for school.

What developed was that we fell in love, and fell hard. It was an incredible season! We laughed a lot. We prayed and worshipped together. We shared adventures. The love was young and pure. I had dated girlfriends before, but for the first time, I felt true joy in another human being. For the first time, I began to seriously ponder a possible future together. And yet, ever-looming was her

departure for school that fall. As the summer drew to a close, the anticipation of our separation weighed heavily. I was starting to wonder if I had indeed found “the one,” a thought that was enthusiastically shared by parents, friends, mentors—almost everybody. One friend cautioned me: “Guard your heart, Chris. Please be careful.” I thanked her politely, secretly annoyed that she could not see how good this was.

That fall, my girlfriend left for school, and it was heartbreaking. We cried at the airport, and then she was gone. But she was only going to be gone for a year, and we could endure anything for a year. She got settled out west, and we phoned all the time. Yet, as time went on, she began to seem distant. She was experiencing exciting new things, meeting new people, wanting to give herself fully to the adventure out west. “Before we met, I wanted to give this year to God,” she said. “That’s why I came out here—I wanted Him to have all of me.” The distance and the separation began to feel oppressive, and we were feeling pulled in two different directions. As we talked and prayed through this, one night we decided that the best thing to do for her would be to end the relationship, as devastating as the thought was to both of us, so that she could be free to pursue the Lord that year. “Please make this count!” I said to her during our tearful final phone call. “If I have to give you up, please make it worth it—run hard after the Lord and get everything that He has for you this year!”

A long season of heartache followed. I missed her terribly. I was incredibly angry and jealous when I heard she had met someone else at school and

was dating him. It was awkward whenever she came home to visit, as our social circles were still the same. Seeing her was painful. The season was disappointing and discouraging, missing her terribly and grieving the lost love in my life.

But when I look back on the whole story, I believe all the pain could have been avoided. It all traces back to that first long walk and long talk, when we jointly agreed that the Lord was saying that we should not pursue a romantic relationship. That was our mutual understanding of God's will, and in retrospect I wonder why we were so quick to lay that discernment aside. And ultimately the answer is, "Because we cared about each other—and we really wanted to be in a romantic relationship!" But that desire caused us to lay aside God's leading, and ultimately led to all the heartache that followed. Looking back, I believe that He knew that we were not going to end up together, and that He wanted to spare us the unnecessary pain. I also believe that, had we listened in the first place, we would have experienced disappointment, but the road would have been much smoother long-term. As is often the case, retrospect is a very good teacher.

This young lady was the most incredible woman I had ever met, and would remain so for many years. She was the bar by which I measured all other dates. She set that bar until years later, when I met another beautiful young woman, who, respectfully, demolished that bar and redefined everything.

The next lamp flashes to life, and another room is illuminated, this one called, "Listen to the Lord." In this place, I receive some of the most important

revelations of my journey with Jesus: Discernment is crucial to our walk with the Lord. I did hear from God, and I have that ability, by His grace. God's will is paramount. Seek it, and once I have found it, submit to it. Even godly guides and friends can give poor advice. When God says "no," it may disappoint, but He knows best. Listen to the Lord. I have certainly not always heard from God perfectly, I have sometimes missed His leading—but I have never again purposefully ignored His leading, like I did in that season of my life. All of these revelations of God and of self affected me greatly through the heartache of this season, and became a permanent part of becoming the child of God that I am. Knowing that I can discern His will, and trusting that He is leading me in a good direction, even if I cannot always see it, we continue through the house.

The Ninth Room

After this, I embraced singleness for a season. It was a season of much prayer, and no dating. I decided that if God wanted to bring me a wife, He could, but that I would not actively seek one. For several years I was single, throwing myself solely into my schooling and my ministry. I finished my Bachelor of Theology, and I was looking for full-time work, which my home church could not afford to offer me. With the church's blessing, I began to prayerfully examine different ministry opportunities.

One day, my mentor was camping near Amherstburg, Ontario, when suddenly a torrential storm broke out, soaking his family thoroughly. Initially

planning to go to a hotel, my mentor then remembered that he knew a local pastor in the area. He called and asked if his family could crash at the pastor's church that night, rather than spending money on a hotel room. The local pastor agreed and met them at the church to let them in to spend the night.

Looking back, it is mind-blowing how much of my life has been affected by one sudden thunderstorm. As the two men caught up, the local pastor mentioned that he was retiring soon, and that he and the church leadership wanted to hire someone younger who could eventually take over the church after he retired. However, they wanted someone who would first sit under the pastor's leadership as an Associate Pastor for a time, working out a slow transition where he would increasingly move out of his position into retirement, while the Associate increasingly transitioned into the Lead Pastor role, hopefully seamlessly passing the baton for the pastors and for the church.

My mentor gave him my name and number. As the interview process unfolded, the Lord confirmed that this was indeed what was next for me and the church. I moved from Grimsby to Amherstburg as the church's Associate Pastor. Eventually I took over as Lead Pastor when the pastor retired a year later, with the transition happening as smoothly and seamlessly as he had prayerfully hoped.

The time in Amherstburg was both an invigorating season, as I threw myself into the life of my new church, but also a lonely season. I was now hours away from any family or friends, carrying the weight of a church as a young Lead Pastor for the first time—and I was doing it by myself, without a helpmate,

coming home to an empty house every night. The solitude gave much room for time with God, and communion with Him was sweet, and also challenging. I was forced to confront many various aspects of my character—pride, lack of faith, stubbornness, and other things. I wrestled through such issues with Jesus in the solitude and the silence of my singleness. It was not easy, but it was transformative.

While I was being worked on by the firm and gentle hand of God, I still longed to be married one day. I could see the value of being single from all that God was doing in me in that season, but from time to time I would ask a girl out anyway, and it always went disastrously. I was continually being reminded that God would make this happen, not me, and it would happen in His time, not mine.

At one point during that period, I felt prayerfully led to engage in a 21-day fast, sensing that I should be praying and fasting for my wife-to-be, wherever she was. Since the fast was going to be for 21 days, I decided to take each day to pray for one quality that I was praying for in my future spouse. I kept a journal of the process, writing down the prayer that I prayed each day (“Day One: Father, I pray for a worshiper ...”; “Day Seven: I pray for a woman who challenges me ...”; “Day Thirteen: I pray for a woman who will be an amazing mom ...”, etc.). The fast ended, and it felt powerful and meaningful, but nothing changed at the time. It would be two years later, on a Sunday in December, that our church was hosting our annual Christmas dinner. This particular year, a group of young adults were visiting, and I chatted with them for a few minutes. One of the young

women was a beautiful blonde with blue eyes and a stunning smile. I was intrigued. Her name was Sarah.

Our first date was a smashing success, full of laughter and connection and many things in common. More dates followed, and I was smitten. Sarah was smart and mature, fun and funny. She was strong and strong-willed, which I had been praying for. She was joyful, which I had also been praying for. Most importantly, she was a passionate worshiper, deeply committed to serving and following Jesus, which I had been praying for most of all. I pulled out my prayer journal from my fast two years earlier, and Sarah was the fulfillment of everything I had prayed for, plus much more. Soon enough, I proposed, and thankfully she said yes.

One wedding concern that we had was that our date was set for August 2nd in nearby Windsor, Ontario, which is a brutally hot and humid city, especially during the intense heat of August. We were going to have an outdoor wedding in one of the hottest Canadian cities at the hottest possible time of the year. It would not be an overly pleasant experience for everyone to be sweating profusely through their suits or having their makeup dripping off their faces!

We turned to the Lord. “Scripture says that we do not have because we do not ask,” I said to Sarah (James 4:2). “That’s a bad reason to not have something. Of course, God can say ‘no,’ but let’s not ever miss a blessing just because we did not ask for it.” We prayed very specifically: “Father, you know how hot August can be. And we believe You control all things. We pray for a beautiful wedding

day—and since we are wanting to ask specifically, please send a thunderstorm the night before the wedding, to break the humidity and give us a cooler wedding day. But, Thy will be done!” It is always wise for us to add that last part (Matt. 6:10).

The night before our wedding was our rehearsal, and it was oppressively hot and humid. Afterwards, we headed to a home for a barbeque in the soggy heat. A humid wedding would not be the end of the world, of course, and we were at peace—the night was filled with joy and celebration, anticipating the day to come. At one point, Sarah and I walked down to a nearby beach, our last time together until I would see her coming down the aisle. We looked out over Lake Erie, shimmering in the heat. As we stood, peaceful, there came an unmistakable sound: softly, off in the distance, we heard the rumble of thunder. As we looked out over the water, flashes of heat lightning began to flicker across the sky. The thunder became clearer, more pronounced. Dark clouds filled the horizon and began moving toward us. We hurried back to the house, laughing as the heavens opened and as the rain began to pour down, as thunder shook the windows and lighting lit up the night. Sarah and I looked at each other in awe—we had prayed for this, prayed for *exactly* this, and it had happened just as we had asked.

It stormed through the night, but our wedding day dawned bright and clear, a comfortably warm day but one where the storm had shattered the humidity. Before the ceremony started, a friend tearfully whispered to me, “Look at this day God gave you! His favour is shining down upon you guys!” And I gratefully acknowledged that this was true. I could not hold back the tears as

Sarah came down the aisle. All of God's faithfulness in my life seemed to crescendo into this moment. Sarah and I stood before the Lord and before everyone we loved, and we made our vows to God and each other. We celebrated the day with our loved ones, laughing through it all. Sarah fulfills everything for which I had been fasting and praying, and more. Other women I had dated had some of those qualities, but Sarah had them all in abundance, and all the years of waiting and fasting and praying were proven entirely worth it.

Another light illuminates another room in my house, this room called "God's Best is Worth Waiting For." But this room is different than the others visited so far. Jesus has been moving through my house with me, and parents and guides have been in other rooms, calling for me to follow, but now, as this room lights up, I have a beautiful, strong, and godly woman at my side. From now on, I will be exploring this house with a partner. From now on, any new light bulbs flickering on will be with my wife by my side, with her experiencing the light too. I find myself looking back and thanking Jesus for the heartache of lost love, grateful that He shut other doors, understanding that He always knew what was best. A transforming revelation of God and self is learned: God's best is always better than mine, and His best is always worth waiting for. With my waited-for wife now at my side, we set out together and reach for the next room.

The Tenth Room

Sarah and I were loving the first year of our marriage, adoring our church, and beginning to talk about how we might renovate our house when we started having kids. We were talking in terms of the next five-to-ten years, figuring out how we could arrange bedrooms, how many kids we might have, etc. It was a happy time. We loved each other, we loved our life, we loved our church—it was exciting to plan for our future there.

One Sunday at church, we began our musical worship, and as I prayed and sang, suddenly a thought rose sharply in my mind, so clearly that it might as well have been audible: “Your time at this church has come to an end.” It was so startling and clear that I trembled, and I was so sure I had heard from the Lord that tears began to fall. It was so moving, so humbling to be spoken to like that—but I also did not like what I had been told. We loved our church and were looking forward to many more years of ministry there. But I had no doubt that I had heard the voice of God. As I stood there, stunned, my immediate concern was how to tell my wife. She too loved the church and our home—possibly moving away was not going to be a pleasant thought. I looked at my wife, who was passionately worshiping Jesus as she always does, and dreaded what was coming.

The rest of the service was a blur, and afterwards we headed home. As we drove, I was rehearsing what I needed to say, when my wife spoke. Her voice cracked as she said, “I think our time at this church is coming to an end.” While I had been hearing from God, Sarah was having her own moment with Him,

discerning the same thing that I was. We each shared what had happened, and we drove home holding hands, heartbroken at having to leave, yet filled with a sense of holy awe. There was never a doubt—God had spoken, and we knew it.

So, we resigned our church, and entered a season of prayer, waiting, and discernment that ultimately led us to a new season of ministry at a church in Sudbury, Ontario, several hundred kilometers from anyone we knew. Summers were short and winters were brutal. But, we settled into our new home and our new life as true northerners. It was lonely, far from family, but our loneliness soon eased when we joyfully learned that Sarah was pregnant with a girl.

God has designed pregnancy brilliantly, in that you have nine months to try and get your head around everything coming. Sarah's pregnancy was smooth, and the preparations went as well as they could for first-time parents who did not have a clue as to what was coming. As the big day clicked closer, I was full of excitement and nervousness. Would I be a good dad? What would our girl be like? How will I handle all of this? How will *we* handle all of this?

It was on a Sunday morning that Sarah began to have occasional pangs of pain, and she elected to stay home from church. The contractions were far apart and irregular, so we likely had a long way to go. I went to church to lead the service and preached the most distracted sermon of my life. Arriving home, things had not progressed much, so we watched a movie, took a nap, walked around, and felt the anticipation rise as the contractions began to escalate. When we finally

drove to the hospital that night, there was an overwhelming feeling of surrealness—*this is actually happening!* This is our last day on earth child-free!

The labour was long but smooth, and Kaylee was born around lunchtime the next day, which was Family Day—fitting, as it was the day our family first expanded. That night, I took over baby-duty for a few hours so that my wife could get some much-needed sleep. I held my brand-new girl in my arms, walking around the room, speaking to her, and praying with her and for her. “I’m your daddy,” I whispered. “I prayed for you, and I waited for you, and I love you. I thank God for you, and I will never stop praying for you.”

“You’ll never know a love like this,” I had been told. “It’s like nothing you’ve ever experienced.” I found this to be one of the truest sentiments ever expressed. My heart felt like it was going to explode—I literally felt the sensation in my chest. When I was not with her, my arms ached to hold her again. And amid it all, there was a sense of holy awe—“Heavenly Father, you love *me* like this.” It was beyond comprehension, but at the same time felt more real than any emotion I had ever felt. Becoming a father showed me more of what God’s love was like. The apostle Paul prayed that the Church would “know this love that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:17–19)—that they would somehow comprehend this incomprehensible love. Becoming a father got me one step further in understanding this.

My son was born a year and a half later, and what I assumed would be somewhat familiar was anything but. The pregnancy was smooth, but the labour

was a nightmare, with multiple terrifying moments. Still, the turmoil transformed into joy, as Matthew came and was placed in our arms. For this second child, to some extent I knew what to expect, but it did not make the miracle any less profound. As with Kaylee, I walked with him in my arms that first night, praying and speaking over him. “I’m your daddy, Matthew. You’re my son, and I love you. I will always love you.”

With much gratitude, I can say that I was loved by my parents, by my brother, loved by friends growing up, and dearly loved by my wife. But it has been the love of my children that has transformed me the most. There is no human relationship that has pushed me more to be a better man in every way. This love points me to the love of the Father, giving me a glimpse of how great His love is toward us (1 John 3:1)—love that transforms us.

The next room bursts forth in light—but as this room illuminates, my wife and I are suddenly accompanied by two new passengers to journey through the rest of this house with us, beginning here in the room called “Love Will Transform You.” This new knowledge has come from God and shows me more about Him and about myself. I have experienced great transformation through God’s love. I have also experienced love through other human relationships, but never as profoundly as now. This love has redefined all other love in my life and helped me understand God’s love better. Now I not only have my Lord over me, my guides ahead of me, and my wife at my side, but now I have two trusting and

precious souls that I need to lead and guide and love on this journey as well. As I lead them and love them, they love me and somehow also lead me too—leading me to greater love, greater maturity, and greater potential as a man. The revelation of this room is clear: Love is transformational—and other than the Lord’s, no love on earth has transformed me more than this. My wife and I take tiny hands into ours, and we move forward as a family to the next room.

The Eleventh Room

While pastoring in Sudbury, I increasingly struggled. There were many wonderful people in our church, but it was also a community in which people more or less stuck to themselves—building friendships was difficult, and we found ourselves very lonely. Our marriage and our children kept the isolation at bay, and overall, it was a happy season of life because of my family. But I was increasingly feeling disconnected at work, and I was beginning to resent the endless tasks and expectations that went with my job.

In this season, I began working on my Master’s degree. One course was called “Leadership Development.” An element of the class focused on self-discovery and examined how our personalities contributed to our personal leadership style. The professor’s wife was a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) practitioner, and she led a session, having us do an online assessment and explaining its results to us. The MBTI® measures various aspects of a person’s “psychological types,” determining how an individual is energized,

takes in information, makes decisions, and approaches the world (Myers 1995, xii). By determining these things, a profile is created that demonstrates a reasonably accurate picture of a person's attitudes and behaviours.

I had never taken this assessment before and was not familiar with the various personality aspects that the MBTI® explored. The only thing of which I was vaguely aware was the difference between Introversion and Extraversion. Since my upbringing, education, and ministry were entirely within the Pentecostal world (a very loud and gregarious expression of the faith), and since I was employed as a Pentecostal pastor who legitimately enjoyed and cared for people, I had always assumed that I was an Extravert, based on my limited understanding.

As it happens, my limited understanding was wrong—my results showed me to be an Introvert, and as the practitioner explained what makes an Introvert tick, I could not deny that this is who I am. Not only am I an Introvert, I learned that I am apparently an “INFJ” on the MBTI®—an Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling and Judging type. As I took the following weeks and months to explore what this meant in more depth, I found it incredibly eye-opening. Suddenly, I made a lot more sense. INFJs are reflective, cautious, imaginative, creative, empathetic, values-driven, and structured—all qualities that describe me. The “F” meant that I cared for people and was driven to encourage and help others, which was why I had mistakenly assumed I was an Extravert, but Introverts need much quiet time to recharge, and find too much social activity draining, which was certainly me.

This information was life-changing. When Isabel Briggs Myers wrote *Gifts Differing*, her seminal work on the MBTI®, she concluded by quoting Romans 12:4–8, which talks about God giving different gifts to different people, and how all gifts are needed for the benefit of the Body (Myers 1995, 202). Although the book was secular, Myers saw that the MBTI® could be a helpful tool in understanding the gift of our God-given personality type, and how our gifts help us to connect with God, and how they could benefit those different from us. As I learned more about who I was, I found myself grateful for the increasing understanding of how I had been “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

I read widely on the subject. I began to learn how to pick up on cues from others that indicated their psychological type to me, and found it an incredibly helpful. If I was speaking with an Extravert, I knew I needed to approach them differently than my own Introverted preference would want. I learned to speak to Sensors with facts and figures and data, and to make sure that Thinkers heard some sound logic and reasoning in my points. As I ministered to people, this growing understanding of psychological type was invaluable, helping me to connect with people and thus build bonds that were deeper than I might have been able to build without such knowledge. There were, however, even larger implications to come.

I was taking my final course for my Master's degree—“Spiritual Classics.” As the course began, we introduced ourselves, sharing who we were, a little bit about our family, what we did for a living, etc. In his own sharing, the professor

mentioned that, besides being a teacher, he was a certified Myers-Briggs® practitioner. As I spoke, I shared about my family, and that I was a Lead Pastor in a Pentecostal church, and then I threw in off-handedly, “And by the way, professor, I am an INFJ on the MBTI®.” Equally off-handedly, he replied, “Huh! I’m not sure if I’ve ever met a Pentecostal Lead Pastor who was an INFJ!”

His comment nagged at me for a few weeks, until I eventually asked him what he meant by it. I had been struggling in my church and my role, and I was curious if his remark might bring insight. “I know it was just an off-hand comment,” I said, “but I am just curious as to why you said it.” While assuring me that it was indeed just a light comment, he nevertheless explained what he meant. “Pentecostals value spontaneity,” he said, “being ‘led by the Spirit’ in the moment, while INFJs are very structured planners. Pentecostals value openness and transparency, while INFJs tend to be private. Pentecostals are exuberant and expressive, while INFJs are usually more reserved. Pentecostals like to leave things open-ended, while INFJs value closure.” He went on, but the gist of it was that my particular personality type did not match what Pentecostal churches are typically looking for in their pastors.

As my professor shared, I initially felt surprise, followed by a surge of memories from thirteen years of ministering as a Pentecostal pastor. A performance review in which I was told, “You’re not spontaneous enough.” A church member saying, “You’re too private in the pulpit—we want see you exposed up there!” A mentor telling me, “I wish you threw out your plans more

often, and just flowed with the Spirit ... that's where we see the best ministry." A job interview where I was told, "You sound like you're a real planner. Give us some examples of where you threw out your sermon on a Sunday morning because the Holy Spirit told you to, and you spoke what He spontaneously put in your heart instead." I admitted that I had never really done that, but added with a smile, "Hey, I guess I just hear from Him correctly the first time!" I did not get a second interview.

These comments (and many others) had stung over the years—and I really had *tried* to do what was being asked of me, but I just could not make it work. I was not loud, I was not spontaneous, I needed alone time, I was not unashamedly transparent with everyone, I was in no way a "go with the flow" type. Despite intense and exhausting efforts for years, I just could not be what was being asked of me. And when I thought of the most popular and successful Pentecostal pastors I knew, they were all these things, and were very good at them. I began to realize why I was feeling frustrated in my job, and why church boards and members were sometimes frustrated with me. I couldn't escape it—when I got right down to it, my natural personality type was just not well-suited to what Pentecostals were looking for in their pastors, and after thirteen years of Pentecostal ministry the evidence was clear. The clues were there the whole time. This new revelation broke down many years of self-doubt and self-criticism. Maybe I was not "wrong," maybe I was just wired differently—and importantly, maybe I was just in the wrong stream of the Church.

As Sarah and I prayed into this, a position opened at a Mennonite Brethren church in Leamington, Ontario. They were looking specifically for a planner, someone who could teach with depth, and someone sensitive to the needs of others—all things that INFJs bring to the table. Although knowing little about the Mennonite Brethren, we applied and began to interview, and felt an instant kinship with this church. Here was a church that would be happy if I shut myself in my office to work on a sermon instead of meeting with people all day. Here was a church who wanted my preaching plan weeks in advance, instead of spontaneously on a Sunday morning. Here was a church full of quieter, reflective people who would likely be offended if I shouted from the pulpit or shared too much personal information from the stage. They were praying for someone like me, and I was praying for a church like them. God answered both sets of prayers and brought us together, and we moved our family from the frozen north down to the comparatively balmy town of Leamington. I had found the next step in my ministry, and it fit me like a glove—as if God Himself had designed something to fit exactly right with whom He made me to be.

The light flashes on in the next room, and this one is multi-faceted, like a chandelier with many bulbs casting light in many different directions across the room, a room called “Discover Who You Are.” In some ways I have been learning this truth in many ways in many different rooms thus far, but this season brought it home profoundly. This new knowledge of self has impacted my walk

with God dramatically. Discovering the MBTI® was crucial to understanding myself, my walk with God, my ministry style, my marriage, my approach to parenting, and who I am as a child of God. I learned more about who God made me to be and how to connect better with Him out of those strengths. This knowledge of self has been a game-changer in my life, and helps me to lead my family and walk purposefully toward the next room.

The Twelfth Room

As I began at my new church, it was a much better fit than my old positions at various Pentecostal churches. Here I was not expected to be the centre of attention, and I could (with a clear conscience!) shut myself away in my office to study and prepare various teachings and sermons. I could structure my life with a consistent schedule, as my main responsibilities were scheduled ones. The Mennonite Brethren valued consistency far more than spontaneity, which helped me a lot. It was a dream position—there was much to be excited about!

Eventually, I became certified as a MBTI® practitioner. The training was secular, but I began to see very real connections to the spiritual journey with Jesus. Introverts pray differently than Extroverts. Sensors approach Scripture differently than Intuitives. Thinkers and Feelers approach conflict and community from quite different perspectives. Judgers and Perceivers have dissimilar views of how church life should function. I began to sprinkle new insights from the

MBTI® into my teaching and counseling, bringing encouragement and understanding to others. As I was learning, I shared the insights with others too.

This had always been the case as a preacher, of course—I would learn things, and then share that understanding with the congregation. This felt different, however. This was not just information that I was understanding and sharing—that is certainly important, but this was deeper. This was transformation that was going on in my life, which was starting to transform others as well. This was God doing a deep work in me, revealing to me more about who I am and how I related to Him, and as I was being formed, I was sharing it with others.

Ultimately, I wanted to do more. I had wanted to pursue my doctorate degree for a while and was beginning to sense that it might be time. What if, as I started my studies, I focused them on how our unique psychological types affected our spiritual formation? That was very much my own story—understanding my own type helped my walk with Jesus and my ministry tremendously. What if my studies could help others do the same? What tools could we put into the hands of others to help them approach their formation from within the understanding of their own self that had been so helpful for me?

This was a new level of ministry and leadership for me. It was not just about sharing the truth of God's Word, as powerful and important as that is, and as much as that continues to be a major part of what I do. This was different—this was understanding that God was doing a work in me, and that through it, He would also do a work in others. This was not just teaching, it was impartation—it

was leading not just as an instructor, but as a guide. “Here is where I have been journeying with Jesus,” I was saying. “Now come and follow me in this journey.” The formation that was happening in me was meant for others as well.

By understanding more of who I am, I have been able to lean into my giftings better and trust where God is using me. I know I am a leader, but not the stereotypical Pentecostal leader that I felt pressured to be for so many years. I can lead from my INFJ strengths of reflection, persuasion, care, and influence, without worrying about being something I am not. As a preacher, I worry less about loud and exuberant sermons, focusing instead on how it is through depth and quiet wisdom that God can use me. As a husband and father, I know I need some alone time if I am going to be at my best at home, and so I make it a priority. As a child of God, I have learned to connect with Him in the silence and the solitude, and in the inner intuition of my soul, and have felt more alive in Him as I do. I have been changed, and am eager to help others experience this as well.

The light flashes forth in all its brilliance, and another room bursts into clarity. This room is named “Share What You Are Given.” For many years, I have been sharing what I know, but in this season, I learned the importance of reproducing what God was doing within me in others. When God does something in my life, it is not just for me—to minister and to lead well is to share my story and my experiences with others, pointing them to Jesus to be formed as He has been forming me. “Share What You Are Given”—the grace of God granted to me

is to be given away to others. In so doing, others can have their own “light bulb” moments with Jesus as well, and nothing blesses me more as a minister than this. This revelation of self and of God have come together to inform every part of my ministry moving forward, forming and changing it dramatically.

I feel the profundity of this room bursting into light, and I reflect on where I have been thus far as I journey through my house—my spiritual home. There is more to come, but all in good time. Things will be different moving forward—the lights have been accumulating all this time, and the entire ground floor is almost fully lit. So much has been learned, but there is so much left to learn as well. I know more about Jesus and more about myself since the journey started—the light bulbs have turned on in exactly the right moments, by the grace of God, and every revelation about Him and about me has been transformative in my life.

Summary

At the time of this writing, I am arriving at the stereotypical half-way point of my life, Lord willing. In the first half, I have moved through the rooms of my spiritual home, experiencing illumination after illumination, discovering more about who God is, and about who He has made me to be. Some lessons have been just about God, some have been just about me, but most have been the dual revelation: growing in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self. Some lessons have been joyful to learn, others more difficult, but each blazing light bulb of understanding of God and self has been crucial to the journey. There have been

other lessons, more than just those shared here, but these most crucial revelations have been:

God is Real.

God is at Work.

God is Reaching Out.

Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

You Have a Calling.

God Has Made You Unique.

You Need a Guide.

Listen to the Lord.

God's Best is Worth Waiting For.

Love Will Transform You.

Discover Who You Are.

Share What You are Given.

Each illuminated room has been thrilling to discover, and light is filling my home because of them. And yet, as I approach midlife, I look ahead through the house, and in the few remaining shadows I can vaguely perceive a staircase at the end of the hall, leading upstairs. I am almost done with the ground floor, but there is actually a whole other level to this home that needs exploring. Everything up until this point has been crucial, but it has also been leading me to this next phase—moving upstairs for the second half of life, seeing what other lights and revelations will come, and seeing how this entire home of mine ties together.

So, there is much more exploring to do, more to learn, and more illumination to come. I anticipate with great hope what is next. Although dim at the moment, I know the future will be faithfully illuminated to me, one room at a time, one lesson at a time, one revelation at a time, as it always has been, until my entire home is filled with the light that God brings forth. I will grow in the understanding of who my God is, and of who I am, and will thrive in the marriage of these two ongoing revelations in my life.

And so, with the Good Shepherd guiding me; with my mentors and guides already upstairs, calling me forward; with my wife at my side, faithful and partnering; and with my precious children following behind me—I take another hopeful step out into the darkness, and reach forward toward the next light switch.

CHAPTER THREE:
HELPING US HEAR:
IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT VIA PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE THEORY
A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Several years ago, I sat down with a church member who was distressed. He shared, “I’m so sick of hearing people say, ‘God told me this, God told me that.’ God has never told me anything! I have no idea what that feels like. I have never heard from Him. What’s wrong with me?” This man was a solid Christian, devout in worship, strong in character, and full of wisdom. I pointed out that the man had chosen a godly spouse, made good career choices, prayed often for God to lead him in his decision-making, and his life showed many signs of God’s favour and blessing. He was praying into choices, and then making good choices, and by all appearances was walking in God’s will. So then, what was the disconnect that this man was feeling when it came to hearing God’s voice or sensing His leading?

As the conversation unfolded, I realized that this man was indeed “hearing from God,” but just in a different way. This man was a logical, analytical, critically-minded thinker. In the MBTI® parlance, he would be considered an

ISTJ—an Introverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging type. These types are thoughtful, rational, literally-minded, data-driven, and focus on the concrete (Myers 1995, 102–103). As such, this man was not naturally listening for the “still, small voice” within him, or abstractly “getting a sense” of God’s direction, or paying attention to where his feelings might be leading him. Rather, he was processing his discernment logically and methodically, as an ISTJ naturally would, coming to decisions that made the most rational sense after a thorough process of doing homework, exploring options, and dutifully submitting matters to God in prayer.

I realized that, although sincere, when others were using the language of “God told me ...”, it was completely unhelpful for this logical and literal-minded man, and was actually leading to frustration and self-doubt. I also realized that there would certainly be others in my church who felt similarly; people are wired differently, and therefore it stands to reason that people discern differently. We are all created by God beautifully and uniquely (e.g. Ps. 139:14; Jer. 1:5; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 2:10; etc.), and this man’s analytical nature simply led him to a very different approach to discernment—an approach that needed to be acknowledged, respected, and nurtured.

An ever-growing revelation of God and of self has been a major part of my formation journey. Therefore, when it came to discernment, I theorized that we could help people discern and know God better if we could help them know themselves better. We can help others understand how their personality works,

and we can then give them a practical mode of discernment that they can explore through the lens of their God-given personality. As that happens, we can help them grow in the knowledge of God and of self, thus aiding them in their spiritual formation.

The Nature of Spiritual Formation

God is good. Humanity was originally created good in His image, and created to do good in His Name (Gen. 1:26–27; Gen. 9:6; Ps. 8:5–8; Rom. 12:2a; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:23–24; James 3:9). When humanity fell, that original design was lost to sin, and we remain a shadow of what we were originally created for, marred by our sinfulness. However, even though the image of the good God in us was tarnished, it was not erased (Beck and Demarest 2005, 298). When we needed saving from ourselves, Jesus came to save us—saving us from an eternity without Him, but also from our sinful selves in the here and now. We are currently being restored to the fullness of the image of God by the Spirit of God—this image being expressed most clearly through Jesus (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), making “Christ-likeness” the aim of our restoration (Rom. 8:29).

This redemptive and restorative process is called “spiritual formation,” a life-long endeavour where we who are sinners are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the people we were created to be, image-bearers who increasingly reflect the character of the perfect Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Titus 3:4–7). There are two key elements to this process, where we firstly acknowledge that we cannot change ourselves, but rather it is the Spirit who transforms us (Boa 2001, 76). Secondly,

at the same time, we do have an active role to play in partnering with Him. Barton points out: “While we cannot transform ourselves into the image of Christ, we can create the conditions in which spiritual transformation takes place. Like a gardener who prepares for plants to grow by tilling the soil, adding fertilizer and watering, so we can create the conditions that make it possible for the life of Christ to grow and flourish within us” (Barton 2012, 292). The process of creating a “Model of Spiritual Formation” essentially involves deciding how we are going to design our garden—what processes and conditions can we put in place that will contribute to us being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ?

The Outline of This Model

In “designing the garden” of this particular Model, we begin with the premise that discernment is a crucial aspect of our spiritual formation process, as we seek to know God’s will and walk in it. In its simplest form, the *telos* of my Model is the desire to make discernment easier for people, which will aid them in their formation journey. This Model will focus on how we might utilize our different God-given personality types by understanding and honouring them, and by harnessing them in our discernment process.

In order to make discernment easily accessible, and in order to draw from historical formation practices, I determined that St. Ignatius had many “tried and true” ideas about discernment in his *Spiritual Exercises*, and that his work was a worthy way in which discernment might be made practical and applicable for the

average person. As well, since I am a certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioner, this personality assessment would be utilized to explore all these elements together. To that end, my Model of Spiritual Formation focuses on the following thesis: One way that the Holy Spirit forms us is as we discern His leading and obey it; an easily accessible method of discernment is St. Ignatius' distinguishing of "consolation and desolation" within our souls; and we can determine these inner movements better by growing in our self-knowledge through a personality assessment tool such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®.

Premise #1: Discernment is Crucial to Spiritual Formation

As mentioned, spiritual formation involves us being transformed from our sinful selves into the good selves that God originally created us to be, reflecting Jesus' perfect image (Gen. 1:26–27; Rom. 8:29; Eph. 2:10). This being the case, it is worth returning to Eden to determine the "goodness" for which we were originally created. Although of course there are many answers to that question, one aspect is that we were originally created to know God intimately and to walk in His will; this included obeying His directives and respecting His boundaries (Gen. 2:15–17). God offered Adam and Eve the choice between life and death, and His desire is always for His people to walk in His will and "choose life" (Deut. 30:19–20).

In the Fall, humanity chose to not walk in God's will. In that sense, we could say that the very first sin in the Garden was a matter of poor discernment.

Adam and Eve chose badly, and reaped separation from God and death as a result (Gen 3:19; Isa. 59:2). Fallen humanity has been discerning badly ever since, choosing poorly and making ungodly decisions. As Isaiah notes: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way” (Isa. 53:6). In our sinfulness, we repeat the error of Adam, discern wrongly, and make choices that are not in line with the will of God.

However, when the Second Adam came, His attitude toward knowing and obeying God’s will was completely different. Jesus said that His only task in life was “to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work” (John 4:34). Instead of sinfully choosing His own way, Jesus said, “I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). When it came time to face the cross, Jesus longed “that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:31). Even in His anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39), submitting His own will to His Father’s will alone.

Jesus knew the Father’s will and walked in it. He said, “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19). As the only perfectly formed member of the human race (Heb. 4:15; 7:26), Jesus never went astray or turned to His own way. Jesus chose rightly every time. Therefore, if we are being spiritually formed into the image of this Jesus, then we too must

become people who know the Father's will and walk in it, as Christ did. To be a person like Jesus is to be like Him in His knowledge of God's will, and so to grow in formation into His image, we must grow in our ability to discern His will and His leading more clearly. We must be a discerning people to be a Christ-like people.

Crucial to this understanding of discernment is that we cannot know God on our own, "that God wants to make himself known ... God is a self-communicating God. Through various means of revelation God displays himself and invites us into relationship. Discernment, therefore, involves the careful attention to God's self-revelation" (Howard 2008, 373). We cannot conjure a revelation or lean on our own understanding. We cannot engage in discernment by our own merits, but rather must remember that the emphasis of this process is always upon God, and what He chooses to share (e.g. Ps. 111:16; Isa. 40:5; John 1:18; Rom. 1:20; Eph. 3:5; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1–4). Our role is to seek and submit ourselves to our self-revealing God, and to what He desires to reveal to us. In doing this, we present ourselves in the sunlight of His presence where He may form us by His Spirit.

That being said, Smith notes that "Holy Scripture makes the extraordinary assumption that God the Creator has chosen to speak to us" (Smith 2003, 11). Jesus said that He "calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all his own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice" (John 10:3–4). In John 16, Jesus teaches that, when

the Holy Spirit comes, “He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that He will receive what He will make known to you” (John 16:13–14). Paul wrote in Galatians 5:25, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Thus, in a biblical view of discernment, the whole Trinity is involved in our discernment process: We want to know the Father’s will (John 6:38), following the Son’s example (John 5:19), and to help us, the Holy Spirit has come to share with us what the Father, Son and Spirit wish us to know (John 16:13–14). We might say, in terms of a Trinitarian view of discernment and formation, that we are being made into the image of the Son, as we discern and walk in the will of the Father, which is revealed and empowered by the Holy Spirit—all three Persons of the Godhead are involved in revealing the knowledge and will of God to us and transforming us through it.

How exactly does discernment form us? This happens primarily in three ways. First, the Holy Spirit will specifically and intentionally show us things that need attention in our lives, convicting us of sin, making us aware of God’s holiness, and helping us to move forward in our spiritual journey (John 16:8–11). The Spirit makes clear what needs changing and then empowers the change. So, discerning the Holy Spirit’s gracious conviction is crucial to us growing in spiritual formation (Cloud and Townsend 2001, 105).

Secondly, the choices we make are themselves formational. Liebert says it well: “Because our identity is formed in part through our decisions, the making of

decisions is actually a privileged moment for growing in discipleship. Through our choices, we can become the person God is calling us to be” (Liebert 2008, 7). Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, and it changed them profoundly for the worse; humanity has followed their example and reaped the same consequences (Rom. 5:12-19). Our own sinful choices have indeed formed us as well, but our decision to become a Christ-follower also affected us greatly for the better. Our decisions to marry or not and who to marry, to choose a vocation, to have children, to live in a certain place, to take on a certain ministry, are all examples of choices we have made that have formed us. As Silf says, “We are becoming what we choose” (Silf 2004, Kindle location 673). The choices we make have a tremendous impact on our identity, and so learning to discern properly is crucial to forming our identity toward Christ.

Thirdly, the *process* of discernment is formational. J. Brent Bill is a Quaker minister and author who teaches on discernment, at times referring to the Holy Spirit within us as “the sacred compass,” and he says:

When we travel through life attentive to the sacred compass, we find that God’s direction changes us. We discover that spiritual discernment is about sensing the presence and call of God, and not just about making decisions. The process of following the sacred compass awakens us to a life of constant renewal of our hearts, minds, wills, and souls. (Bill 2008, xi)

The act of seeking to distinguish and respond to the Spirit does more than just lead us to good decisions; the process of discernment brings us into communion with God, and communion with God always changes us (Smith 1997, 20).

Therefore, formation also happens through the *journey* of seeking and

communing with God as we are discerning. The very act of seeking God's will calls us to pray, to fast, to dig into Scripture, to seek the assistance of the community of faith—all aspects of connecting and communion with God and His Church that can spiritually form us. These are ways in which we place ourselves in the sunlight of His presence so that He can do His work in us. As we engage with the Lord and His presence, we are formed through the experience of discerning.

So then, discernment is crucial to our spiritual formation because: 1) the Holy Spirit comes to show us what needs attention and then empowers us to change; 2) the choices we make are formational to who we are becoming, so thus we want to be choosing God's will to become more like Him; and 3) the discernment process itself draws us into communion with God, which forms us as well. The purpose of discernment, of course, is not just to find God's leading as an end in itself; discerning God's direction always calls us to action to carry out His will. Jesus said, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working" (John 5:17). Jesus did not just know the Father's will—He obeyed it and carried it out. Our desire likewise is not only to understand God's will, but to then take steps to live it out, obeying His will as we determine His direction.

Discernment must be engaged in carefully, as there is always the possibility that we are mishearing, following not the Lord's will but our own flesh, or the deceptive leading of the enemy. There are two great "guardrails" that can help keep us safe as we journey down the road of discernment: the Word of

God, and the community of faith. The God-breathed Scriptures were inspired by the same Spirit who leads us in our discernment and formation, so by checking our discernment against the Scriptures, we can trust that we will never sense the Spirit saying anything to us that contradicts what He has spoken in His Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17). As well, having members of a community of Christian faith that we trust can help us greatly in our discernment, as discerning God’s will can be aided when we engage in it with others (e.g. the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15). If the Holy Spirit is saying something to an individual, then other believers, who share in that same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), should be able to confirm that discernment. While discerning, we should be “checking in” constantly with the Scriptures, and with other believers, to keep us from making errors.

Premise #2: Accessible Discernment via Ignatius’ Consolation and Desolation

The second premise of this Model’s thesis is that an easily accessible method of discernment is St. Ignatius’ distinguishing of “consolation and desolation” within our souls. Since discernment is crucial to spiritual formation, we must now discover how we might practically engage in it. Classically, the process of discernment has been defined as “identifying what spirit is at work in a situation: the Spirit of God or some other spirit” (Howard 2008, 374). If we can determine whether a choice that we are considering is of God or not, then we can make decisions in ways that are in line with where God is leading us, being formed as we do so.

In terms of putting discernment into practice, St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are a traditional, practical, and proven historical tool to help us discern the Lord's leading by actively and methodically engaging with the Lord. One of the most easily accessible examples of this in Ignatius' *Exercises* is the section on "Rules for Distinguishing Between Different Spiritual Influences," often referred to as "The Discernment of Spirits." This section focuses on discerning by paying attention to the inner rhythms of consolation ("comfort") and desolation ("discomfort") that occur within our souls (Ignatius 1963, 107–114). By paying attention to these inner movements while we are making decisions, we can determine where the Spirit is leading us and where He is not. As we discover a sense of His leading, we can make decisions in line with where He is at work, trusting His forming work in us as we walk in step with Him (Gal. 5:22–25).

The understanding behind consolation and desolation came from Ignatius' own life experience. When he was twenty-six years old, he was far from God and sought personal glory by becoming a soldier (Ignatius 1900, 1). After being seriously wounded in battle, he spent extended time in convalescence, reading much, and eventually encountering spiritual books that led him to faith in Christ (Ignatius 1900, 2). In those endless hours of resting in bed, reading, and meditating, he began to pay attention to the movements of his thoughts and feelings within himself. As he did, he noticed that allowing his thoughts to dwell on worldly pleasures brought temporary joy but eventually gave way to sorrow

and spiritual dryness. On the other hand, when his mind dwelt on the things of God, his soul was filled with joy and peace which remained (Ignatius 1900, 2–3).

He began to piece together the idea that there were two spirits at work within him: the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the devil, and that one was drawing him closer to God while the other one was drawing him further away from God, with each spirit producing different sensations within him (Ignatius 1900, 3). He realized that it was always desirable to respond to the Spirit of God within him, rather than the opposing spirit. This was the beginning of his understanding of what we now call determining consolation and desolation.

Scripture tells us to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1)—for Ignatius, this verse meant discerning the spiritual movements within himself and paying attention to where God is moving and where He is not. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), and as the Spirit has made His home in us, we are able to sense His leading simply by looking to Him within ourselves. However, since He does reside *within* us, we also need to sort through our own thoughts and emotions, and see where the Spirit may be using them to lead us, while also being aware of where the flesh or the enemy might be falsely leading us.

Ignatius described the movement of consolation (“comfort”) thusly:

... this is the name I give to any interior movement experienced by the soul, causing it to glow with love for its Creator and Lord, the effect of which is that it can no longer love any creature in itself, but only in the Creator of them all. The name also applies to the shedding of tears leading to love of God, either out of sorrow for sin or for the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for other reasons directly concerned with His service and praise. Lastly, comfort is the name given to any growth in faith, hope or charity, or to any inward joy which summons or draws a man (*sic*) to the things of the next

world, to the saving of his own soul, bringing the soul to peace and tranquility in its Creator and Lord. (Ignatius 1963, 107–108)

Therefore, we are in a state of “consolation” when we are filled with or growing in faith, hope, and love; when we have a sense of God’s closeness; when we experience peace and tranquility; when we are filled with great desires; and when we feel comfort in being open and transparent (Thibodeaux 2010, 44). Being in a state of consolation turns us outside of ourselves, lifts our hearts, bonds us more closely to our faith community, generates new ideas and inspiration in us, restores balance in our lives, allows us to see where God is working in our lives, and releases new passion in us for the things of God (Silf 1999, 85).

The opposite inner movement is desolation (“distress”), of which Ignatius says:

... this is the name I give to whatever is opposite to the foregoing—darkness of soul, disquiet of mind, an attraction to what is coarse and earthly, all restlessness proceeding from different temptations and disturbances, such as the temptation tending to destroy faith, hope and charity; the condition in which the soul finds itself listless, apathetic, melancholy, like one cut off from its Creator and Lord. Inasmuch as comfort and distress are opposed, the thoughts that spring from the former are contrary to those springing from the latter. (Ignatius 1963, 108)

Thus, we are in a state of “desolation” when we are lacking in faith, hope, and love; when we lose the sense of God’s closeness; when we are filled with some combination of “disquietude” (restlessness), agitation, boredom, “tepidity” (apathy), fear, worry, or secrecy (Thibodeaux 2010, 16). The nature of desolation turns us in upon ourselves, sends us deep into negative feelings, pulls us away

from community, makes us want to walk away from things that are important to us, takes over our thought-life, and drains us of energy (Silf 1999, 84–85).

As we prayerfully consider whatever decision that we are making, gathering information that will aid the decision, and then thinking or talking things through, we want to be paying close attention to what is going on within us, and whether our consideration of this decision is bringing us into a state of consolation or desolation. In looking at these two movements of the soul, “the bottom line is this: which direction is our life taking us—toward God or away from him?” (Silf 1999, 70). When we are considering decisions, as we pay attention within us, we can ask questions like, “Do these thoughts, feelings, and ideas lead me toward being a person of greater faith, hope, and love, or do they lead me away from these virtues?”; “Does considering this course of action fill me with peace and joy, or restlessness and anxiety?”; “Does this decision make me feel alive in Christ, or pull me away from Him?”, and other such questions.

As we prayerfully ponder such questions, paying attention to what is going on in our souls as we do, we can determine which spirit is at work in each considered possibility (Thibodeaux 2010, 17). The crucial element is that we should never make a decision that puts us in a state of desolation, for when our souls are in this negative state, it is far too easy for our flesh or the enemy to be misleading us (Thibodeaux 2010, 69). As we desire to choose life (Deut. 30:19)—that is, to choose the way of God in our discernment—we can trust that the Spirit of God desires to bring us closer to Him and desires to lead us in His ways. When

we make decisions while in a state of consolation, we will be making decisions in line with the Spirit's leading, as He confirms His will by giving us that inner sense of faith, hope, love, peace, and other godly virtues.

As we engage with Ignatian discernment, "Our purpose in the Exercises is not to become more efficient, more assertive, or more independent. Our purpose is to draw closer to Jesus and to choose his will more consistently" (Wakefield 2006, 48). With some basic teaching, understanding, and practice, this technique of discerning consolation and desolation within us is easily accessible for people. Spiritual directors commonly use this method to assist directees in discerning the Spirit's activity and leading in their lives (Thibodeaux 2010, 7).

As this happens, "The Ignatian method of discernment teaches you how to fine-tune your spiritual senses so that you can more readily detect and move toward the voice of the Good Shepherd, distinguishing that voice from all the others" (Thibodeaux 2010, 7). As we learn to make decisions when we are in consolation, and avoid decisions when we are in desolation, we will more easily discern the leading of the Spirit. By paying attention to the consolation or desolation in our souls as we ponder various decisions, we can learn where the Spirit is leading us and respond accordingly, regularly checking our sense of the Spirit's leading against Scripture, and against other believers, to help confirm our sense of discernment. As this happens, we can know God's will and walk in it, knowing that He is forming us as we do so.

Premise #3: Self-Knowledge Can Aid our Discernment

If we do not know or understand ourselves well, this can be a great obstacle to discernment (Green 1984, 22). Palmer says, “One dwells with God by being faithful to one’s nature. One crosses God by trying to be something one is not” (Palmer 2000, 51). We need to meet God as we are, understanding how He has made us, and our communion with Him can be enhanced when we do so. Throughout Church history, many traditions have called upon people to follow one mode or style of communion with God, and have not left room for how our various personalities function. This can result in making our efforts at connecting with God fruitless, if our personality simply does not fit well with that particular mode of communion (Michael and Norrissey 1991, 8).

Discernment is the process of prayerfully sorting through our thoughts, our feelings, and our ways of processing information in order to sense the Lord’s leading as we make decisions. In essence, it is Spirit-led decision-making. Therefore, there are few things that are as critical to effective discernment as growing in the understanding of how we are wired (Smith 1997, 45); we must understand who we are, for “If you are not in touch with yourself, if you don’t know what’s going on, you cannot hear the ‘other,’ even when the Other is God” (Larkin 1981, 7–8). In his introduction to the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius even notes that the *Exercises* are by no means a “one-size-fits-all” approach to spirituality, and that they must be adapted to the uniqueness of each individual who is undertaking them (Ignatius 1963, 17–18). We are all made in God’s image,

fearfully and wonderfully, but we are also created uniquely from one another (e.g. Gen. 2:4–24; Ps. 139:14; 1 Cor. 12:12–26). Not every personality type will experience or explain discernment in the same way, and not every type will experience or explain consolation and desolation in the same way, because the way in which we process information and come to decisions varies from person to person.

Growing in discernment is therefore going to require us to engage in self-reflection, and to take an honest assessment of who we are, for it is important to note that we are not just being formed *into* the image of Christ, but that we are being formed into His image *from* the person that we currently are (Stanberry 2019). Therefore, gaining understanding about who we are can aid us in the formation journey. When this happens, “We can live with permission to cherish our God-given personality, rather than under compulsion to strive to be someone else” (McGuinness 2009, 60). As we grow in our self-knowledge, we will grow in our knowledge of God as well, since we will be able to engage with Him better and hear from Him more clearly, helping us in our formational journey.

Utilizing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®

As a young man, the future king David famously could not fight in Saul’s armour when facing Goliath. David had different strengths and weaknesses than Saul did, and needed to be able to “be himself” as he entered the battle (1 Sam. 17:38–40). Taking this principle into our current conversation, we need to know

who we are, how we are created and gifted by God, so that we can engage with God in the way that He has made us. We need to understand our self so that we can listen for God within our self. We can discern better when we are doing it out of knowledge of our God-created giftedness, discerning through the lens of the personality that He has given us.

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, my experience with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® has caused me to choose it as a tool to help increase our self-knowledge in this Portfolio. The MBTI® has its origins with the works of Carl Jung, who described “psychological types” as natural inborn preferences which unconsciously influence how we live our lives (Jung 1990, 331). Katharine Briggs and Isabelle Briggs Myers are a mother-daughter duo who took his work and sought to make it more accessible to the broader public by creating an assessment that would allow people to explore these inborn preferences and understand themselves and others better (Myers 2015, 1).

In the MBTI®, these inborn preferences are identified via four dichotomies. The first is Extroversion/Introversion, which examines how one is energized, either by the outer world or their inner world. Sensing/Intuition determines how one processes information, either through the senses or through their intuition. Thinking/Feeling measures how one comes to decisions, either through logic and objectivity or through values and concern for others. Judging/Perceiving examines how one lives out their life, either through structure and order or flexibility and spontaneity. Although everyone engages with both

sides of each dichotomy as they live their lives, type theory states that everyone has a natural and unconscious preference for one side or the other. These preferences are on “automatic pilot” as we live out our daily lives (Pearman and Albritton 2010, 8), and although we certainly do not act *only* within our preferences, they are “generally more comfortable, automatic, and trustworthy” for us, and they often serve as the “default positions” for our actions (Tieger et al. 2014, 13).

The analogy of “handedness” is often used to explain the theory. Most of us are born with two hands, and actively use them both, but we also each have an unconscious preference for a dominant hand over the other, and using that hand is most comfortable and natural for us. Likewise, every person also has an unconscious preference for one side of each of the four dichotomy poles (Kroeger and Thuesen 1988, 14). A right-handed person will certainly use their left hand as they engage with various tasks, but they will naturally turn to their right hand when they need strength or dexterity. Similarly, someone with a Thinking preference, for example, can certainly intentionally engage with their Feeling side, and with deliberate effort can even develop the other side’s effectiveness, but it will never feel as comfortable as their natural preference for Thinking.

By understanding which side we lean toward in the MBTI® dichotomies, we grow in our self-knowledge and can better understand our strengths and weaknesses, our thought-processes, our decision-making, our discernment, and in the context of this Model, how we might determine consolation and desolation

through the lens of our MBTI® type. We approach discernment differently based on our psychological type, so better understanding of this will help us to better comprehend consolation and desolation within our souls. As this happens, we may discern God's leading better, thus helping us to be spiritually formed.

Narrowing the Scope of the MBTI®

When one looks at each of the four dichotomies and determines which side they more naturally fall on, they will arrive at a four-letter MBTI® type (e.g. ESTP, INFJ, etc.). There are sixteen possible combinations of letters on the MBTI® scale. These sixteen types will approach formation, discernment, and consolation and desolation in different ways based on the unique aspects of their personality type (Mulholland 1993, 65–67). In the interest of efficiency and clarity, this Model focuses on the “four mental functions” of the MBTI® (Myers et al. 2003, 40–44), rather than attempting to engage with all sixteen personality types that the Indicator® outlines. My Model narrows in on this one aspect, which is crucial to understand as it relates to our discernment.

The “mental functions” refer to the two middle letters of a person's MBTI® typology, which are called our “perceiving” function and our “judging” function. Isabel Briggs Myers considered this pairing of letters to be the most important aspect of our personality as measured by the MBTI®, especially when decisions are being made (Myers et al. 2003, 40). These two letters gauge how we process information (Sensing [S] vs. Intuition [N]), and how we make decisions

(Thinking [T] vs. Feeling [F])—both of which are crucial aspects of discernment. Each of the four mental functions will have different language and a different emphasis in their approach to discernment. In a clinical sense, discernment involves prayerfully processing data and information (Green 1984, 83), and then making a judgment on a matter as we sense the leading of the Spirit (Smith 1997, 25). This would suggest that understanding how our personalities naturally work in these two areas could help us be more effective in discernment.

The four mental function pairings are ST (practical and matter-of-fact types), SF (sympathetic and friendly types), NT (logical and ingenious types), and NF (enthusiastic and insightful types) (Myers et al. 2003, 40–44). Each of the sixteen MBTI® types will fit into one of these four categories. Because each of these four pairings will process information and make decisions in different ways, each type will have a different approach to discernment, and a different approach to both explaining and experiencing consolation and desolation. Theoretically, we will be able to help people interpret these inner movements better by helping them grow in this area of self-knowledge.

The Perceiving Function: How Do We Process Information? (S vs. N)

We must take some time to examine each aspect of the mental functions. Firstly, our “perceiving” function positions us on either the Sensing side or the Intuitive side. Sensors take in information through “*sense perception*” (Jung 1990, 462)—that is, data that is experienced through the senses. Myers wrote,

“Whatever comes directly from the senses is part of the sensing types’ own experience and is therefore trustworthy” (Myers 1995, 57). Fact-based and data-oriented, Sensors are drawn to what they can see, experience, and prove, and prefer matters clearly defined and articulated (Myers 1995, 59). Sensors are typically oriented to present realities (as opposed to future realities); prefer information that is factual and concrete; focus on what is real and actual; observe and remember specifics; tend to build carefully and thoroughly toward conclusions; have an easier time grasping ideas and theories through practical applications; and tend to lean heavily on experience, rather than imagining future possibilities (Myers 2015, 5).

In their walk with God, Sensors are inevitably drawn to the practical side of the faith: learning and then doing (Fryling 2009, 100). They may be drawn to spiritual activities that engage the senses, such as contemplating art or music, the beauty of nature, or the burning of incense (Michael and Norrissey 1984, 96–97). They tend to engage in simplicity, have a keen eye for detail, and have a tendency toward specific rules and guidelines (Ross et al. 1996, 265). A Sensor’s spirituality is driven by things immediate and concrete. They are typically happy with the status quo, seeking consistency and moving toward practical obedience to the Lord (Boa 2001 473). They value tradition, duty, and historical spiritual practices that have proven effective over time (Baab 1998, 7).

When it comes to decision-making, Sensors need a good reason for things to change. “Don’t fix it if it isn’t broken!” is a typical mentality (Ward et al. 1988,

26). Sensors will be concerned with clearly identifying the facts related to the decision (Baab 1998, 116), and are good at focusing on the reality of the present situation with precision and accuracy. Decisions must be based on accurate information, so the information-gathering process of decision-making will be important for Sensors. They enjoy “doing their homework” and will feel frustrated if facts and details are overlooked (Baab 1998, 117). They are methodical, and their thinking typically moves in a step-by-step linear fashion, rather than by “leaps” or assumptions. They will have difficulty agreeing to something if they cannot track the progression of how the conclusion was reached (Duncan 1993, 21).

Sensors like a clear goal, clear parameters, and clear expectations of them, and need to see the practical application of what they are doing (Lawrence 1997, 15). When things are ambiguous, Sensors can become frustrated (Ross et al. 1996, 265). Definitiveness and clarity are also very important (Ross et al. 1996, 270). The traditional language and practice of determining consolation and desolation may be challenging for a Sensor, as they tend to be literally-minded, and drawn to what is tangible, rather than what is more abstract, such as an idea like how our inner movements may be leading us toward God’s will.

The contrasting side of the perceiving function is Intuition. Whereas Sensors process information through careful observation of facts, in Intuition content “presents itself whole and complete, without our being able to explain or discover how this content came into existence. Intuition is a kind of instinctive

apprehension” (Jung 1990, 453). Intuitives live for moments of insight and inspiration, “light bulbs” of understanding that arrive as they subconsciously put things together in their minds. Intuitives are oriented to future possibilities; are imaginative and verbally creative; focus on the patterns and meanings in data; move quickly to conclusions, following “hunches”; often want to clarify ideas and theories first, before putting them into practice; and lean heavily on their sense of inspiration (Myers 2015, 5). Rather than a Sensor’s methodical examination of information, Intuitives “listen for the intuitions that come up from their subconscious with enticing visions of possibilities” (Myers 1995, 57). To Intuitives, these moments of inspiration are a breath of life.

Intuitives enjoy symbols and metaphors, which may aid in their spiritual journey. They are comfortable with ambiguity and have an eye for the bigger picture (Ross et al. 1996, 265). They enjoy imagining the future and its possibilities, and are innovative by nature (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 35). They desire to connect with the Holy Spirit within (Michael and Norrissey 1984, 98), and are naturally adept at paying attention to the impulses and inspirations stirring within their souls. They enjoy asking the “big questions” of faith, and then wrestle with and try to answer them (Baab 1998, 7).

In decision-making, Intuitives will be less likely than Sensors to want to gather facts and “do their homework,” preferring instead to jump ahead to their favourite activity: imagining possibilities (Baab 1998, 116–117). Their ideas often swirl around within them, not as naturally connected with facts, figures, or

practical concerns (Ward et al. 1988, 26). They are quickly bored with repetition and routine, instead craving what is new and innovative, and will happily lay aside the specifics or the details of a decision in order to try and comprehend how things connect to the bigger picture (Lawrence 1997, 15).

Intuitives are seldom satisfied with the status quo. They are comfortable with change, and there is “a divine discontent about them, which can be challenging and endearing, but also at times infuriating because of their seeming need to challenge and change everything” (Goldsmith 1997, 65). They are happy to consider many options at once, stimulated by imagining all the possibilities—the danger being that they may get so caught up in imagining that they never get to action (Goldsmith 1997, 65). Paying attention to what is going on within them through an exercise like determining consolation and desolation will likely feel quite natural for an Intuitive, as they are already innately familiar with weighing out their inner impulses, inspirations, and directions.

The Judging Function: How Do We Make Decisions? (T vs. F)

The third letter of the MBTI®, the “judging” function, focuses on how we make decisions, with everyone landing on either the “Thinking” or “Feeling” side. When making decisions, “Thinking is essentially impersonal. Its goal is objective truth, independent of the personality and wishes of the thinker or anyone else” (Myers 1995, 65). Thinkers naturally distance themselves emotionally from a situation and are thus gifted to approach a decision impersonally and

dispassionately with objective analysis (Myers 1995, 67). Thinkers are analytical, reasonable, logical, and are “tough-minded” in their decision-making (Myers 2015, 6), making difficult choices when necessary.

Thinker types “like to win people over by logic” (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 36), but the effect of decisions on people is typically less important than finding a rational decision. Their walk with God must engage the intellect, and will often emphasize orthodoxy (proper belief); this can come at the neglect of the heart, and at the neglect of considering others (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 38–39). Thinking spirituality is driven by objectivity, principles, reason, speculation, criticism, and analysis—they do not like ignorance or inconsistency, and seek justice, truth, and enlightenment (Boa 2001, 473).

When decision-making, Thinkers “objectively evaluate the possible plans and solutions” (Baab 1998, 117). Thinkers tend to believe that if others are unable to articulate why they made a decision, then the decision is likely wrong—a reasonable explanation is a clear sign of a reasonable decision, and therefore is the hallmark of good decision-making. Thinkers also tend to believe that the decision that is the most logically sound is always going to be the right one (Baab 1998, 8). Thinkers must learn, however, “that logical decisions are not always the best ones, that sometimes relationships with other people are more important than anything else” (Ward et al. 1988, 29).

Thinkers love to fix problems and make things more efficient (Lawrence 1997, 18). They value precision and succinctness, and will have great difficulty

agreeing to anything that does not make logical sense to them (Ward et al. 1988, 48–49). Thinkers may be uncomfortable with emotion, or when people use language that engages the emotions more than the mind (Lawrence 1997, 18). This may make the idea of discerning consolation and desolation more difficult for Thinkers, as the classic Ignatian approach typically involves engaging with emotional questions and language (Green 1984, 98).

While Thinkers make their decisions primarily through logic and analysis, Feelers come to their conclusions based on values (Jung 1990, 435), both personal and social. Feelers are typically empathetic, guided by these personal and social values, and are always assessing the impact of decisions on other people. They strive for harmony and positive interactions with others, are compassionate, and often are “tender-hearted” in their decision-making (Myers 2015, 6). They value warmth in their relationships, and are trusting and appreciative in their interactions, seeking to win people over by persuasion (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 36).

Feeling types “desire to have their heart strangely warmed whenever they engage in any spiritual activity. They want to feel God’s presence and love” (Oswald and Kroeger, 1988, 114). Too much emphasis on “right thinking,” at the neglect of the heart, can be problematic for a Feeler (Goldsmith 1997, 72). However, Feelers may also need help in making sure their faith is on solid intellectual and theological ground (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 39). Feelers sometimes “need to guard against sentimentality or oversimplification of religious

faith” (Oswald and Kroeger, 1988, 114). They “tend to be more open to mystical experiences” (Ross 2011, 185), and have a spirituality driven by emotion, memories, ideals, and relationships. They dislike conflict and desire harmony, communion, and the expression of appreciation for others (Boa 2001, 473).

In decision-making, Feelers heavily lean on and weigh out values and motives, both their own and others’, trying to arrive at the best solutions for the people involved, and they can be tenacious about sticking to their convictions (Oswald and Kroeger 1988, 36). Feelers can often “simply know” when a decision is right and can find it difficult to describe the thought-process behind it (Baab 1998, 8). Feelers will likely be at ease in exploring and explaining their emotions, and the concept of discerning through consolation and desolation may seem quite natural to them, as they are already used to weighing out their feelings within and responding to them in decision-making.

Both Thinkers and Feelers bring strengths to decision-making, as Thinkers will always ensure that reason and logic are part of the process, while Feelers will always ensure that considerations are made for people and values. It is also good for each type to stretch themselves to consider the opposite part of the dichotomy, as it is far too easy to overlook things when we only consider matters from our preferences (Myers 1995, 116). Myers writes, “For maximum effectiveness, all types must add to their natural endowment the appropriate use of opposites, either by using them in other people or by developing a controlled use of them within themselves” (Myers 1995, 118). When we are willing to grow in this, we can

ensure that we are both discerning out of our strengths, while also stretching ourselves to mature as a person in our less-developed side.

The Four Mental Functions in Discernment

The various combinations of these four elements (Sensing and Intuition; Thinking and Feeling) produce the four different mental functions pairings that can give us insight into how we make decisions, which is the essence of discernment. The first combination to examine are STs, who are “practical and matter of fact” types (Myers et al. 2003, 40). STs thrive when they have precise, step-by-step instructions, when they can be grounded in logic, and when they are given the ability to see the practical reasons for doing something (Myers 2015, 48). An ST’s main interest in decision-making will tend to:

... focus on facts because facts can be collected and verified directly by the senses—by seeing, hearing, touching, counting, weighing, and measuring. The ST types typically approach their decisions regarding facts using objective analysis because what they trust is Thinking, with its linear and logical process of reasoning from cause to effect, from premise to conclusion. (Myers et al. 2003, 41).

Because of this, it is possible that STs may have difficulty when first approaching consolation and desolation as an exercise in discernment. They are intellectual and logical literalists, so a discussion of how their inner thoughts and feelings are leading them toward God or away from Him may be challenging for them to understand or explain. Questions like, “How does that make you feel?” or “What does that feeling suggest to you about the Spirit’s leading?” may be difficult to answer for the analytical ST mind. STs will likely approach discernment in a

disciplined and systematic way, so answering questions that are less about feelings, and more about facts, experience, and next steps, would likely be helpful. Questions appealing to tradition, duty, and reason may better help them see whether a choice is leading toward God or away from Him, and thus toward His will or not. I have crafted several ST-friendly discernment questions:

- What are all the facts to be considered in this decision?
- What has God taught me in the past about this matter?
- Which option will honour God the most?
- Which option is the most logical path forward?
- Which option inspires me the most toward Christ-like action?

By talking out facts, details, duties, and experience, rather than feelings, STs may prayerfully process consolation and desolation from their more comfortable strengths, dealing less with emotion and abstract thought.

Sharing the Sensing perceiving function but with a different judging function, SFs are “sympathetic and friendly” types (Myers et al. 2003, 41). Like STs, they will thrive with precise, step-by-step instructions, but unlike STs they will also seek frequent, friendly interaction with and approval from others (Myers 2015, 48). SFs:

... are mainly interested in facts they can gather directly through the senses, but they approach their decisions with a subjectivity that is based on their personal value system. This subjectivity and the warmth they convey comes from their trust of Feeling, with its power to weigh how much things matter to themselves and others. In contrast to Sensing Thinking types, they are more interested in facts about people than in facts about things. (Myers et al. 2003, 41)

Although similarly methodical and systematic, SFs will typically be more comfortable with emotional analysis and language than STs. They are likely to be at ease in both experiencing and explaining their feelings, but may have a difficult time interpreting what those feelings mean, which is the point of determining consolation and desolation—are these inner thoughts/feelings leading us into God’s will or away from it? Emotional language will not hinder, but trying to ascertain whether a feeling is leading one toward God or away from Him might still be difficult for their literal thinking to process. As with STs, a series of step-by-step questions may help in an SF’s discerning, with the freedom to use emotional language to explore. Questions about facts, experience, and what actions the feelings might spur us toward will likely be helpful, such as:

- What are all the facts to be considered in this decision?
- What has God taught me in the past about this matter?
- How does each option make me feel, and does that spur me toward godly action?
- How might each option affect people that I love?
- Which option will benefit my personal walk with God the most?

By giving room to explore facts and data-gathering, as well as what is already known via experience, an SF will be on familiar ground. From there, one can move into exploring feelings that are affected by the decision, and what they might mean in terms of the Lord’s leading. Posing questions around how the decision might affect one’s walk with God, or how it might affect loved ones, will

tap into their Feeling sensibilities, and can help them to get a sense of whether these inner movements are leading them into consolation or desolation.

NTs are the “logical and ingenious” types (Myers et al. 2003, 43). They love problem-solving and wrestling through intellectual challenges (Myers 2015, 48). NT types:

... prefer Intuition for purposes of perception, but they prefer the objectivity of Thinking for purposes of judgment. They too focus on possibilities, theoretical relationships, and abstract patterns, but they judge these from a nonpersonal, cause-and-effect perspective ... where attention to human issues may be secondary. (Myers et al. 2003, 43)

In this light, NTs often approach discernment as a puzzle to be solved. They naturally engage with daydreaming and imagining all possibilities and potential outcomes of a matter. They will likely be comfortable paying attention to their inner impulses, looking for an idea that “just feels right” to them, but like STs, they are typically going to be less comfortable with emotional language.

Questions to help NTs sort through consolation and desolation may include taking time to imagine all the possible outcomes of a decision, and paying attention to what each outcome does in their mind, rather than what it does in their heart (emotions). NTs may also need some help being “reined in” from too much imagining, as they can often get caught up mentally pursuing “rabbit trails” that do not serve the main question being discerned. Cause-and-effect questions will help an NT focus their thoughts and find a rational path forward, and an emphasis upon logic and thoughts will help them focus on what leads toward God or away from Him in their discernment. As examples:

- What is going on inside my mind right now, and does it draw me closer to God?
- What are the possible outcomes of each option in this decision?
- What are the good and bad consequences of these outcomes?
- Which solution sits right as the most reasonable and logically sound?
- Which solution brings peace to the array of ideas swirling in my mind?

By giving space for an NT to do their mental exploring, they will be on familiar ground. From there, rather than focusing on which decision brings peace to the heart, as an example, focusing on which decision brings peace to the mind—no doubt one that also makes logical sense—will be a good way for NTs to process the inner movements of what is going on inside of them, and help them determine whether the movement is leading them toward the Lord’s peace, or not.

The final group, the NFs, are the “enthusiastic and insightful” types (Myers et al. 2003, 42). They need freedom to do things in their own creative way, and thrive with frequent positive feedback (Myers 2015, 48). NFs:

... are likely to be attracted to new projects, things that have never happened but might be made to happen, or truths that have not yet come to light ... Feeling provides the interest in using these intuitive insights in human relationships. The personal warmth and commitment with which NF people seek and follow up possibilities tend to make them enthusiastic as well as insightful. (Myers et al. 2003, 42).

Because of this, NFs may be easily drawn into determining consolation and desolation, as they are naturally comfortable paying attention to their inner movements, and will generally be at ease processing what is going on within them. NFs can be asked directly how the implications of decisions make them

feel, and careful attention can be paid to how a decision affects one's values and loved ones, and determining whether these inner movements are leading them toward the Lord or away from Him. As examples:

- What is going on inside my soul, and what leads it closer to God?
- What are all the possible outcomes of this decision?
- What values of mine does this impact?
- How will the outcomes affect my loved ones?
- Which solution “sits right,” as the most comfortable?
- Which solution brings me into peace with God?

By giving NFs room to talk about their feelings and to imagine outcomes, their N and F sides will be well-nourished. It can then be straightforward to try connecting an NF's emotions to whether these feelings are drawing one closer to God or further away from God. The NF will likely be able to settle on which option “feels right” from there, by the sense of peace that comes to their soul as they find the decision that leads them closer to God and His will.

There is one more crucial thing to note: God is by no means bound to speak to us *only* within the confines of our personality type (Ward et al. 1988, 230). Although tools like the MBTI® are helpful in general, we must never restrict ourselves to thinking that He may only speak to us in certain ways, or that our discernment methods need in any way be *limited* to our MBTI® type. Just because one is an “N” or a “T” does not mean that they are confined to that part of their personality preference—learning about ourselves does not only show us new

things about our strengths, but also can help us to see our weak spots, so that we can actively invest in growing in those areas (Demarest 1999, 234).

In that sense, there are really two levels of self-awareness to take away from the MBTI®. This first level is to learn about what type one is, and how one might lean into their natural in-born preferences. In this, we can learn something profound about who we are. The second level of revelation, however, is to learn about the opposing side of each dichotomy, and how one might stretch themselves to grow in their less-developed side. To claim, “I’m a Feeler,” and lock oneself entirely into that identity is to miss the point. On the contrary, great maturity can happen “when we see ‘how the other half lives’—when we allow for insights and information from spiritual experiences that are different from our initial, more natural paths” (Hirsh and Kise 2006, 241). When we use the MBTI® properly, we can be who God created us to be, while simultaneously leaning on and learning from those who are different than us in a way that stretches us beyond ourselves and can cause us to grow in deeper maturity and deeper self-knowledge.

Strategies and Applications of Model

The best strategy for this Model of Spiritual Formation would be for an individual to first explore the MBTI®, ideally with a professional practitioner for the best results. As the individual learns more about their mental function, they can then begin to prayerfully process a decision through function-appropriate questions such as the ones listed in the previous section, as they weigh out

whether a choice is leading them into consolation or desolation. This would best be done with another person, such as a pastor or spiritual director. As we begin to sort through these questions while honouring our God-given personalities and how we naturally process information and come to decisions, theoretically we will have an easier time discerning His leading. As we feel we are getting a sense of God's leading, we should always be checking our sense of discernment against Scripture to see if it is consistent with the Word of God, and we should always be exploring it with other believers to see if they are able to confirm our sense of the Spirit's leading.

Howard writes, "Simply (and hopefully) put, by the end of discernment a clarity appears—about one's situation, oneself, and one's God. And often this awareness is accompanied by feelings and motion toward activity" (Howard 2008, 396). This is indeed the hope of this discernment process, and through this process, we trust that we are growing in our spiritual formation as well. A spiritually formed person is one who knows God's will and walks in it, as Christ did, and the ideas behind this Model could make discernment easier for us. The desire behind this work is to help people discern in an easily accessible way, and in that sense, with a little practice, any person should be able to understand how consolation and desolation works, and how the MBTI® works, and start to put the principles of this Model into practice. However, consolation and desolation are likely best explored with someone else, and the MBTI® is the same—no one can be entirely self-aware, so it is unwise to discern entirely on our own. In that sense,

this Model may be best suited for pastors and spiritual directors to use as a tool to help those to whom they are ministering to go deeper in their discernment. It could also be used in a trusted partnership or group setting with people committed to helping one another grow in discernment together.

As the MBTI® helps us to grow in the knowledge of self, we will be able to discern more effectively, which will help us grow also in the knowledge of God. As we increase our revelation of God and self, we can commune with Him better, and thus be spiritually formed in His presence. This Model has been designed to allow people to go deeper in their awareness of self via the MBTI®, leading them deeper in their knowledge of God via discernment, that deeper spiritual formation may ultimately be achieved.

Summary

As we are seeking to be spiritually formed people who are becoming more like Christ, we must become people who know the will of God and walk in it, as Jesus did (John 5:19–20). Discernment is crucial to our spiritual formation, because discerning the Spirit's leading shows us what we need to work on for our growth; as well, our choices themselves are formational, and also the process of discernment itself forms us, as God changes us through the journey.

As we seek to become a discerning people, Ignatius' mode of discernment via determining consolation and desolation is an easily accessible way for us to learn how to discern. By paying attention to what is going on within us as we

prayerfully weigh out different options and aspects of our decision, we can sense where the Spirit of God is at work and where He is not, and can learn God's will and walk in it, being formed as we do so.

As we are paying attention to these inner rhythms of our souls, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® is a helpful tool to help us grow in our self-knowledge so that we can sort through these inner movements with greater clarity. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this Portfolio, Isabella Briggs Myers ended her seminal work *Gifts Differing* by quoting from Romans 12:4–8, in the King James Version:

*For as we have many members in one body,
and as all members have not the same office:
So we, being many, are one body ...
and every one members one of another.
Having then gifts differing ...
whether prophecy, let us prophesy ...
Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering;
or he that teacheth, on teaching;
Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation ...* (Myers 1995, 202)

Although this passage speaks specifically of our spiritual gifts, for Myers this passage could easily be applied to our personalities, our unique psychological make-up being a “gift” that we can bring to the world, while also leaning on the differing gifts of others. Harbaugh writes, “Of all the spiritual gifts that can be given to us, the gift of one's personality is probably the most basic. Other gifts that we may have, such as the gift of teaching or service, will be expressed through our particular personality” (Harbaugh 1990, 22). Growing in the self-knowledge of our God-given personality gift can help us to live life as our true

selves, without feeling the pressure of being someone else. As has been explored in this Model, we can then discern better because we hold this self-knowledge.

We are spiritually formed by the Holy Spirit as we discern His leading and obey it; an easily accessible method of discernment is Ignatius' distinguishing of "consolation and desolation" within our souls; and we can determine these inner movements better by growing in our self-knowledge through a tool such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®. When these elements all come together, we have a straightforward and easily-engageable Model of Spiritual Formation that will help people to know themselves and the Lord better, and will help them be formed more into the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit, as we discern His leading and His will, and as we respond in obedience to Him.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RESEARCH PROJECT:
“EXPLORING DISCERNMENT
VIA PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE THEORY”

Introduction

My Research Project explored how one’s psychological type (as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®) affects one’s discernment process, using members of Meadow Brook Church in Leamington, Ontario. Discernment is the process of humans learning what God already knows and has chosen to reveal to them (Smith 2003, 11). As my Model demonstrated, it is a crucial part of spiritual formation and the spiritual journey, but can be a highly individual process that differs from person-to-person based on one’s psychological type. I have observed that people in my congregation approach and process discernment differently based on different aspects of their MBTI® type. Some people are naturally perceptive (Intuitives), while others are more methodical and data-minded (Sensors); some are more logical and forthright (Thinkers), while others are more emotionally sensitive and gentle (Feelers), etc.

By using a tool like the MBTI® to help people grow in the knowledge of self, giving them permission to “be themselves,” and then by exploring discernment questions through their MBTI® type, I desired to see if we could make the process of discernment easier for people by helping them to sense God’s leading within their own God-given psychological type. This project led people of different MBTI® types through a guided process of discernment, using Ignatius’ “discernment of spirits” from his *Spiritual Exercises* as the mode of discernment. This was combined with exploring different aspects of the MBTI® as a way for people to prayerfully sort through their thoughts and emotions in order to help them determine whether a decision was leading them closer to the Lord (consolation) or leading them away from the Lord (desolation).

It was hypothesized that subjects would approach discernment differently based on their specific MBTI® mental function, and that discernment could be made easier for people through their use of specific exercises geared toward their MBTI® type. This process could thus help them to grow in the knowledge of self and of God. In actuality, the research demonstrated that while people did approach discernment differently based on their mental function, they did not overly prefer discernment exercises that were geared toward their specific mental function. Rather, by having participants engage in all sides of the mental functions, and not just their specific type, a holistic and effective process of discernment was discovered for the participants.

Context

Meadow Brook Church is a Mennonite Brethren congregation, a stream of the Church with roots going back to the Anabaptist branch of the Reformation. Mennonite Brethren engage in a very practical faith journey, emphasizing the teachings of Jesus and actively seeking to live them out. Simple and accessible approaches to the Christian life are important to this branch of the Church, and so investigating discernment through a simple and accessible format such as a guided exploration of Ignatian consolation and desolation was a natural decision for this research.

My six years of ministry at Meadow Brook have included many conversations, prayer times, and counseling sessions concerning the topic of discernment. These times have taught me that many people struggle to discern the Lord's leading, and many people feel discouraged in their spiritual journey because of it. As my Model unpacked, discernment is crucial to our spiritual journey, and I was witnessing that discernment can be difficult when people try to engage with discernment methods that are simply a poor match for how God has wired them. By practically exploring how we discern through the lens of our MBTI® type, I wanted to ultimately see if I could create a tool to help make discernment more accessible for members of my congregation. Although the research results ultimately did not prove all of my original hypothesis, I learned that the particular method of discernment that we explored did indeed help the

research participants to discern effectively, and thus it was valuable research and a valuable experience for my project and for my pastoral ministry.

Field

The project explored discernment with six members of Meadow Brook Church, from two differing MBTI® mental functions pairings, with three each of the “ST” and “NF” functions. The “ST” and “NF” pairings were chosen because they are opposite MBTI® mental functions, and it was presumed that they would provide the clearest contrasts in this project, and therefore the clearest results. NFs are naturally drawn to the intangible, the abstract, and the mystical, making them a strong choice to explore discernment. Then, the logical and tangibly-driven STs would hopefully provide an interesting juxtaposition, as they would likely naturally approach discernment in an opposite fashion to the NFs. Participants prayerfully considered and responded to weekly discernment questions at home in their private devotional time over eight weeks. They shared their written answers with me, and then met with me one-on-one after the completion of the exercises for an interview debriefing the experience. The project began the first week of October 2019 and ended the first week of December 2019.

Each participant was assessed ahead of time to confirm their MBTI® type via two free online assessments, and each had at least one follow-up conversation with me to ultimately confirm their type. Table 1 summarizes the participant profiles:

Table 1. Participants of the research project

Participant	Age	Gender	MBTI®	Mental Function
ST #1	34	F	ISTJ	ST
ST #2	26	M	ISTJ	ST
ST #3	31	F	ESTJ	ST
NF #1	38	M	ENFJ	NF
NF #2	33	F	ENFJ	NF
NF #3	40	F	ENFJ	NF

Although not planned, all participants were of the “Judging” persuasion—found in the final letter of the MBTI® type—meaning that they were all structured, planful types. Since the project only looked at mental function, the Judging side was not being measured. However, a planned-out and structured approach to discernment like the one utilized in this project conceivably fit well with the Judging persuasion of all participants, which may have affected the results. Someone of the opposing “Perceiving” type (naturally more spontaneous and flexible), might conceivably have had a more difficult time walking through such a structured program of discernment, which the data generated by this research does not address. This may limit the transferability of this research to the broader population, as the results only reflect a Judging approach to discernment in this project.

Scope

This project was limited by only exploring two of the four mental function pairings primarily to keep the data manageable in the time frame provided. The

four mental functions themselves are also a limit, exploring the two middle letters of the MBTI® instead of all four letters. Again, these limits made the project more manageable, rather than trying to engage with and measure all sixteen MBTI® types and their approach to discernment. Age was also limited, as it does affect our MBTI® development; as one matures past mid-life, we subconsciously begin to explore aspects of our psychological makeup that are counter to our preference type. For example, with age an Introvert will start to become more comfortable with their less-developed Extraverted side (Johnson 1999, 40). Because of this, I recruited participants who were 40 years of age or younger. This was done to ensure that the people involved could engage as their type without the maturity of mid-life exploration potentially affecting results. For example, a 50-year-old Sensor might subconsciously approach the project with some newly developing Intuitive tendencies that might muddy the data, etc.

The project was also limited to attendees of Meadow Brook Church. This was due to Meadow Brook being my specific ministry context, which is what I was assigned to explore. This project did not consider race or gender as an area of study. The research focused solely on how different MBTI® mental functions approach discernment, as the MBTI® focuses solely on psychological type and not racial or gender considerations.

Methodology

I used a qualitative approach to data collection in this project. I utilized narrative and content analysis techniques to process the data. The narrative aspect was used briefly at the outset, asking a few preliminary questions to get a sense of how participants had been engaging in discernment in their lives before the study. By asking people to share some of their story in this area, it gave a good “baseline” for how each participant generally approached discernment.

In content analysis, one begins with a tentative hypothesis statement, and then chooses phenomena to test the hypothesis. By examining the data person-by-person, the hypothesis will be tested against each person, and the statement will be confirmed or revised until a final conclusion exists that fits the data gathered (Chapman 2019). By looking at existing literature and research on a subject, one can create a reasonable hypothesis going into the research, and the knowledge that already exists can inform the prediction of where the research might go from the outset (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1281). The emphasis of content analysis research is to listen carefully to communication from the subjects, and to be attentive to the meaning that is being shared (Krippendorff 2019, xii). The inferences of the data are tested to see if they fit into existing theory or prior research on the subject (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1281), paying attention to how the meaning of the data reflects the participants and their experience (Weber 1990, 9).

Although there is little work done on the MBTI® and discerning the Lord's leading, there is much information available on MBTI® and decision-making, which makes the idea that we approach decision-making differently based on our MBTI® makeup a good starting hypothesis for this research. Since in this Portfolio, discernment is being explored as Spirit-led decision-making, it was presumed that the aspects of our MBTI® type that affect our decision-making would also affect our discernment process. Based on this, a preliminary hypothesis was formed: "People of different MBTI® mental functions will approach discernment differently based on their mental function, and each mental function will be drawn to certain exercises that fit their type better than others." This hypothesis was explored through the research, with revisions happening based on the data collected from each participant, until I finished with a revised hypothesis that was backed up by the data.

Methods

Participants were each asked to come up with two different questions to which they were seeking to discern the Lord's leading. The ten-week study included four weeks to explore each matter, for a total of eight weeks of discernment exercises. Over the final two weeks I conducted a follow-up interview with each participant. The matters for discernment could not be time-sensitive to the research period (i.e., we needed to be able to take the full time period to explore the questions without pressure), and were to be constructed as

“Should I?” questions with two or three clear outcomes (e.g., “Should I apply for this job? Yes or no?” rather than bigger and broader questions like “What should I do with my life?,” which would be too challenging to explore within the design limitations of this project).

The weekly format was modeled after Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, during which his process, occurring over four weeks, allowed for participants to have time to reflect and meditate, rather than simply rushing through a list of questions and exercises in one sitting. The first four weeks of the project explored the first matter of discernment for each person, and the second four weeks explored the second matter of discernment. Exploring two different matters added rigour to this small project, since exploring one matter would generate too little data to produce potentially reliable or transferable results.

Based on MBTI® theory and practice, I crafted data collection questions that allowed participants to explore their discernment matters over eight weeks, and which would produce results that could thoroughly investigate the project’s hypothesis. I then observed how each type responded to the questions given for prayerful consideration. Participants were given a brief questionnaire to answer in writing before the weekly discernment exercises began (see Appendix A), outlining what their personal discernment process had been like up until that point. This narrative approach gave a baseline going into the project for how the different types were approaching discernment at the outset. From there, each four-week process of discernment followed the same format: participants were given a

weekly questionnaire to help them process their discernment during that week, which they were to pray into and reflect on as the questions related to the matter they were discerning. They were asked to take 10–20 minutes a day for this purpose, and then write out their answers to the questions by the end of the week and return the results to me (see Appendix A).

Each week, the questions focused on a different element of the MBTI® mental functions: the first week was “Sensing-friendly” questions, the second week was “Intuitive-friendly” questions, the third week was “Thinking-friendly” questions, and the fourth week was “Feeling-friendly” questions. For example, week three had participants make out a pros-and-cons list for their possible outcomes, a “Thinking-friendly” exercise. Week four had participants explore how their values were being impacted by the decision that they were discerning, and how understanding those values might be leading them toward or away from the Lord—this was a “Feeling-friendly” exercise. The participants did not know that each week had a theme, so that they would not gear their answers toward that specific theme. By having them process these different questions and record the results, I expected to see an interesting juxtaposition as to how the two different mental functions were approaching discernment. Ultimately, these exercises were all to help each person process their thoughts and emotions in an intentional way so that they might have a clearer picture of whether a decision was leading them into consolation or desolation.

At the end of the eight weeks of weekly discernment questions, I met with each participant one-on-one for an interview to discuss the whole process, as I took notes. Participants answered a few closing questions (see Appendix A), focusing on what, if anything, they had learned about discernment through these exercises, and whether the experience had been helpful to their discernment, and if so, why. The participants' weekly responses and closing interviews were then analyzed to determine how the people of different mental functions approached discernment, and whether specific questions were more effective for each mental function in the discernment process. Data were analyzed via content analysis, with coding based on examining the results through the lens of the original working hypothesis.

These methods were chosen because they allowed space for people to explore discernment on their own, over time, which was important because discernment often takes time, and people needed room to prayerfully process their thoughts and feelings. The process also gave space for personal exploration and expression by the participants, allowing them to answer as authentically as they wished. The closing interview gave me some room to dig deeper into the weekly answers that had already been submitted. Finally, the content analysis methodology allowed me to explore my preliminary hypothesis and revise it as the data demonstrated, ending the research with a statement summarizing the results of the data.

Phases and Timetable

I began my preliminary search for participants in September 2019 by finding a “purposive sample”—people who meet the predetermined criteria (Sensing 2011, 83). An open call was made to the church (see Appendix B), and several weeks of testing for and confirming psychological type followed. After that, the participants engaged in the discernment process, reflecting on the assigned weekly questions over eight weeks. Other than the initial interactions finding the candidates and giving instructions, I was generally not in contact with the participants about the project, other than to touch base occasionally and make myself available for questions. It took until the end of September to find participants, and once the Tyndale Research Ethics Board (REB) gave consent on October 1st, all participants signed the research consent form (see Appendix C). From there, October–November was used to engage in the discernment research process. December–February was taken to analyze the data and write up the findings. A summary of this timeline can be found in Appendix D.

Ethics

In this project, I was accountable to Tyndale University and Dr. Mark Chapman, my research instructor. As well, in my role as Lead Pastor I am accountable to the Board of Elders at Meadow Brook Church, which gave permission for me to conduct my research with participants from the church. The primary concern of ethics in research is the standard to “do no harm” (Sensing

2011, 34) to those participating in the research. As researchers, “we have a ‘duty of care’ in relation to all people we engage in processes of investigation” (Stringer 2014, 89). Ethics in research are especially important when we are engaging in research within our own congregations, for I hold a “sacred trust” as a minister (Sensing 2011, 31), and it can be easy, even inadvertently, to abuse clerical authority by coercing people into participation (Moschella 2008, 91). As a shepherd over God’s flock, a minister is called by the Lord to protect and care for the sheep (Acts 20:28–31; 1 Pet. 5:1–4), and so extra care must be taken to ensure that congregants are in no way negatively affected by research that is conducted by a spiritual overseer in their lives. For this reason, special attention was needed to ensure that all participants in this research were being treated ethically, and that the research process itself was also ethical.

Several steps were taken to ensure that this happened. One aspect of conducting ethical research is ensuring that the potential benefits outweigh any potential risks involved. There were many potential benefits for the participants of this research, which were outlined in a letter given to them before the project began (see Appendix E). While efforts were made to minimize any negative experiences from this research study, there were some minor risks which were also disclosed, as well as the measures taken to reduce those risks (also found in Appendix E).

Another common ethical concern in research such as this is that the study might induce participants to act against their wishes or may induce participants to

disclose intimate or otherwise sensitive information. Someone may not wish to participate in a certain exercise or may not wish to share certain information. To address this, it was made clear that all participation was completely voluntary, all sharing was likewise voluntary, and that the participants should act and share only according to their comfort level. Since each person was given the freedom to pick two matters for discernment of their own choosing, it could reasonably be presumed that they chose things that they were comfortable sharing about.

Finally, it was possible that there could have been issues connected to “institutional/formal power relationships [that] connect the researcher with participants (i.e., student/teacher, employer/employee, counsellor/client, youth pastor/youth group member)” (Tyndale 2018). Since I am a pastor with spiritual authority over the participants, and a MBTI® practitioner, and also the researcher conducting the study, this could have potentially led to possible conflicts. However, my role as a pastor is also a benefit, as a level of trust already exists between me and the participants, allowing them to feel comfortable with me. My personal expertise as a MBTI® practitioner included training on how to approach different psychological types with humility and grace. This specific expertise also meant that it would have been difficult to use a third-party data collector in this research. I made clear to participants my commitment not to use my position of spiritual authority to coerce or influence participants in any way, and it was repeatedly stated that nothing in this process would ever affect the participants’ standing with me or with Meadow Brook Church. Participation in this study was

completely voluntary, and they were clearly given the option to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Findings, Analysis, and Interpretation

The data collection process is shown in Appendix F. As data came in, a method to code it accurately and meaningfully was sought. In a content analysis methodology, data is mined for clues that either defend or reject a specific hypothesis (Stemler 2001, 8). Therefore, coding was needed that explicitly explored how the participant's answers related to the project's hypothesis, which was that "People of different MBTI® mental functions will approach discernment differently based on their mental function, and each mental function will be drawn to certain exercises that fit their type better than others."

To do this, I looked to the standard MBTI® descriptive language for the four mental functions—Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling (Kummerow and Quenk 2015, 4). The official MBTI® descriptive words for these four areas became the codes used to analyze the responses to the preliminary and the weekly questions. Each answer from each participant was examined carefully against the list of MBTI® descriptive words, and these descriptors were assigned to each answer based on MBTI® wordage, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2. MBTI® coding categories for analysis

Sensing (S)	Intuition (N)	Thinking (T)	Feeling (F)
Concrete <i>(relating to facts, and things that are literal and tangible)</i>	Abstract <i>(comfortable with the figurative, symbolic, and intangible, the “big picture”)</i>	Logical <i>(impersonal, impartial, objective, analytical)</i>	Empathetic <i>(emphasizing the personal, harmony, values)</i>
Realistic <i>(sensible, matter-of-fact, efficient)</i>	Imaginative <i>(being resourceful, inventive, seeking novelty)</i>	Rational <i>(truthful, focus on cause-and-effect, principled)</i>	Compassionate <i>(tactful, sympathetic, and loyal)</i>
Practical <i>(pragmatic, results-oriented, with a focus on application)</i>	Conceptual <i>(being scholarly, idea-oriented, intellectual)</i>	Questioning <i>(precise, challenging, wants discussion)</i>	Accommodating <i>(approving, agreeable, want harmony)</i>
Experiential <i>(a hands-on approach, trusting what is empirical, trusting experience)</i>	Theoretical <i>(seeking patterns, comfortable with the hypothetical, trusting theories)</i>	Critical <i>(skeptical, demanding evidence, critiquing)</i>	Accepting <i>(tolerant of differences, trusting of others, encouraging)</i>
Traditional <i>(conventional, customary, valuing what is tested-and-true)</i>	Original <i>(unconventional, valuing new, unusual)</i>	Tough <i>(tough-minded, firm, ends-oriented)</i>	Tender <i>(tender-hearted, gentle, means-oriented)</i>

These words reflect preferences and behaviours typically associated with each element of the mental functions. Participants' answers were assessed according to these descriptive words and were used to determine whether participants were responding "in-preference." That is, were the STs giving answers that reflected the words and concepts typically associated with the Sensing and Thinking categories listed in Table 2, and were the NFs giving answers that reflected the words and concepts typically associated with the Intuitive and Feeling categories listed in Table 2? If the data showed that STs approached the discernment exercises as STs, and the NFs as NFs, then this would demonstrate that our specific MBTI® mental function does indeed play a role in how we approach discernment.

Coding by these means was a time-consuming process. Ultimately the six participants were each asked 41 questions, for a total of 246 answers to be analyzed, plus the follow-up responses in the debriefing interview. Participants were asked to give concise responses, and they obliged, which helped keep the process from becoming overwhelming. For an example of how this coding worked, see Figure 1 below, in which an ST participant's answer was coded according to the MBTI® categories in Table 2.

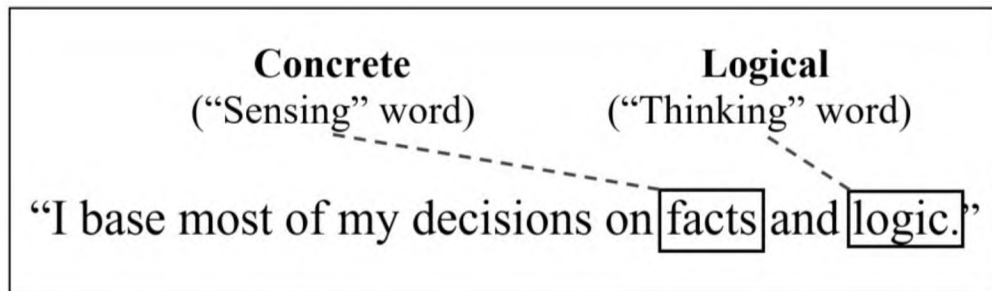


Figure 1. MBTI® coding example of an ST answer

In this example, the descriptive words that the participant gave could reasonably be defined as classic Sensing and Thinking words. There were no other words in the statement that could be coded according to the MBTI® coding categories (Table 2). Thus, it was concluded that an ST answering in this way was answering in-preference.

Here is another example of coding in Figure 2, this time from an NF's answer:

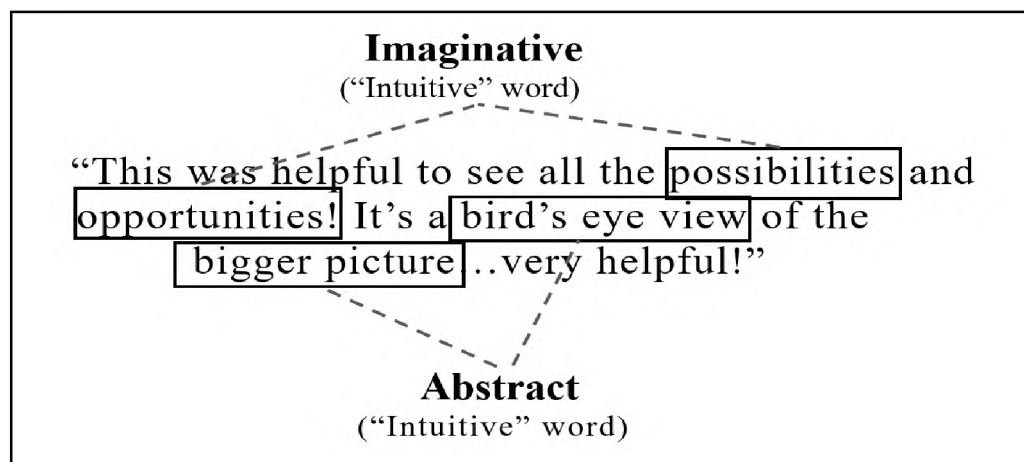


Figure 2. MBTI® coding example of an NF answer

In this example, within the answer are several Intuitive-type phrases, and no obvious Sensing, Thinking or Feeling-type phrases. I determined to only mark coding for the clearest possible MBTI® usages for the four aspects of type being analyzed, to keep the analysis accurate to the coding categories. Thus, for an NF, it was determined that this answer is in-preference, as it gives evidence of Intuitive wordage.

In determining the first part of the hypothesis—that people of different MBTI® mental functions will approach discernment differently based on their type—each question was analyzed by this process, and the answers were coded thusly, yielding clear results as to whether a person was answering in-preference or out-of-preference. That said, there were times when an answer did not contain enough data to make an informed decision either way. This happened because either: a) a participant may have skipped a question and there was no data to analyze; b) an answer may have “split the difference” in coding—for example, the answer contained two Sensing words as well as two Intuitive words, making it impossible to determine whether the answer was in-preference or out-of-preference; or c) the answer did not include at least one of the MBTI® coding descriptors, making a fair determination impossible. When an answer fell into one of these three categories, it was marked as “indeterminate.”

After coding the preliminary and weekly questions, the results of each participant’s answers were compiled and are presented in Table 3, showing the

number of answers that were coded as in-preference, out-of-preference, or indeterminate.

Table 3. Participant answers according to MBTI® type

Participant	In-Preference	Out-of-Preference	Indeterminate
ST #1	32	0	9
ST #2	29	3	9
ST #3	31	4	6
NF #1	32	4	5
NF #2	34	0	7
NF #3	29	0	12
Totals	187	11	48

Although there are some variations, the data show that participants were approaching the discernment questions in-preference for a clear majority of the questions. This is visualized in Figures 3 and 4.

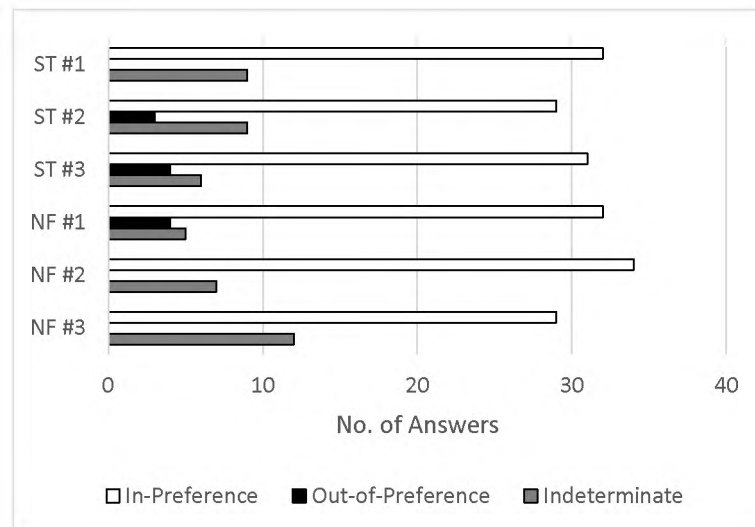


Figure 3. Individual coding results per participant

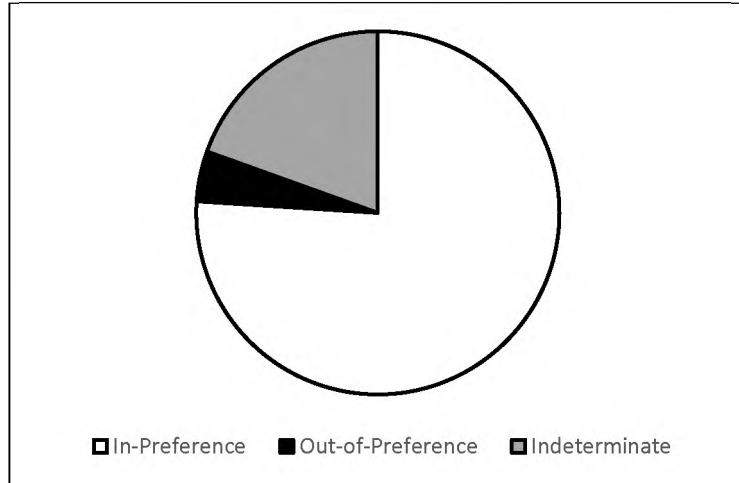


Figure 4. Coding results for all participants as a percentage of the whole

The data demonstrate that participants approached the discernment questions in-preference 76% of the time. In analyzing and interpreting the first part of the hypothesis—that people of different MBTI® mental functions will approach discernment differently based on their mental function—this would be the clearest indicator of whether or not MBTI® mental function plays a factor in discernment. Since STs and NFs naturally approach decision-making in opposite fashion (Myers 2003, 40–43), determining whether or not their mental function affected their approach to discernment would defend or reject the first part of the hypothesis.

Looking at the data, participants showed evidence of their MBTI® mental function impacting their responses to the questions 76% of the time. Participants answered out-of-preference approximately 4% of the time. This should not be

considered unusual. In an official MBTI® analysis, it would be expected that there would be a few answers given out-of-preference for any person (Myers 2003, 120). Human psychology is far too complex to be minimized to a simple four-letter formula like the MBTI® (Harbaugh 1993, 32). We all engage with both sides of our MBTI® type regularly, even though we will always prefer one side over the other (Innes 1996, 11–12).

As for the “indeterminate” answers, it is likely that, if I had been able to sit with the participants and had the opportunity to personally discuss each question, more clear answers could have been determined. The downside of written responses being submitted was that there was no room for direct follow-up to any responses. As the data analysis began, it also became apparent that some of the questions certainly could have been worded better. Although many of the questions produced good results, there were several that could be rewritten to bring clearer results and potentially provide less “indeterminate” answers. For example, an “Intuition Week” question was, “How does each outcome (of the matter you are discerning) fit in with the ‘bigger picture’ of your life and calling?” This question did not generally produce effective answers to test against the hypothesis, as it allowed people to answer with responses such as, “I don’t know what my calling is!” Such answers were sincere, but not helpful to the research or the discernment process. The question could be rewritten, “Which outcome fits in better with your current understanding of your gifts/calling, and why?” This

would have spurred the participant to make a choice and then justify it, which would likely have been more helpful for the research and the discernment process.

The first part of the hypothesis was fairly straightforward, and the results were clearer than expected. The data of this small project indicate that as the participants prayerfully answered the provided questions, their MBTI® mental function demonstrated a measurable affect on their approach to discernment most of the time. The STs typically approached discernment with an emphasis on facts, on the tangible and concrete, on logic, and on pragmatism. Conversely, the NFs approached discernment with an emphasis on abstraction, intangibility, empathy, and accommodation. Therefore, according to this data, the first part of the hypothesis is defended.

As to the second part of the hypothesis—that specific MBTI® mental functions will be drawn to certain exercises that fit their type better than others—there were four particular questions in the data-gathering process that were designed to flesh this out. As participants went through their four-week cycles of examining each of their two discernment matters, each aspect of the MBTI® mental functions received one week of focus. This meant that, for each cycle, participants were forced to engage with two weeks of questions that were in-preference for them, and two weeks that were out-of-preference for them. For the STs, their in-preference weeks were the Sensing and Thinking weeks; for the NFs, their in-preference weeks were the Intuitive and Feeling weeks.

Therefore, for every participant, they participated in alternating weeks of engaging in in-preference and out-of-preference questions: Week one was Sensing, week two was Intuitive, week three was Thinking, and week four was Feeling (the participants did not know that this was the structure of the questions). At the end of every two weeks, participants were asked which of the two weeks' exercises they preferred. For the second part of the hypothesis to hold true, the STs should have preferred the exercises of the Sensing and Thinking weeks, and the NFs should have preferred the Intuitive and Feeling weeks. This would demonstrate that people were feeling specifically drawn to exercises that fit better with their MBTI® mental function.

As the data came in and were coded, the anticipated results did not materialize. Table 4 demonstrates how the participants answered the questions to determine whether they preferred their in-preference weeks or their out-of-preference weeks.

Table 4. Participant preferences of weekly exercises

Participant	Weeks 1–2 (<i>S vs N</i>)	Weeks 3–4 (<i>T vs F</i>)	Weeks 5–6 (<i>S vs N</i>)	Weeks 7–8 (<i>T vs F</i>)
ST #1	Neither	Neither	In-Preference	Neither
ST #2	In-Preference	In-Preference	In-Preference	In-Preference
ST #3	In-Preference	Out-of-Pref.	In-Preference	Out-of-Pref.
NF #1	Neither	Neither	Neither	In-Preference
NF #2	In-Preference	In-Preference	In-Preference	In-Preference
NF #3	Neither	Neither	Neither	Neither

This is represented visually in Figure 5.

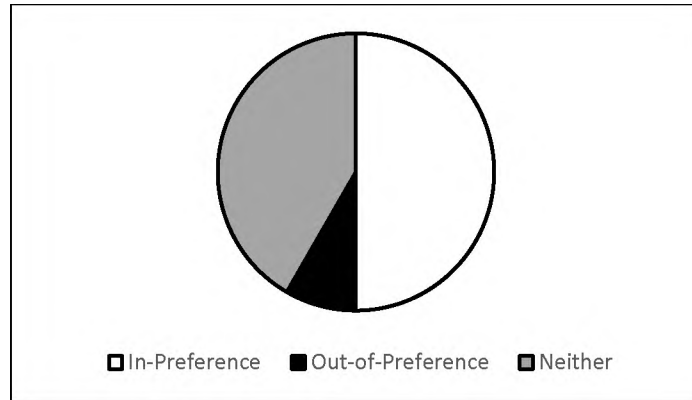


Figure 5. Participants' weekly preferences as a percentage of the whole

Thus, the data demonstrate that participants found in-preference discernment questions preferable to out-of-preference discernment questions only half the time, with the other half expressing that they either preferred the out-of-preference weeks, or much more often, “neither.” Thus, the second part of the hypothesis—that people of different MBTI® mental functions would be more drawn to exercises geared toward their type—was not confirmed.

As mentioned, the data pertaining to this part of the hypothesis were gathered by asking participants every two weeks which week of questions they preferred, to determine if they preferred their in-preference or out-of-preference weeks. In retrospect, a significant weakness in the design of this project was the way that these particular questions were worded. Every two weeks, the participants were asked, “Looking at last week’s questions and then this week’s questions, was one week’s process easier than the other? Did one week give you any clearer sense of the Lord and/or His leading than the other? Please describe.” As responses were analyzed, it became clear that there was enough ambiguity in

the wording that allowed participants to naturally answer that they had no preference for one week over the other.

In a standard MBTI® questionnaire, a question might be asked such as, “If forced to choose, would you rather attend a party with lots of people, or stay home with a book?” as an example of trying to determine whether someone has an Extraversion or an Introversion preference. Type theory relies on forcing people to choose one side of the dichotomy over the other, trusting that our psychological type will become apparent through the forced choice (Myers 2003, 5). Had my research questions been worded similarly—“If forced to choose, which week did you prefer, and why?”—it would not only have adhered better to MBTI® psychological type theory, but more importantly, the “neithers” in the answers could have been avoided, and the questions could have generated clearer results one way or the other.

As with the first part of the hypothesis, the few out-of-preference answers given by participants are not unusual—a small number of those in any usage of the MBTI® would be typical (Myers 2003, 120). The “neithers” deserve some more exploration and explanation, however—if the first part of the hypothesis was demonstrated, and one’s MBTI® mental function does indeed play a role in how one approaches discernment, then why did the participants not more overwhelmingly prefer discernment questions that fit with their own mental function?

The most likely answer can be found in the MBTI® literature, as well as from digging deeper into some of the specific participant answers. As mentioned in my Model, there are two levels of self-knowledge that can emerge from the MBTI®: first, it can help us understand ourselves better, and lean into who we are (Myers 2003, 21), but there is also a second level of self-awareness, which is actually a more mature level of self-awareness. This second level causes us to realize areas of our life where we are *not* naturally gifted, but where we can grow (Mulholland 1993, 145). As a practitioner, I will tell a client, “To walk away from this assessment and say, ‘I’m an Introvert, that’s just who I am, so I don’t need to make any effort to get out there and connect with people,’ would be to miss the point.” Yes, one may be an Introvert and more naturally drawn to solitude and quiet, requiring “alone time” to recharge—that is the first level of self-knowledge, and it is crucial to understanding one’s self. However, that same Introverted person can and should also intentionally stretch themselves beyond their natural inclinations, to grow as a person and better engage with their less-developed Extraverted side (McGuinness 2009, 141).

Although people all lean to one side or the other of each MBTI® dichotomy, there is great value in seeing “how the other half lives” (Hirsh and Kise 2006, 241), and it can actually be refreshing and insightful for us to intentionally engage with our less-developed side. If we stick to our natural tendencies alone, we can miss things. A Thinker, looking at things only from their Thinking preference, may never give much weight to others’ feelings, while a

Feeler might never make a difficult but logical and necessary decision because they are *too* concerned for another's feelings. It is good for a Thinker to consider their less-developed Feeling side, as it is good for a Feeler to do the same with their Thinking side. An Intuitive might jump from project to project due to their love of novelty, never settling in or finishing things, while a Sensor might never take a risk because they do not naturally live in the world of possibilities. We experience maturity and growth as we discover our MBTI® type and learn more about who we are, but left to *only* our own type, we can also limit ourselves. By intentionally engaging with our opposing and less-developed side, we can stretch ourselves and grow even more in self-knowledge.

Based on the data, it is reasonable to conclude that this was at least a factor in why the second part of the hypothesis was not confirmed. The assumption in the project design was that the STs would prefer the Sensing and Thinking weeks, and the NFs would prefer the Intuitive and Feeling weeks. While this was a reasonable assumption, what was not anticipated was that the STs might actually find parts of the NF weeks interesting and helpful, precisely because they *were* different than their natural thought-process, and vice-versa for the NFs. For example, all the STs enjoyed making a list of pros-and-cons concerning their discernment matter. This was a logical Thinking exercise (although the concrete and fact-driven “Sensing” side also typically love lists). In that sense, they responded as expected: the STs found this Thinking exercise natural and easy. They were in-preference. However, all the STs also saw the

importance of pondering how their discernment matter was affected by their values, which was a Feeling exercise. It was not natural to their type, but that does not mean that it was not important for them to consider. Two of the STs specifically indicated that they had never previously considered “values” in decision-making but found the exercise helpful in their discernment.

Likewise, all the NFs found the “daydreaming” questions quite comfortable and natural, as would be expected from Intuitives. However, they were also aided in their discernment by the Sensing exercises of gathering facts and making tangible written lists, not because the Sensing questions fit with their type, but precisely because the Sensing exercises did not come naturally to them, and yet still proved helpful for them to consider. When the participants suggested that they did not prefer one week’s questions over the other, this occurred a number of times because the participants actually found elements of both weeks helpful, and therefore did not prefer one over the other. In that sense, this can be viewed as a benefit—the process helped people engage with both sides of their MBTI® typology, and both sides proved helpful to the discernment process.

This idea was further clarified in the final debrief interview, during which each of the six participants gave evidence of seeing the value of engaging with at least some of the opposing side of their MBTI® type. Although certain exercises were indeed natural to the specific MBTI® types (for example, the STs all enjoyed concrete lists and logical thinking in the process, and the NFs all enjoyed daydreaming and figuring out how their personal values fit into the decision), at

the same time, it turned out to be helpful for each type to also engage in discernment questions that stretched them beyond their natural MBTI® preferences. As this happened, participants could prayerfully seek the Holy Spirit's leading in a much more well-rounded way, rather than simply being limited to learning from questions that only engaged with their MBTI® type.

Even though the second part of my hypothesis was not confirmed, what emerged nevertheless proved helpful to the discernment process. A premise of my Model was that a process of discernment could be created where a pastor or spiritual director could, for example, sit with an ST and guide them through specific “ST” discernment questions that would help them to sense God's leading in a way that would make sense to an ST. The research results did not entirely disprove that this occurred—again, the data suggests that ST discernment can certainly be aided by including a focus on concrete facts and logic, for example. Having an individual with ST preferences try to discern by *only* sorting through their inner “senses” as they search for the “voice” of the Lord can lead to frustration, as it did for the person in the story at the beginning of Chapter 3.

However, a more holistic and balanced approach to discernment emerged, as the data suggested that it would actually be far too limiting to only ask STs questions that fit with their ST type. Rather, it was a far richer discernment experience to ask people questions that specifically and intentionally engaged with all aspects of MBTI® mental function, even their less-developed sides. For example, this would ensure that the logical Thinkers are always making a point of

purposefully considering others' feelings or ensure that the compassionate Feelers are being pushed to access their less-developed logical side. When all sides of one's mental function are engaged, we are not as likely to miss important things when we are making decisions (Myers 2003, 341). We consider matters more carefully, and we can prayerfully sort through our thoughts and emotions more deeply, allowing us to determine whether a decision is leading us closer to the Lord, or away from Him, in Ignatian discernment.

The final set of data came from the one-on-one participant interviews, which focused on reflecting upon the experience holistically. These interviews investigated whether the desired outcomes of the project had been met. First, participants were asked if they felt that they had discerned the Lord's leading on their two matters. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5. Effectiveness of research process in discerning matters

Participants	Discerned first matter?	Discerned second matter?
ST #1	Yes	No
ST #2	Yes	Yes
ST #3	Yes	Yes
NF #1	Yes	Yes
NF #2	Yes	Yes
NF #3	Yes	Yes

So, most excitingly for this pastor and researcher, in terms of discernment itself, the process worked. Of the 12 matters being discerned, in 11 cases the participants felt that they had discerned the Lord's leading. In the only case where

an answer was not clear, this participant shared in the follow-up interview that the chosen matter for discernment turned out to be difficult to explore in this particular format of discernment. But with 11 out of 12 matters discerned, this suggests that the discernment process was an effective tool in helping participants sense the Lord's leading on these particular matters that they chose to explore.

From there, participants were asked a few questions relating to what was helpful or not in this discernment process. That is, from this experience, what did they learn about themselves, the Lord, discernment, and others? The data were coded based on common themes that occurred across the participants' answers, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Most common coding themes from follow-up interviews

Most Important Aspects of Experience	No. of Occurrences
Growing in Self-Awareness	11
Clear, Intentional Process of Discernment	7
Learning/Growing in Discernment	6
Growing closer to the Lord	6
Understanding the opposing personality type	6
Putting thoughts in written form	6
Discerning over time with deadlines	5

Thus, there were several helpful answers given to determine what worked in this process, and whether the outcomes were met. As Table 6 indicates, the most common responses to what people found helpful about the process were that they grew in self-awareness in some way; that they experienced a clear and intentional process of discernment; that they felt closer to the Lord; that the discernment

happened over time (giving them time to think, and giving the Lord time to lead); that there were deadlines (weekly) given, so that they were pressed to keep moving and pushed to dig into the Lord for insight and understanding; that there was value in seeing the opposing personality type and those out-of-preference exercises; and that the act of writing things out was helpful in putting the swirl of thoughts and emotions into visible form. This indicates that the process brought an increase in the knowledge of self, and in the knowledge of God, through discernment.

Since content analysis requires the researcher to adjust the hypothesis based on the data and present the adjusted statement as a conclusion, the data and interpretations can now be put together toward a new conclusion. The original hypothesis was that “People of different MBTI® mental functions will approach discernment differently based on their mental function, and each mental function will be drawn to certain exercises that fit their type better than others.” The adjusted conclusion, based on this small research project, is that the data demonstrated that “The participants of this research project approached discernment differently based on their MBTI® mental function, but were not only drawn to specific exercises that fit their mental function better than others. To reduce one’s discernment process to only engage with exercises geared toward their MBTI® mental function would be too limiting. Rather, an intentional, written process of answering discernment questions that specifically engaged with

all aspects of the MBTI® mental functions demonstrated an effective model of discerning the Lord’s leading for participants.”

Outcomes

Going into this project, it was expected that this research would demonstrate that MBTI® mental function does play a factor in how we discern, and that by helping people understand their type better, we could help them discern with greater ease, since the participants would find certain discernment exercises more helpful than others. The data confirmed that mental function did play a role in how the participants approached discernment—the first part of the hypothesis was confirmed. Although the idea of gearing specific discernment questions toward specific MBTI® mental functions did not play out as expected, the end conclusion proved more interesting for this researcher, due to its implications for how we can still aid people in their discernment process. We can certainly help people to discern with greater ease by using a process like this one, not because we are gearing discernment exercises toward specific mental functions, but because we are intentionally engaging with all aspects of mental function, creating a holistic approach to discernment that is accessible for all.

It was expected that participants would grow in their knowledge of self by learning about their own MBTI® type, and would also grow in respect and understanding of differing personalities, and that these differences could be accepted and celebrated. While the “celebration” of differences was not measured

by the data of this research, each participant gave indications of learning while considering the opposing MBTI® type to their own preference, and in that sense, the participants showed the value of engaging with the other side of their MBTI® preference. This increased self-awareness also helped them to grow in their knowledge of God through discernment, learning more about His will and how to connect with Him. Each participant gave evidence of this, and I trust that this will contribute to their ongoing spiritual formation.

Another desired outcome was that discernment would become an easier process for the participants, and that they would feel closer to the Lord as they continue to grow in discernment and in walking in God's will. All participants gave evidence of drawing closer to the Lord and learning something valuable about the process of discernment, making this Research Project a success in that sense. Given that the participants discerned 11 out of 12 of their matters, and based on participant feedback in the closing interviews, it can be concluded that participants learned new ideas about discernment moving forward. By using an intentional, written process that engaged with all sides of MBTI® mental function, participants found a mode of discernment that was accessible, easy-to-use, and which produced good results. A couple of them have expressed that they are continuing to use this process as a tool for ongoing discernment in their desire to pursue God and His will for their lives. This growth in the knowledge of self and of God has thus proven to be a benefit in their spiritual formation journey.

Finally, it was hoped that the research would be a positive experience for the participants, and that the ethical guidelines laid out beforehand would protect them and keep them from harm. All participants have expressed that it was a positive experience, and no evidence of any harm has been provided. To that end, this research has had a positive impact on my ministry context. It achieved the desired outcome of engaging participants in a safe and ethical process of growing in discernment, and even though the second part of the hypothesis was not confirmed, this nevertheless brought forth helpful results. The six participants drew closer to the Lord, and learned more about discernment, which I trust will be an ongoing part of their spiritual formation. A discernment tool was created that has now been modified based on the feedback of this project (see Appendix G). This tool can be used to help others in my church to discern, and this is a wonderful addition to our own discernment process as a church. It has drawn attention to the individuality that results from our MBTI® type, which enhances our self-awareness, and also shows us that we should not restrain ourselves only to our MBTI® type. It has also demonstrated that discernment does not need to be a confusing or overly mysterious process. Rather, discernment can be engaged with by following an intentional, step-by-step process of prayerfully processing and pressing into the Lord, just as St. Ignatius taught us in his *Spiritual Exercises*. This process brought an increased knowledge of self and of God for the participants, and it blessed me greatly to know that others could benefit in their walk with the Lord by growing in this dual knowledge, as I have.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

As I arrive at the end of my Research Portfolio and of more than three years of doctoral work at Tyndale, there is much to be thankful for. The courses have been enriching and have greatly enhanced my knowledge and my ministry. The teachers have been informative and encouraging, sharing out of their expertise and their experience in a way that has been effective and empowering. The colleagues I have met have been a wonderful blessing from God as we have journeyed together. My Doctor of Ministry journey has been a wonderful and transformative experience, which I will share in my concluding thoughts as I reflect on my Research Portfolio as a whole.

The importance of beginning this program with the Spiritual Autobiography as the first major work was lost on me at first, but I appreciate it greatly now. It is the story of my own spiritual formation, and was no doubt going to play a major role in demonstrating how my own journey is informing my approach to schooling, ministry, and this degree. After writing it, and taking time over the following years to reflect upon it, it was abundantly clear to me that the document, although covering many topics, was primarily about myself growing in

the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, and how those two aspects of spiritual growth inform each other and have contributed to my own spiritual formation. This has been my story, which the Autobiography helped to clarify. I would not be who I am as a Christ-follower, or a minister, or a husband and father, or a student, without this. For me, spiritual formation has been a journey of growing in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self in many ways, and that needed to be established at the beginning of the program and in the first major project, or none of the other major projects could have come together.

As I look over this Portfolio, it is wonderful for me to see how the three major documents flowed, one into the next. Obviously, is it easier to see how the Research Project flowed out of the Model, but the threads of the final Research Project were certainly evident even in the Autobiography, two years before I arrived at the point where I was writing my final major paper. My Autobiography contained the elements of my own self-knowledge journey helping me connect with God, and a desire to help others connect in the same way through their own increased self-knowledge. This autobiographical groundwork obviously proved very important in contributing to my future Model and Research Project papers, as they too focused on how growing in the knowledge of self (specifically through the MBTI®) can help us to grow in the knowledge of God (specifically through discernment), and how this can help us to grow in our journey to be formed into the image of Christ. This makes sense, as obviously the Model was going to come

from my own spiritual formation experience, and it made the Research Project more meaningful, as I explored something that was especially important to me.

Reflecting upon my Model, there are several things worthy of comment. The first is that it has quite a narrow and specific emphasis. Discernment is obviously not the only part of spiritual formation that is important, and it is not the only way in which one can grow in the knowledge of God. However, at this point presumably the Model has demonstrated why discernment is so important to our spiritual formation, and why engaging in it is crucial to our growing in Christlikeness.

It is also important to note that this Model also focuses somewhat narrowly on only the most accessible aspects of consolation and desolation as it relates to discernment, emphasizing how we might pay attention to what is going on within us and allow that to lead us into greater knowledge of God and His will. Ignatius actually had much more to say on the matter beyond just this. As a few examples, he taught on how to determine a “false consolation” (Ignatius 1963, 112); what one can do to discern the reason *behind* a state of desolation, and how to respond to it (Ignatius 1963, 109–110); and what to do when we do not have a clear sense of whether we are in consolation or desolation (Ignatius 1963, 62–66). Future research could certainly explore these matters in more depth, but the reason for the narrow focus in my Model was simply for ease of access for people who would engage with the Model and the Research, many of whom may be learning about consolation and desolation for the first time.

This Model also called for people to craft their matters for discernment into phrasing which called for a “yes” or “no” response. This very specific format for discernment may not always reflect what the Lord wishes to do in a person’s life. As the research data showed, one of the STs did not get a sense of “yes” or “no” on one of her discernment matters (see Table 5). She had no sense of peace in moving forward with her decision, and no sense of peace in not moving forward either—in that sense, she did not feel that she received direction from the Lord via seeking to make a decision while in consolation. In our follow-up interview, we discussed what this meant, and her opinion (which I agreed with) was that the Lord was calling her simply to wait on Him. He was not ready to release His will on the matter at that time, and so she determined to wait until clearer direction came.

The Lord chooses when He speaks to us, so we cannot force a revelation (Hab. 2:3), If we are not discerning a direction, we have no choice but to wait upon Him until we do. Since this ST had no sense of consolation in moving forward with her decision, and felt uneasy in doing so, we would determine that she was in a state of desolation, and as has been discussed, we do not want to move forward when we are in desolation (Thibodeaux 2010, 69). If there is no sense of consolation in moving forward, then the decision should wait until such consolation arrives, as desolation could mean that the answer is “no,” or it may simply mean “wait.”

While waiting is never easy, we are certainly called to wait upon the Lord (e.g. Ps. 27:14 38:15; 130:5; etc.), and although desolation may not feel pleasant, Green notes “that desolation, while it is never a sign of God’s voice for those seeking to live and serve him, is nevertheless not a bad sign” (Green 1984, 105). Waiting upon the Lord in a season of desolation can actually be a crucial time of spiritual formation, during which we are tested and refined through the waiting, and during which our faith and hope get stretched and expanded as we anticipate the day when the Lord will choose to reveal Himself to us. Although this Model did not formally include “wait” as a possible outcome of the discernment process, it must be noted that the Lord may indeed lead that way, and that this waiting can and should be embraced as an important and formational part of the spiritual journey with Christ.

In terms of the tool chosen to grow in self-awareness that my life, my Model, and my Research Project have focused on, the MBTI® itself certainly has its critics, and should be clarified for what it is and is not, so that we might reap its benefits without falling victim to its weaknesses. While it can be easy to put too much stock in it, the MBTI® is best viewed simply as a helpful tool (Innes 1996, 22). Our MBTI® type is not “who we are” (Johnson 1999, 39), as much as it is an *oversimplification* of certain aspects of our psychological makeup, which gives us some common language to help bring definition and clarity to how we act and think (Howell 2012). Knowing our MBTI® type is helpful, but should not be considered the “be-all and end-all” of our personality. As has been said, “God

has created us much too marvellously to be understood fully by any simple psychological formula” (Harbaugh 1990, 32).

If we are not careful, the MBTI® can potentially foster an unhealthy focus on self (Innes 1996, 21). Growing in self-knowledge is crucially important, but if we seek to know ourselves apart from our identity in Christ, it “easily leads to self-inflation ... an arrogance to which we are vulnerable when knowledge is valued more than love. It can also lead to self-preoccupation” (Benner 2004, 22–23). In this Portfolio’s context, at its best, the MBTI® will be a tool that helps us to understand ourselves better, but only in the service of allowing us to commune with God better, discern His will better, and ultimately know Him better, without us elevating the Indicator® any higher than that.

One recent work summarizes many of the issues that critics have with the MBTI®: panning the roots of the assessment found in Jung’s work (Emre 2018, 35); noting that Briggs and Myers had a lack of education and training (Emre 2018, 74); and declaring that the Indicator is unproven, with no scientific evidence that it actually works (Emre 2018, 168). Emre notes that skeptics continually assert that “the instrument is unreliable, that people often get different results when they take it from one week to the next. They say the type descriptions are loose enough to fit anyone, a flagrant example of circus man P. T. Barnum’s observation that the best hoaxes are the ones that have ‘got something for everybody’” (Emre 2018, 267). Concerns have been raised as to whether the data truly support the MBTI®’s claims (Pittenger 2005, 210); whether the

MBTI® is simply a gross oversimplification of human nature (Reynierse 2009, 3); and whether it is appropriate to use the MBTI® from within a theological framework (Tucker 2011, 296).

In brief response, firstly, there are some aspects of type theory (such as Extroversion vs. Introversion) that have indeed been well-accepted by the psychological community (Johnson 2016). Also, in spite of the many claims to the contrary, “The validity and reliability of the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) instrument has been documented in thousands of peer-reviewed journals and case studies, and its publisher, CPP, Inc., freely makes its supporting data publicly available. When the official test is used, the reliability of the test over time is much better than just by chance” (Myers et al. 2003, 165). As well, rigorous independent analysis has consistently confirmed its validity (Myers et al. 2003, 219). Although it indeed grew from humble roots from two uneducated women exploring Jung’s work, the organization that oversees it now is full of PhDs, with a peer-reviewed journal that explores the various research studies and produces academic work related to it. While it is certainly easy to overpraise the MBTI®, if we can hold on to it as a reliable tool to help us understand ourselves better, without inflating it, then we can enjoy its benefits while avoiding claims that may overvalue it.

One final caveat for my Model is that it explores only one particular aspect of the MBTI®, focusing on the four mental functions. Future research could easily explore applying the principles of this Model through the lens of

dominant function, or our shadow side, or looking at how discernment through consolation and desolation might be explored through each of the sixteen personality types in more depth. This last point would be the area that I would be most interested in exploring further down the road.

Utilizing the theory of the Model, my Research Project practically explored the connection between discernment and psychological type, for two of the MBTI® mental functions, theorizing that people of different mental functions will approach and experience discernment differently, and that certain mental functions would be drawn to certain discernment exercises that better fit their type. Doing this research with members of my congregation was useful to my ministry, as it has taught me much about how people approach discernment, and about how to walk someone through a process of discernment. The format proved successful in helping the small sample of participants discern effectively, and I look forward to refining the process continually by adjusting some of the questions, and using it in an ongoing way to help others in their discernment process (see Appendix G for the most recent refinement of the discernment process).

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius created a process of discernment that was designed to be easy for anyone to access, and this Model and Research Project sought to follow his example of ease and accessibility to help people engage with the Lord through the process. The discernment method created through this doctoral work is one that makes sure that all aspects of the MBTI®

mental functions are accessed, ensuring that it less likely that we miss anything in our discernment by limiting ourselves to our MBTI® type alone. The Research Project demonstrated a simple and easily accessible approach to discernment that could be used by other pastors, spiritual directors, leaders, and any others desiring to help another person hear from God. It could also be used by couples or teams of people attempting to discern a matter together.

This Research Project certainly raised some questions that could be answered through further research. Firstly, as with the Model, this Project only dealt with the “mental functions” portion of our MBTI® type. Further research could explore other aspects of our psychological type, such as how Introverts and Extraverts might approach discernment differently. Also, as mentioned in the Research Project chapter, all participants were of the “Judging” persuasion, meaning that they were all structured, planful types. Further research could explore how “Perceivers”—spontaneous and flexible types—might approach a structured model of discernment such as this one, or whether they might thrive in more unstructured process.

This research was also restricted to measuring how people engage with discernment individually. Further research might look at how this discernment process works in a communal setting. Acts chapter 15 tells the story of the Council of Jerusalem, in which the Church came together to communally discern the Lord’s will through sharing, discussion, debate, prayer, and Scripture. We are

one Body, and we share in one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), so in determining the Spirit's leading, there can be great benefit in engaging in the process with other believers.

Processing discernment as a group is one way to bring balance to our personal discernment, and can help ensure that we are not being misled, overlooking things, or hearing what we want to hear (Fryling 2009, 101). Liebert notes that since we always discern naturally through our preferred mental functions, the danger will be that we may miss the perspective that comes from our less-developed sides (Liebert 2008, 72). If, however, we invite brothers and sisters in Christ into a discernment process, we can engage all aspects of the mental functions together, looking for unity in the group as a sign that we have found the Lord's will (Barton 2012, 185).

In that sense, the elements of this Model relating to the MBTI® make group discernment an appealing option. Whereas one person has a certain mental function pairing, and must actively engage in their less-developed side when discerning alone, a group of people will bring a variety of mental function pairings to the discussion, and thus can contribute to the conversation out of those strengths (Myers 1995, 119). So, rather than a Feeler working hard to access their less-developed Thinking side, group discernment can mean that Feelers bring their Feeling strengths to the table, while Thinkers bring Thinking strengths to the table, and both sides of the mental functions can be shared. Walking through my Model of discernment with a group would ensure that each week's questions would have various group members speaking into the matter out of their

strengths, presumably leading to an insightful discussion that would flesh out the matter more thoroughly than it might have been by an individual alone.

This communal approach can also lead to challenges, as different people of different types must then come into agreement, which can be difficult when we are approaching discernment from such different perspectives. Sensors may become frustrated that Intuitives are not giving enough consideration to details and figures, while Intuitives may feel that Sensors are getting bogged down in minutiae and missing “the big picture” of what the Lord is saying. Thinkers could get annoyed that Feelers are giving too much weight to people’s feelings in decision-making, while Feelers might see Thinkers as insensitive to others in their pursuit of a logical solution to a problem. We all tend to believe that our personal way of thinking is “the right way,” and so the group must be willing to acknowledge the various strengths and weaknesses that all are bringing to the discernment process, and must be willing to actively listen to one another’s contribution to the prayerful discussion. If this happens, then a rich and thorough group discernment process is possible.

Finally, this research did not evaluate how other aspects of our personality might affect discernment, as it only dealt with the MBTI®, which is one specific and limited view of our self-makeup. It would be interesting to see how other assessments (for example, the enneagram) might play into discernment processes for people of varying types. Such further exploration could keep the same principles behind the Model, but could simply add another

personality/psychological assessment tool as the means to explore self-knowledge and its effect upon one's discernment process.

Having an effective tool to help others discern more easily has been the most exciting thing to come out of this entire process for me. Based on my experience and my findings, I intend to continue to experiment with this particular process of discernment, adjusting it to improve its effectiveness. Several of the discernment questions could be rewritten for greater clarity, and a few could stand to be removed altogether, as feedback from the Research Project participants suggested that there were some redundancies. I intend to use this multi-week process, not as a “be-all and end-all” for discernment, but as a helpful tool to get people pressing into God and intentionally processing and praying through their discernment, helping them sort through their thoughts and emotions as they attempt to determine if a decision is drawing them into consolation or desolation. Longer term, I am hopeful that discernment will become easier and more accessible for many in my church as we engage with it using this approachable tool.

Discernment is crucial to our growing relationship with God, and to increasing our knowledge of Him. Helping people grow in their discernment is an important part of helping them grow in their spiritual formation. Likewise, helping people to grow in self-knowledge can help them in their discernment, as this Research suggested. By digging into questions that both fit into our MBTI® mental function, as well as stretch ourselves beyond just our type, we can benefit

from the insight that our growing self-awareness brings to discernment, as our self-knowledge helps us to grow in our knowledge of God. Beyond just the specific participants of my church, whom I love and want to help in their own spiritual formation journey, the hope would be that anyone who is trying to discern the Lord's leading, or any minister who is trying to help another person discern the Lord's leading, could engage in discernment in the manner laid out in this Model and Research, and that this would be a helpful instrument to aid people in their discernment and formation.

One element of the Research Project that must be addressed is that, in some ways, the results challenged a major premise of the Model. The Model hypothesized that discernment could be made easier for people of different MBTI® mental functions by gearing discernment questions to specific types, allowing them to prayerfully process consolation and desolation easier through the lens of their own type. As the Project has presented, this was not what materialized from the data: people of both MBTI® mental functions actually found questions geared to *both* types helpful in their discernment process, even if they did appreciate the questions geared to their own type and answer in-preference most of the time.

Chapter 4 has already addressed some of the reasons why this may have happened. In essence, it was indeed helpful for people to have questions geared to their MBTI® type. I believe the process would have been more difficult for them without those questions there. However, it would have been too limiting for

people to answer only questions according to their type, and there was much self-awareness to be gained by having them stretch their self-knowledge beyond just their personal preferences. Although there was some initial disappointment that the research did not more clearly support the hypothesis of the Model, ultimately the result was a “happy accident.” The overall desire driving the Model and Research was to create a process of discernment that would help people to connect with God and to discern His will, and this result was achieved. Growth in the knowledge of self did happen through the MBTI®, in a deeper way than expected, as people learned to lean into their opposing MBTI® side as well. In that sense, the Model could use a rewrite with a greater emphasis that one should not be limited to *only* exploring discernment via their MBTI® type, but to do so more holistically. This experience has helped me grow in my own maturity with the MBTI®, as it stands as a clear reminder not to limit ourselves only to our type but to use it as a helpful tool of further self-exploration.

Working with my own congregants through the Research Project is no doubt one of my greatest takeaways from this whole Doctor of Ministry process. The opportunity to help some of my congregants grow in their knowledge of self, God, discernment, and formation, has been a wonderful and life-giving experience. I look forward to leading many others through this discernment process moving forward, helping them to connect with and commune with God and to learn better how to walk in step with Him as He does His forming work in their lives.

I have read and experienced many wonderful teachers and authors through my time in this degree. I am grateful to have encountered scholars such as Robert Mulholland and Elisabeth Liebert, two wonderful teachers who have seen the value of growing in self-knowledge specifically through the MBTI®, and its role in helping us to grow in spiritual formation and discernment. St. Ignatius is another voice with whom I have become much more familiar. His approach to finding practical and accessible ways for people to draw close to the Lord and grow in their communion and discernment with Him have been a wonderful influence, both upon my spiritual life and on my doctoral studies.

Moving forward, I look forward to helping my congregants to continue to grow in self-knowledge through the MBTI®, and to connect with the Lord through formational exercises, aided by this self-knowledge. The local church is my ministry context, and I believe that it will be where I remain. At one point, I felt that one day I would seek to be a full-time professor, but over my time in this program I have come to feel that my first love truly is the local church, and serving her there. However, I certainly do desire to teach at the seminary level in an adjunct capacity from time to time, potentially as it relates to formation, prayer, and especially discernment, where my interests and my passions lie. Anything that I can do to help people commune with God, to hear from Him, and to know Him more, are very much in line with my heart and my ministry. Although I had a sense of that before, I am very glad that my Doctor of Ministry time has confirmed this for me and taken it to a much deeper level.

My journey of spiritual formation has been a journey of growing in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, and learning how these dual revelations inform each other and change me. These themes have showed up continually throughout my doctoral time at Tyndale. By understanding myself better, I can better commune with and understand God, and as this happens, I can connect with Him in a way that allows Him to do His formational work in me. I am grateful to have explored and reaffirmed this in my life, my ministry, and my studies. Through my time in this program, I have grown in the knowledge of God and self even more, and have seen this dual knowledge reaffirmed as a crucial part of the spiritual journey for myself and for those I lead. I trust that through these lessons the Lord will continue to do His forming work in me, and that this work will continue to help me to minister to the sheep of my flock, and any others that I may encounter, that they may know themselves better so that they may draw closer to the LORD in knowledge, in discernment, and in spiritual formation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Data Gathering Instrument: Questions for Reflection and Discernment

Pre-study Questions

1. Think about a few times in your life that you felt God lead you in decisions that you made. If you were to generally describe your own “discernment process,” how did God communicate His will to you, and how did you know it was God’s will?
2. When you think about your personal experience of discernment, describe anything about the process that has been interesting, encouraging, or exciting about it for you.
3. When you think about your personal experience of discernment, describe anything about the process that has been frustrating about it for you.

Week #1 (“Sensing” Week)

Take the first matter that you are discerning, which you will be praying into and reflecting on for the first four weeks.

1. Write out the matter in a sentence or two, as simply and clearly as possible (e.g. “I am trying to discern whether to go back to school.”)
2. Write out each of the possible outcomes of the matter clearly, in a short and simple sentence or two (e.g. “I will go back to school.” “I will not go back to school.”)

Take at least 10–20 minutes per day to intentionally and prayerfully consider this decision, and to consider the possible outcomes. As you do, ask the Lord to clear your mind and lead you into His will for you, taking some time to consider these questions over the week, and write down some thoughts in response:

1. Jot down all the facts/information that you can think of that might be important to making this decision. What was this experience like?
2. What has God taught you in the past about a decision similar to this one, if applicable? How does that make you feel about this current decision?

3. Which possible solution spurs you on toward greater Christian duty and obedience? Why do you think you feel that way?
4. How has the process of considering this week's questions been for you? When you consider each outcome through the lens of these questions, does one outcome bring you a sense of being closer to the Lord and/or His will than the other(s)? Please describe.

Week #2 ("Intuition" Week)

Take the first matter that you are discerning, which you will be praying into and reflecting on for the first four weeks. Take another look at the clear statement you made last week on the matter you are discerning, and each of the possible outcomes.

Take at least 10–20 minutes per day to intentionally and prayerfully consider this decision, and to consider the possible outcomes. As you do, ask the Lord to clear your mind and lead you into His will for you, taking some time to consider these questions over the week, and write down some thoughts in response:

1. Take some time to daydream about all the possibilities and "could-be's" about each of the outcomes of this decision. What was this experience like?
2. How does each outcome fit in with the "bigger picture" of your life and calling?
3. Does one of the possible outcomes sit more right than the others "in your gut?" Why do you think that might be?
4. How has the process of considering this week's questions been for you? When you consider each outcome through the lens of these questions, does one outcome bring you a sense of being closer to the Lord and/or His will than the other(s)? Please describe.
5. Looking at last week's questions and then this week's questions, was one week's process easier than the other? Did one week give you any clearer sense of the Lord and/or His leading than the other? Please describe.

Week #3 (“Thinking” Week)

Take the first matter that you are discerning, which you will be praying into and reflecting on for the first four weeks. Take another look at the clear statement you made last week on the matter you are discerning, and each of the possible outcomes.

Take at least 10–20 minutes per day to intentionally and prayerfully consider this decision, and to consider the possible outcomes. As you do, ask the Lord to clear your mind and lead you into His will for you, taking some time to consider these questions over the week, and write down some thoughts in response:

1. Make a “pros and cons” list for each possible outcome. What was this experience like?
2. What is the cause-and-effect of each possible outcome? Please describe.
3. Which possible outcome is the most logically sound? Please describe.
4. How has the process of considering this week’s questions been for you? When you consider each outcome through the lens of these questions, does one outcome bring you a sense of being closer to the Lord and/or His will than the other(s)? Please describe.

Week #4 (“Feeling” Week)

Take the first matter that you are discerning, which you will be praying into and reflecting on for the first four weeks. Take another look at the clear statement you made last week on the matter you are discerning, and each of the possible outcomes.

Take at least 10–20 minutes per day to intentionally and prayerfully consider this decision, and to consider the possible outcomes. As you do, ask the Lord to clear your mind and lead you into His will for you, taking some time to consider these questions over the week, and write down some thoughts in response:

1. What personal values are important to you that this decision impacts? How does each outcome affect those values, for better or for worse? Please describe.
2. How will each outcome affect other people in your life, and how do you feel about that?

3. What is your heart telling you about the decision? Please describe.
4. How has the process of considering this week's questions been for you? When you consider each outcome through the lens of these questions, does one outcome bring you a sense of being closer to the Lord and/or His will than the other(s)? Please describe.
5. Looking at last week's questions and then this week's questions, was one week's process easier than the other? Did one week give you a closer sense of the Lord and/or His leading than the other? Please describe.
6. Looking at the last 4 weeks of questions and reflection, is there an outcome that is emerging as one that makes you feel closer to the Lord and/or His leading? Please describe.

Weeks #5–8

Participants will repeat the same questions in the same weekly format, but will do so while considering their second matter that they have decided to discern.

Post-Study Interview Questions

1. Having reviewed their questionnaires before the interview, I would begin by asking any follow-up questions for clarity or insight from their answers written there.
2. Did you feel you discerned the two matters?
3. Overall, what did you learn about discernment through this process?
4. What do you learn about yourself?
5. How was it engaging with your out-of-preference weeks?
6. What was most helpful in this model in terms of helping you discern?
7. What will you be taking away from the experience as you move forward in your walk with the Lord?

APPENDIX B:
Initial Recruitment Email

Hello Meadow Brook Church!

As part of his doctoral work, Pastor Chris will be conducting research this fall with church members that will explore how our unique personality types affect our discernment, and how we might discern better as we understand ourselves better and discern through the lens of how God has created us! The Board of Elders has given permission for this project.

Participants will take 9 weeks this fall to dive into the topic of discernment, guided by Pastor Chris, and the hope is that participants will learn more about how God has made them and how they might discern better moving forward!

If you are interested in participating, are 40 years old or under, and want to learn more about yourself and learn more about how to discern the Lord's leading, please contact Chris at chris@meadowbrook.ca to talk about next steps!

APPENDIX C:

Research Study Consent Form

To Engage in a Research Study on
“Exploring Discernment via Psychological Type Theory”
at Meadow Brook Church in the fall of 2019

Name (please print):

1. I have read and understood the attached “Information Letter for Research into Discernment and Personality Types.”
2. I understand that I will be participating in a research project engaging in discernment exercises, along with other members of Meadow Brook Church. I will be asked to share my experience of discernment through question responses that will be shared with Chris Walker, and through an interview with Chris Walker, and I understand that notes will be taken and audio recorded during this interview.
3. I give permission for my data to be used in the written report, knowing that nothing will be included that I am not comfortable with.
4. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard the confidentiality of data and personal information, and that results being shared in the written report will protect my anonymity.
5. I understand the intended benefits and possible risks of the proposed study as laid out in the information letter.
6. I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary, that I am not waiving any legal rights, and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence.
7. I am aware that I may direct any future questions to Pastor Chris Walker, either via office phone (226-350-1776), email (chris@meadowbrook.ca) 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 University at reb@tyndale.ca. I am also welcome to contact Chris’ research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale University, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

I have read and agreed to the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study:

YES ____ NO ____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D:

Timeline for Research Project

Date	Activity
Sept 2019	Advertised the project to the church and invited participant applications (see Appendix B); interviewed potential candidates to find those filling the criteria. (No participants gave consent or were officially confirmed until approval was given from the Research Ethics Board)
Oct 1 2019	Received official approval from the REB
Oct 1 2019	Finalized participants and gained consent (see Appendix C)
Oct 1 2019	Week 1: Research officially began on first discernment matter; questions explored “Sensing” side
	Week 2: Questions explored “Intuition” side
Oct 13 2019	Week 3: Questions explored “Thinking” side
Oct 20 2019	Week 4: Questions explored “Feeling” side
Oct 27 2019	Week 5: Research moved on to the second discernment matter; questions explored “Sensing” side
Nov 3 2019	Week 6: Questions explored “Intuition” side
Nov 10 2019	Week 7: Questions explored “Thinking” side
Nov 17 2019	Week 8: Questions explored “Feeling” side
Nov 24–Dec 5 2019	Began preparing for final interviews; One-on-one final interviews with participants over the two weeks, clarifying responses and debriefing overall experience
Dec 5 2019–Feb 29 2020	Time spend analyzing and coding data, writing up results and interpretations, and preparing final report.

APPENDIX E:

Information Letter for Research on “Exploring Discernment via Psychological Type Theory”

Hello!

As you likely know, I have been involved in my studies at Tyndale University for the last few years, working toward my Doctor of Ministry degree. As you may know as well, I am a Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioner, as I have occasionally mentioned from the pulpit. I am also deeply interested in the area of discernment, wanting to discover how we may grow in hearing God’s voice and sensing His leading better. For my final research project, I’ve decided to integrate these things together by studying how our unique personality types (as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®) affect our discernment process, and how we might make discernment easier for people if we can help them discern through the lens of who they are!

This study has been reviewed and approved by Tyndale’s Research Ethics Board, and Meadow Brook’s Board of Elders has given permission for it as well.

The study will take 6–8 people with differing MBTI® types, and have everyone go through 8 weeks of discernment exercises, where, on your own as part of your private devotional time, you will be given specific questions each week to reflect on and answer as you prayerfully consider the matter that you are discerning. You will record your answers, and you will turn in the responses to me at the end of the study, and then meet one-on-one with me in the 9th week of the study for a closing interview to discuss how the process was for you.

The criteria for being a part of this study are:

- 1) You are a practicing Christian, and have a desire to grow in discerning the Lord’s leading;
- 2) You have two different decisions that you are trying to discern, which you are willing to explore in this research. The matters can be anything, but must not be immediately time-sensitive (e.g. you need to be able to take 4 weeks to explore them without pressure), and must be decisions with 2–3 clear possible outcomes (e.g. the matters should be more like “Should I go back to school? Yes or no?” rather than “What shall I do with my life?”
- 3) You are part of a certain MBTI® type that I am looking for (which we will test for);

- 4) You are 40 years old or under; and
- 5) You are willing to commit to 9 weeks to explore discernment this fall.

We will begin the exercises the first week of October, and wrap up with our final interview in the first week of December. The data will be gathered through your written responses and through our interview at the end. You do not need to share anything you are uncomfortable with, and you will be kept anonymous in any data that is gathered; you will not be identified in the final report by anything that would compromise your anonymity.

Although we cannot guarantee any of the following, the intended benefits for you as participants are that:

- 1) You will grow in your self-awareness and learn more about who you are and how you have been created by God;
- 2) You will learn and grow in new discernment techniques;
- 3) You will be empowered to “be who you are” as you approach discernment moving forward;
- 4) You will have an easier and more enjoyable process of discernment, as you find techniques that fit your personality type;
- 5) You will gain a new respect for those who are wired differently than you, and how they discern in their own way;
- 6) You will ultimately feel closer to the Lord as you learn to sense His leading and walk in it more and more;
- 7) You will feel more confident in discernment in general, with the practice and tools that you will receive, and;
- 8) Although you are ultimately responsible for your own discernment, and these exercises will not guarantee anything, hopefully you will discern a sense of the Lord’s leading in the 2 matters that you are discerning through this process.

While all efforts have been made to minimize any negative experiences from this research study, ethically I do need to disclose some possible risks, as well as the steps taken to minimize the risks. One potential risk is that since discernment is a very subjective process, if a participant struggles with

discernment in these exercises, or feels that little has been learned in the process, or feels that they are no closer to God because of it, or that they have not sensed His leading, then this may potentially lead to feelings of embarrassment, discouragement, etc. As well, we cannot guarantee through these exercises that someone will definitely sense the Lord's leading—it is not automatic, as He is the one who chooses what to share and not, and that could potentially be discouraging as well.

Since discernment is what is being explored, there is no way to engage in the discernment process without this being a potential risk, and these things would be a risk anytime someone is engaging in discernment. However, we are studying the process of discernment much more than the end result, and in that sense, engaging the process is always valuable. Even a “negative” experience of discernment can teach us something about how we discern (or ways that we shouldn't try to discern). Discernment is a lifelong journey of discovery, which can't be fully explored in one short study—but it is always valuable to take time to seek the Lord! We also cannot guarantee that one will sense the Lord's leading through this process—ultimately, we are all responsible for our own discernment, and must keep that mind.

As well, another common ethical concern in research is that the study could “induce participants to act against their wishes,” or may “induce participants to disclose intimate or otherwise sensitive information.” You may not wish to participate in a certain exercise, or may not wish to share certain information. In response, please know that all participation is voluntary, all sharing is voluntary, and that the participants should act and share only according to their comfort level. As well, you will be asked to pick two matters for discernment of your own choosing; this is being done so that you can be comfortable with your choice, and also so the experience will be meaningful for you. Since you will be choosing your own matters to discern, you will presumably choose matters that you are willing to share on; you by no means need to share anything of a sensitive nature if you do not wish to.

Although unlikely to come up in this project, it should also be noted that legally there are mandatory reporting laws (such as if there is a concern about possible child abuse, as example) in which anonymity and confidentiality would be waived, should a participant share such info.

Finally, it is possible that there may be issues that “institutional/formal power relationships connect the researcher with participants.” Since I am one of your pastors, as well as the researcher conducting the study, this could theoretically lead to possible conflicts. I commit to not use my position of spiritual authority to coerce or influence participants in any way, and nothing in this process will ever affect your standing with me or with Meadow Brook

Church. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Should you choose not to participate, or should you withdraw, there will be no consequences whatsoever.

As the research project unfolds, all information shared with me will be held in confidence, stored in a locked office/house on a password-protected computer, and backed up onto a password-protected server. All participants will be asked to commit to confidentiality when signing their consent form. While your personal experiences may be shared in the final report, all identifying markers like names, gender, age, etc. will be removed to ensure anonymity; the only marker will be your MBTI® type. This report will be kept by Tyndale University as part of my doctoral portfolio. Copies of the final research will also be shared with any participant who wishes a copy.

If you have any questions, please do contact me (226-350-1776; chris@meadowbrook.ca), or in person at the church office. You 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 University at reb@tyndale.ca. You are also welcome to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Associate Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale University, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416-226-6620, Ext. 2208).

Thank you for considering partnering with me in this project! Please respond to me within a week if you would like to progress, at which point I will have you sign a consent form, and we will begin our journey together!

Chris

APPENDIX F:

Datasets collected

Dataset	Date Collected	Data Collected	Data Analysis
Preliminary Questions	Week of Oct 1 2019	Participants shared reflections on their standard/previous discernment processes and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 1 Questions	Week of Oct 1 2019	Participants considered first discernment matter via “Sensing” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 2 Questions	Week of Oct 6 2019	Participants considered first discernment matter via “Intuitive” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 3 Questions	Week of Oct 13 2019	Participants considered first discernment matter via “Thinking” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 4 Questions	Week of Oct 20 2019	Participants considered first discernment matter via “Feeling” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 5 Questions	Week of Oct 27 2019	Participants considered second discernment matter via “Sensing” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 6 Questions	Week of Nov 3 2019	Participants considered second discernment matter via “Intuitive” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type

Week 7 Questions	Week of Nov 10 2019	Participants considered second discernment matter via “Thinking” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Week 8 Questions	Week of Nov 17 2019	Participants considered second discernment matter via “Feeling” questions and shared written reflections	Reflections coded via MBTI® wordage and examined for themes relating to MBTI® type
Follow-up Interviews	Weeks of Nov 24 2019 & Dec 1 2019	Participants met one-on-one with researcher and answered debriefing questions relating to the experience as a whole	Questions asked based on previous data given by participants; clarification sought at times; coded via common phrases related to project outcomes

APPENDIX G:

Revised Questions for Reflection/Discernment

This model of discernment is not a formula; it cannot guarantee that one will hear from God, and each of us is ultimately responsible for their own discernment. That being said, this can be a helpful tool for people who are seeking to know what the Lord is saying and sense where He is leading. Some are questions I have created, some are from other teachers and spiritual directors, and some are taken from St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*.

For clarity's sake, write out the matter that you are discerning in a sentence or two, as simply and clearly as possible, framing it as a "Should I?" question (e.g. "Should I go back to school?")

Write out each of the possible outcomes of the matter clearly, in a short and simple sentence or two (e.g. "I will go back to school." "I will not go back to school.")

Do these following steps carefully and prayerfully, asking the Lord to sanctify your mind, emotions, and will, and for Him to lead you into His will on the matter. For best results, do a few questions at a time, over time—don't just sit and do them all in one sitting! Leave the Holy Spirit room to breathe and speak and lead!

Week 1

1. Jot down all of the facts/information that you can think of that might be important to know in making this decision. It might be helpful to have a "running list" that you add to over time, even as new thoughts come to mind while continuing through these steps. Don't evaluate, judge, or dismiss anything at this point—we are simply information-gathering right now—we will weigh out the information later. Consider things like what does each option cost, how much time will go into things, what would the process be to engage with one option or the other, etc.
2. In retrospect, what has God taught you in the past about a decision similar to this one? What does that make you feel about this current decision?
3. As far as you can tell, which outcome spurs you on towards greater Christian duty and obedience? Why do you feel that way?

4. Which option will bring greater glory to God, and contribute more to your deepening spiritual journey with Jesus?
5. As you go about your week, pay attention to what your thoughts on each outcome are generating within you. Does one option lead you to a deeper sense of peace, joy, love, clarity, or communion with God?

Week 2

6. Take some time to daydream about all the potential possibilities and “could-be’s” that you can imagine about each of the outcomes of this decision, just brainstorming, no bad or wrong answers. Which outcome gives you a greater sense of stirring/passion/closeness to the Lord?
7. Which outcome fits in better with your current understanding of your gifts/calling, and why?
8. Which outcome sits more right than the other(s) “in your gut?” Why do you think that is?
9. As you go about your week, pay attention to what your thoughts on each outcome are generating within you. Does one option lead you to a deeper sense of peace, joy, love, clarity, or communion with God?

Week 3

10. Make an honest and realistic list of all of the “pros and cons” you can think of for each possible outcome, maybe using your question #1 list of relevant information as a starting point that you can now evaluate.
11. Although we of course can’t know for sure, what are some of the most likely cause-and-effects of each possible outcome? That is, if you were to choose one option, what results are most likely to come about from that decision? Consider and write out for each outcome.
12. Which outcome is the most logically sound at this point?
13. If forced to choose, which outcome is the most obvious one to you at this point? That being said, what is keeping you from doing the most obvious thing? (keeping in mind that the most obvious thing doesn’t automatically mean that it’s the right thing, and that there might be very good and godly reasons for not doing the most obvious thing).

14. Imagine that you weren't the one making this decision, but instead you met a stranger who is in your exact situation, facing the exact same decision, with all circumstances exactly the same. You have no emotional connection to this person, and their decision will not affect you personally in any way. Which option would you advise them to choose, and why?
15. As you go about your week, pay attention to what your thoughts on each outcome are generating within you. Does one option lead you to a deeper sense of peace, joy, love, clarity, or communion with God?

Week 4

16. Make a list of your personal values that are impacted by each outcome of this decision. We don't typically think of clarifying our personal values in writing, but a helpful tool can be to finish the sentence, "It's important to me that/to..." Examples: It's important to me that I have a personally fulfilling career; It's important to me to spend lots of hands-on time with my kids; It's important to me to provide well for my family; It's important to me to make a difference in the world; It's important to me to honour God with my gifts; etc.

Now, we often *struggle* with a decision because the decision brings our different values into conflict—e.g. "It's important to me to have a personally fulfilling career, but it's *also* important to me to have lots of hands-on time with my kids, which my new career opportunity will limit." When these conflicting values occur, we have no choice but to actually rank our values—which ones are *more* important right now, and especially, which ones would the Lord want me to focus on? So is it *more* important to me to have a fulfilling career, or *more* important to have more hands-on time with my kids in this season? List the affected values and then rank them by importance. Which outcome fits better with your top values listed?

17. How will each outcome affect other people, and which outcome is the better one when this is considered?
18. What is your heart telling you about this decision?
19. As you go about your week, pay attention to what your thoughts on each outcome are generating within you. Does one option lead you to a deeper sense of peace, joy, love, clarity, or communion with God?

Final Reflections

20. When you imagine standing before the Lord on your Day of Judgment, where everything will be laid bare before God, which option do you think would be the one you would have wanted to choose, now facing Him?
21. Take some time to sit quietly, pray for clarity, and look within you to where the Holy Spirit dwells, and ask yourself and Him simply: Which outcome is bringing me closer to the Lord, and which outcome is not?
22. As one outcome begins to emerge over the other in your mind, even a little bit, another way to help confirm is sometimes called “trying on the jacket.” If we are shopping, we try clothes on before we buy them, to see how they look and fit. So, for a day or two, prayerfully “try on” your outcome—think about it as if you’ve already decided for sure to do it, talk about it as if you are doing it, maybe plan a little as if you are doing it. How does that feel? Does it bring a sense of peace, excitement, newness, a closer sense of the Lord? Or does it bring the opposite—a lack of peace, a feeling of anxiety, a sense of unease or confusion, etc.?
23. As one outcome becomes more clear, make sure to also take it and run it by some people that you trust—we don’t discern as soloists; the Holy Spirit leading you will be confirmed by the same Holy Spirit living in other wise and discerning believers that you trust. Also, look to Scripture—does this outcome line up with what Scripture says? The Holy Spirit will never lead in contradiction to the Word of God, so this can be a final check for us.
24. As you finish this process and feel peace about an outcome, pray into taking an active step of faith towards the outcome, and see what God does next!

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