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Tyndale University College & Seminary

Laying a Foundation for Nurturing Experiential Communion with
the Word of God for Soul Formation through
Journaling and Inner Circle Relationships

A Research Portfolio

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale Seminary

by

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Toronto, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In this research portfolio, three projects form the basis in developing this new pathway to nurture formation. The author's spiritual autobiography recounts his journey into two-way communion with the Word of God and gives readers opportunities to reflect accordingly. A model is presented that contains a cyclical four-step process designed to nurture experiential union. This model incorporates the authors' own experience, an analysis of how the Word of God is depicted by the Scriptures and in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, four existing contemplative models of formation, and the experiences of those who participated in his research project. The project tested follow up material designed to help people take home and form habits (Contemplative Prayer Journaling and Inner Circle Relationships) that would help them experience union with the Eternal Word of God throughout their day. Two months after the study twelve of the sixteen participants were journaling once a week and nine of the sixteen participants had established some form of weekly inner circle relationship with the desire to be more aware of God's presence.

DEDICATION

This research portfolio is dedicated to my wife Janice who has always been there supporting me in life and ministry. Her steadfast encouragement enabled me to press on time and again during my studies and in ministry.

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I want to extend my love and appreciation to my family at the 3crosses Café. You guys have been so patient with me as I travelled this road. You have been with me through thick and thin. Special thanks to Dylan Royal for formulating my diagrams.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge that this entire work was only made possible by the Eternal Word working in my life. I am forever grateful for His grace and love at work in my life without Him I am lost.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Personal Spiritual Experience: Prayer Conversations with God.....	2
Ministry Experience: Sharing My Spiritual Insights with Others.....	3
Research into Spiritual Formation	4
Spiritual Autobiography: Learning Spiritual Formation Principles from Personal Experience.....	4
A Biblical and Theological Inquiry into the “Word of God” and the “Word of the Lord”	6
A Spiritual Formation Model: The Awareness-Encounter-Surrender- Abide (AESA) Cycle	8
An Empirical Study: The Effect of Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ) and Inner Circle Relationships (ICR’s) on Spiritual Formation	12
Conclusion: The Condition of the Heart	14
CHAPTER TWO: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: AWAKENINGS.....	17
The Valley of the Shadow of Death.....	24
Growing Up.....	34
The Bully.....	43
Country Roads.....	54
Underwater.....	61
The Brock Years	64
Uncle David	66
Ouija Board	71
Life in the Fast Lane	74
3crosses	76
Darkness.....	79
The Journey West:.....	84
Into the Church.....	98
Seminary and Marriage	101
Ministry	103
The Church Plant.....	105
The Property and the Building	111
Israel.....	115
The Prayer Mountain at 3crosses	117
The Cleft of the Rock.....	122
The Lower 3crosses.....	123

The Jesus Experience	128
Gethsemane	131
Golgotha: The Upper 3crosses	132
The 3crosses Cafe	133
Taking Root.....	136
McArdle’s	138
A Thorn in the Flesh	139
CHAPTER THREE: THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD	146
<i>Logos Theou</i> in the New Testament.....	147
<i>Logos Theou</i> and the Early Church Fathers	150
<i>Dabar Yahweh</i> in the Old Testament	158
<i>Daw-baw</i> versus <i>Daw-bar</i>	162
<i>Dabar Yahweh</i> in the Early Church Fathers	167
Summary	169
CHAPTER FOUR: PATHWAYS TO ABIDING: A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION.....	180
Four Historic Contemplative Models of Spiritual Formation.....	181
Ignatian Spirituality.....	182
Quietism	187
The Fourfold Gospel	198
Formation Field Theory	201
The AESA Formation Model.....	207
The AESA Cycle.....	211
The Mind and Heart Pathways	214
Scripture and the “Word of God”	235
The Power of Stillness.....	241
Getting Practical – Your life	242
Concluding Thoughts.....	247
CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT: THE EFFECT OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER JOURNALING AND INNER CIRCLE RELATIONSHIPS ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION.....	249
Opportunity	251
Context	252
Response.....	254
Definition of Key Terms	255
Supervision, Permission, and Access	256
Personal, Practical, and Theoretical Backgrounds to the Research Project.....	258
The Ministry of 3crosses	259
Writing a Spiritual Autobiography.....	263
Developing a Model of Spiritual Formation	264

Other Literature and Cases	268
Project, Methodology, and Methods	269
Field.....	270
Scope	273
Methodology	274
Methods.....	276
Ethics in Ministry-Based Research	283
Findings, Interpretation and Outcomes	285
Findings.....	285
Important findings	304
Interpretations.....	307
Outcomes.....	318
Conclusions and Implications	320
CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	327
Spiritual Autobiography	327
The AESA Formation Model	328
AESA Model - Mind and Heart Working Together.....	330
Applying the Model – The Research Project	331
My Plan for Spiritual Growth.....	337
Future Study	339
Future Ministry.....	341
Final Words	343
APPENDICES	346
Appendix 1: Letter to Perspective Participants	346
Appendix 2: Research Study Consent Form	349
Appendix 3: Pre-Follow-Up Questionnaire	350
Appendix 4: Post Follow-up Questionnaire.....	354
Appendix 5: Demographics Survey	357
Appendix 6: Skype Interview Questions & Discussion Guide	358
Appendix 7: Question Guide for Group Interviews.....	359
Appendix 8: Table of Sample CPJ Coding Derived from Journal Entries	361
REFERENCE LIST	365

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Awareness-Encounter-Surrender-Abide (AESAs) Cycle.....	10
Figure 2. Jeff Roy. 2639 Dorchester Road, Niagara Falls Ontario. Photograph by Jeff Roy. June 19, 2014.	23
Figure 3. The Old Gang. Port Colborne Ontario, 1977 by Jeff Roy.....	35
Figure 4. Tony at Gethsemane at 3crosses, 5595 Aspden Road, Huntsville Ontario. by Jeff Roy.....	53
Figure 5. Jeff Roy's 1970 Dodge Challenger, Phase II. Autobody Niagara Falls, Ontario, by Jeff Roy.	58
Figure 6. Niagara Bell Docks, Chippewa, Ontario. Photo by Doug Roy. September 23, 2012. Used by Permission.....	64
Figure 7. 3crosses site in South Carolina, United States. Photo by Jeff Roy.....	77
Figure 8. Jeff Roy at a 3crosses site in West Virginia, 2013. Photo supplied by Jeff Roy.	78
Figure 9. Moraine Lake, Alberta, Photo by Johny Goerend, used by permission. 2018.	97
Figure 10. Jeff Roy at the base of Moraine Lake, Alberta. June 12, 2006. Photo by Jeff Roy.....	98
Figure 11. Google maps. Public domain image adapted by Jeff Roy.....	111
Figure 12. Picture of Lake Vernon from Mt. Sinai at 3crosses. Jeff Roy. October 20, 2010.....	112
Figure 13. Exterior and Interior shots of 482 North Mary Lake Road, Locks United Church. Huntsville Ontario. Jeff Roy December 17, 2009.....	114
Figure 14. Kitchen and Basement. 482 North Mary Lake Road, Huntsville Alliance Church. Dec 17, 2009. by Jeff Roy.....	114
Figure 15. Dinner in Israel with the group and Heading to Jerusalem. March 28, 2010. by Jeff Roy.....	117
Figure 16. The Cleft of the Rock 3crosses Trails 595 Aspden Road Huntsville Ontario. June 19, 2010. by Jeff Roy.....	123
Figure 17. Installation of Lower 3crosses at 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspden Road Huntsville, Ontario. May 14, 2010.	124
Figure 18. Pictures of the Cabin base on Mt. Sinai, 3crosses Trails 595 Aspden Road, Huntsville Ontario. 11/14/2010. by Jeff Roy.....	125
Figure 19. Mt. Sinai cabin exterior and interior. 3crosses Trails 595 Aspden Road. Huntsville, Ontario. September 14, 2010. by Jeff Roy.....	126
Figure 20. The view from the Cabin at Mount Sinai. 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspden Road, Huntsville, Ontario. September 23, 2018. by Jeff Roy.....	126
Figure 21. Participants at the Lower 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspden Road, Huntsville, Ontario. by Jeff Roy. June 7, 2013.....	128
Figure 22. Gethsemane Garden 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario.	

Personal photograph by author. Sept 10th, 2010.	132
Figure 23. Golgotha – Upper 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. May 26th, 2013.....	133
Figure 24. Renovation at 3crosses Café 482 North Mary Lake Road. Huntsville Ontario. January 27, 2013, by Jeff Roy.....	134
Figure 25. Before and after Renovation of the 3crosses Cafe, 482 North Mary Lake Road. Huntsville Ontario. 2013, by Jeff Roy	135
Figure 26. Formation Field Theory – Dr. Graham Standish (used by permission).....	202
Figure 27. Formation Field Graph - Jeff Roy	204
Figure 28. AESA Model – Basic Stages of Formation.....	208
Figure 29. The Basic AESA Cycle	211
Figure 30. AESA Model Stage One – Pre-Salvation – flesh reigns spirit is not present in soul.	219
Figure 31. AESA Stage Two – Sanctification – Spirit now resides in the soul making communion with the Eternal Word of God possible.....	222
Figure 32. Word of God influences soul for positive spiritual formation in the soul through the pathways of mind and heart along the avenue of formation – death.....	228
Figure 33. Satan influencing flesh formation in the soul through the pathways of mind and heart along the avenue of formation – money.....	230
Figure 34. AESA Stage Two – Sanctification - Experiential Union	234
Figure 35. 3crosses Cafe 482 North Mary Lake Road, Huntsville, Ontario. by Jeff Roy. April 4th, 2018.	260
Figure 36. Map of 3crosses Café and Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Google map Screen Capture and labelled by Jeff Roy. May 5th, 2016.....	261
Figure 37. Lower 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Photograph by Jeff Roy. Sept 10th, 2010.	261
Figure 38. Gethsemane Garden 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. Sept 10th, 2010.	262
Figure 39 Golgotha – Upper 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. May 26th, 2013.	262
Figure 40. Participant Average Pre and Post-Study Survey	291
Figure 41. Group One participant Average Pre and Post-Study Survey.....	291
Figure 42. Summary of Data from Pre-study survey & 2 for Groups 1 & 2 for Questions 1-5.....	293
Figure 43. Summary of Data from Pre-study survey & 2 for Groups 1 & 2 for Questions 1-5.....	294
Figure 44. Average Group Response to questions for Group 1 Pre-study survey (pre-follow up) vs. Post-study survey (post-follow up)	295
Figure 45, Group 2 - Average Group Response to questions for Group 2 Pre-study survey versus Post-study survey (post follow up)	296

Figure 46. The Full-Size Tabernacle Replica at 3crosses Trails, 595
Aspdin Road Huntsville Ont. Personal photograph by author,
Jeff Roy.342

Figure 47. The Tabernacle Furnishings at 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspdin
Road, Huntsville, Ont. Personal photograph by author, Jeff Roy.....342

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Sample of the usage of Word of God in the New Testament	148
Table 2. Six Hebrew words relating to God communicating.....	159
Table 3. Old Testament characters who received a Word of the Lord	160
Table 4. Responses to a Word of the Lord (daw=baw).	161
Table 5. Data collection dates for the research project.....	271
Table 6. Information for data sets regarding timing and type.....	281
Table 7. Timetable for the research project.	281
Table 8. Summary of demographics and post CPJ / ICR findings	285
Table 9. Summary of Group One Likert scores for pre and post surveys including overall percentage change	288
Table 10. Summary of Group Two Likert scores for pre and post surveys including overall percentage change.....	289
Table 11. Summary of categories and codes derived from all interviews	301
Table 12. Table of sample CPJ coding derived from journal entries.....	303
Table 13. Sample responses relating to levels of awareness during the day from the Participant Observer Group Interview.....	305
Table 14. Sample Responses Relating to ICR Impact and Design from Participant Observer Group Interview	307
Table 15. Skype Interview sample responses – Question 2.....	309

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For many years I missed God's personal work in my life. It took a long time for me to come to the place where I was experiencing a personal relationship with the Word who dwells within through the Spirit. This involved learning to become still and tune into His presence within and enter into a personal two-way conversation with Him through Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ). I was never taught that I could commune with Him in this way and when I began appropriating this, everything changed for me regarding my spiritual formation: my spiritual journey became filled with opportunities to awaken to the Word and His work in my life and to help others do the same. The purpose of this portfolio is to investigate my journey and understand it better so that I am better able to support others appropriate the personal relationship that is possible with God. My journey to writing the essays contained in this portfolio includes my personal experience with God, my experience in ministry, and the theological and empirical research I have undertaken.

Personal Spiritual Experience: Prayer Conversations with God

In 2008, I began having prayer conversations with God in my journals. Quite simply, I would write out my prayers in my journal and as I expressed my heart to Him, I would find that there were words from Him (the Eternal Word of God) flowing back, quietly and softly. Boldly and yet with trepidation, I started to write the words that I sensed coming from Him in real time as they came. This was scary and exciting at the same time. God was speaking into the depths of my being... using words! Sometimes He would use words from Scripture to affirm and encourage me like “Do not be afraid” from Deuteronomy 1:21, or “I will never leave you or forsake you” from Joshua 1:5. These Scriptures always came in the context of a conversation I was having with Him.

In the years that followed, God led me to read many books which opened my mind to realize that I was not alone in hearing Him speak in this way. Many well-respected believers had already walked this path of deeper, two-way contemplative communion with the Word of God. This list of authors includes; St. Teresa of Avila, Frances Fenelon, Andrew Murray, A.B. Simpson, A.W. Tozer, Major Ian Thomas, Henri Nouwen, and Watchmen Nee. The Lord also revealed that the Bible itself is filled with people conversing with God: Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, all the prophets, Paul the Apostle, Moses, Jesus, and many more.

Ministry Experience: Sharing My Spiritual Insights with Others

God called me to share this newfound communion that I was experiencing with others. Called may not be the right word here, compelled fits better. I simply could not keep to myself how wonderful it was to know and commune with God personally in the depths of my being, through words.

As I shared, I soon realized that some people were open to this kind of communion while others were not. Back in 2008, contemplative listening prayer was the fringe of the evangelical landscape with which I associated. Not many were receptive to it or practiced it. I am excited to say that in the last ten years, within those same evangelical circles, I have seen a dramatic shift toward people being open to, and desiring intimate encounters with God through listening prayer.

Right from the beginning I felt this deep call to help people commune with God and hear Him speak. I soon learned that this was not just about blessing the people. It was more about blessing the Lord. He wants to commune personally with people in intelligible ways!

In 2010 He called me to lay the foundation for an experiential listening prayer ministry that has come to be called 3crosses Trails. Its purpose was to help people encounter God experientially in nature (His creation) and hear Him speak. People who came to 3crosses would receive basic teaching and then spend three hours on a solitary, audio-guided walk on a mountain that presented opportunities to awaken to His presence and commune with Him through Contemplative Prayer

Journaling. After their time on the mountain, participants gave testimony of great encounters with God where they would sense His presence and hear Him speak words that were personally powerful and transformational. However, after returning home to the busyness of life many shared of their struggle to continue to regularly nurture moments of encounter and two-way communion.

Research into Spiritual Formation

This experience in ministry led me to embark on a journey to learn more about spiritual formation. I wanted to help myself and others come to abide with the Lord and practice His Presence throughout the day. To accomplish this, I applied and was accepted into the Spiritual Formation track of the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University College and Seminary. All the objectives of the program aligned with my goals but there were two that stood out for me. The first, “that the student would gain an understanding of the academic field of spiritual formation” and the second, “that they would be able to teach and guide those they minister to in spiritual practices and community formation” (DMin Handbook 2017, 52). I am happy to report that these, along with the other goals of the program were achieved. I found the program at Tyndale to be hard, but good.

Spiritual Autobiography: Learning Spiritual Formation Principles from Personal Experience

Each year of Tyndale’s Doctor of Ministry program consists of four courses, one of which is a project-based course that becomes part of this portfolio. In the first year the main project was to write a spiritual autobiography which is

presented in chapter two. As you read it, I hope you will see the Word of God at work in my life. Please note that whenever I reference the Word of God I will be taking a larger view of the Word of God than just the Scriptures. This “larger view” will be clarified in chapter 3 and center around the Word of God as the Second member of the Trinity, active in creation, redemption, and reconciliation.

Chapter two gives insight into my emotional, spiritual, physical and mental journey from a child . At times it will be interactive. This is my ministry impulse emerging as I present opportunities for you to listen for the Word of God speak to you; even transport you in your mind and heart, back in time to significant points in your own spiritual journey. It is my hope that in reading the chapters of this portfolio you will have your own moments of awareness, encounter, and surrender; that will in turn lead to deeper levels of abiding. This is what happened to me as I wrote my own spiritual autobiography. During the writing God helped me clearly see His revelation and work in my life over the years. As you read my story take advantage of the opportunities to slow down and give Him a chance to speak into your story, reveal things about your own journey and journal about them. Chances are that God will be speaking to you as you read and reflect. Please know that as the reader you are free to read on past or through these opportunities for encounter.

A Biblical and Theological Inquiry into
the “Word of God” and the
“Word of the Lord”

As mentioned above during the program I developed a spiritual formation model which is based on a larger and more comprehensive view of the Word of God and His work in the world and in the lives of people . The basis for view as presented can be found in chapter three. In evangelical circles both the Word, and the Word of God are often rightly considered to be synonymous with the Scriptures. As a result, when someone mentions the Word or Word of God, people may begin to think of the Scriptures. The Word of God as something that is preached, taught or studied. Yet the Word is so much more than just a something, He is a someone, to be encountered and loved! Even more, through the Spirit the Word dwells in believers and becomes one with them. He is the One that makes the Scripture living and active. He cannot be contained on the pages in a book of words inspired by Him through the Spirit. In this portfolio whenever I refer to the Word or Word of God I will be referring to this active living presence in the same way that Ambrose defined Word of God (see page 151 for quote). In certain places to help makes things clearer I will use the Word Eternal prior to Word or Word of God to help one recognize this larger view that I am taking. When I am referring to the Bible I will use the word Scripture. When I am referring to Jesus I will use Jesus, Father will be used for Father and if I am referencing the Spirit, I will use Spirit.

Through the Spirit the Father is at work through the Word of God in our life through our mind, heart and soul. I am defining mind and heart to refer to

activities in the brain that affect the soul. By the soul I mean the metaphysical and eternal part of a person. Before salvation the flesh drives the soul until one is born again and the Spirit takes up residence and the Eternal Word begins to speak and lead from within, waging war against the flesh. After salvation, a problem can occur when believers are not taught about how one nurtures the work of the Eternal Word from within and without through the Spirit in both heart and mind. I experienced the effects of this personally in my life. I was an ordained pastor in an evangelical denomination for over fifteen years and had not personally experienced the One who dwelt within me through the Spirit speaking from within as I have over the last ten years. Yes, I knew He was there living within me. Every now and then He would give me the warm fuzzies. That was it. I never thought to try and talk with Him conversationally. In 2008 I began to experience the personal Presence of the Eternal Word leading me from within my mind and heart, using words. This was a gamechanger! He has been at work changing me from within since then. His work always pertains to my character development, fruit formation, and flesh crucifixion.

In developing my model, I needed to know if there was a theological and biblical basis for this. Being an evangelical Protestant, I have always put Scripture first in formulating and understanding spiritual practices. I needed to study what both the Bible and those closest to the time when the Bible was compiled, had to say. To accomplish this, I conducted a literature survey of the use of “Word of the Lord” and “Word of God” in both the Old and New Testaments and in the

writings of the Early Church Fathers. A summary of this survey is presented in Chapter 3 and supports a larger view of the Word of God as being fundamental to spiritual formation. In this chapter I review what I learned from studying the references to *Logos Theou* (Word of God), *Dabar Yahweh* (Word of the Lord), and *Qwol Yahweh* (Voice of the Lord) in the Scriptures, and the writings of Early Church Fathers.

Through the study of these references, I saw the incredible role the Eternal Word of God plays in: awakening people to an awareness of His reality, drawing people into encounter, calling them to surrender so He can take His rightful place as Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, Lord, and Sanctifier in their lives. Indeed, in a way, the Scriptures are like an autobiography of the working of the Eternal Word in creating, awakening, encountering, calling, saving, leading, sanctifying and abiding with men and women. In the following quote Dorner advocates for this larger view of the Word of God which is fundamental to my spiritual formation model which is presented in chapter four.

They (the Scriptures) are inspired and illuminated by Him. They reveal Him and His work, but they are not Him in the personal sense. He-the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent eternal Word cannot be contained in a book. We must not limit revelation to the Scriptures. The eternal Word antedated the written word, and through the eternal Word God is made known in nature and in history. (Dorner 1871. 1:248)

A Spiritual Formation Model:
The Awareness-Encounter-Surrender-Abide
(AESA) Cycle

Chapter four begins by reviewing certain aspects of four historical models of contemplative spiritual formation and their relevance to the Awareness-

Encounter-Surrender-Abide (AESA) model, that I will develop and elaborate on in this portfolio. The AESA Model emphasizes the essential role the Word of God plays, along the journey and pathways of Spiritual Formation that I identify. The expanded AESA Formation Cycle will be presented to reveal the areas where one can move forward in wholistic spiritual formation (mind, heart, and soul). I believe that there are three basic stages to spiritual formation; Pre-salvation, Sanctification, and Glorification. Experiential Union is identified as a fundamental part of stage two; Sanctification (see figure 28) . Reflecting on these stages of formation in my life and in the lives of others I noticed that awareness of and surrender to God's leading were key parts of each stage and this formed the basis for the AESA Cycle. AESA is an acronym for Awareness, Encounter, Surrender and Abide. The steps of the cycle relate to how the Eternal Word works in the hearts and minds of people to form them as they move through the AESA Stages of Formation. The basic AESA cycle is depicted below in figure 1.

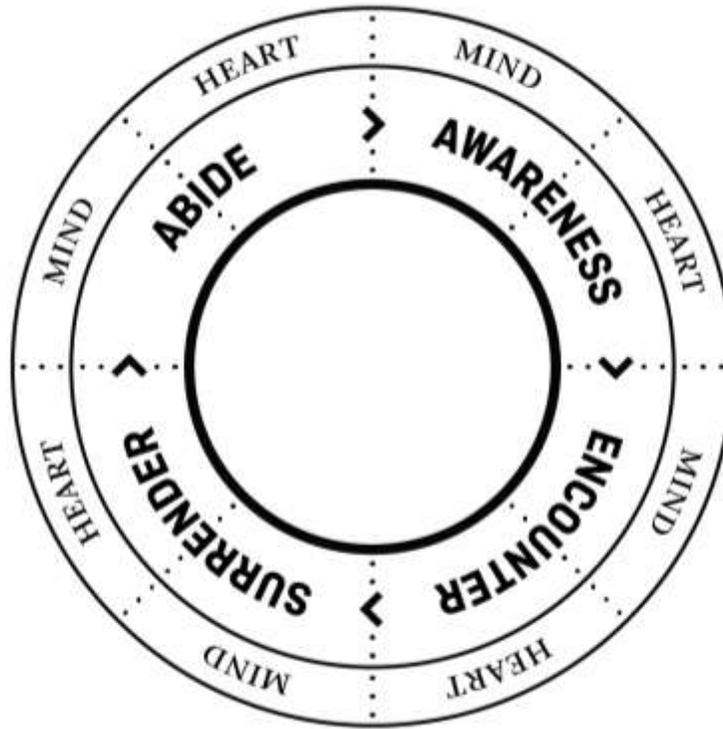


Figure 1. The Awareness-Encounter-Surrender-Abide (AESA) Cycle.

By nurturing the first three (awareness, encounter, and surrender) the fourth (abide) becomes a reality. It all begins with awareness of God’s Presence. To be aware of the Lord’s presence, a person needs to learn to focus attention on Him throughout the day (Willard 2011, Time 18:00-24:00). “Practicing the Presence” is about living awakened and attentive to God, in mind and heart. Now it is one thing to be aware of God and quite another to seek a personal encounter with Him and engage and connect with Him in some way (i.e., worship, gratefulness, meditation, contemplation, conversation). This encounter invariably leads to opportunities to surrender to God’s love, leading, affirmation, encouragement, conviction, and even rebuke. When surrender happens, one

abides with the Lord and the cycle begins again with new opportunities for awareness. In chapter 4 the AESA Cycle diagram is developed to incorporate the work of the One I believe to be essential to formation; the Eternal Word. Avenues of formation, the competing voice of Satan, the pathways of the mind and heart, and the battle for soul between Spirit and flesh are also incorporated. In addition, I present variations of the diagram that reflect how the AESA stages function for positive or negative formation.

The AESA Cycle can also be used to help one see areas where the enemy has taken them down a path of awareness, encounter and surrender that feeds the flesh and is not conducive to positive spiritual formation. Two Spiritual disciplines: Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ) and Inner Circle Relationships (ICR'S) are also highlighted as disciplines that can help one nurture the mind and heart pathways of the AESA Cycle in whatever stage they are in.

The AESA Model was developed during the integration of this portfolio as I reviewed the Word of God's work in my life (Chapter Two), studied the Scriptures and the writings of the Early Church Fathers (Chapter Three), investigated four contemplative historical models of Spiritual Formation from the last four centuries (Chapter Four), and considered the insights gained from my empirical research project (Chapter Five).

An Empirical Study:
The Effect of Contemplative Prayer Journaling
(CPJ) and Inner Circle Relationships (ICR's) on
Spiritual Formation

Chapter five consists of an Action Research Project which involved attempting to help selected 3crosses participants experience how the spiritual disciplines of Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ) and Inner Circle Relationships (ICR's) can help them see, encounter, surrender to, and abide in (AESA Cycle) the renewing work of the Eternal Word in their hearts and minds. Two 3crosses groups agreed to participate in a follow up process that involved trying these two spiritual disciplines with goal of nurturing AESA Cycle formation.

The first discipline, Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ), simply involves paying attention to and discerning the inner workings of the Spirit by engaging the Word within by means of two-way prayer journaling. Morris Dirks found journaling to be something that helped him open his heart and mind to what God wanted to say to him. (Dirks 2013, Kindle Locations 594-96). CPJ has the potential to help a person nurture and grow a moment by moment, personal relationship with the indwelling Word. Nouwen also sees the value of journaling as a way of looking back at one's life and seeing the hand of God at work (Nouwen 1998, 2). Participants were given access to fourteen audio tracks (fifteen minutes or less) that were rooted in Scripture stories with the aim of helping them become aware of and encounter the Word through CPJ daily for fourteen days. Not all the participants were able to do all fourteen of the daily audio CPJ

exercises. In spite of this, the data revealed that CPJ did impact participants in a positive way and they felt a deeper awareness and connection to God throughout the day. Two months after the study group one was using CPJ an average of 2.4 times per week. Group two was using CPJ an average of 4.3 times per week. All the participants from both groups recognized the value of CPJ and expressed a desire to incorporate CPJ into their lives in some way

The second discipline involved participants establishing and maintaining an Inner Circle Relationship (ICR) with one other participant. Jesus modelled that we all need to have close, personal, Inner Circle Relationships. Among the twelve disciples He established an inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John). Jesus took them with Him when He was transfigured on the mountain and Moses and Elijah appeared (a celebratory high point - Mark 9:2-9). He took them with Him to face the challenges of ministry, like raising a dead girl (Luke 8:51-56). They were close at hand when suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46). Jesus prioritized Inner Circle Relationships and modelled how they can work. We all need to have an inner circle of friends who will be with us during the challenges and triumphs of life. Scripture affirms this and reveals other ICR's in Scripture (Moses & Aaron, Elijah & Elisha, David and Jonathon, Paul and Timothy).

Most people have several Inner Circle Relationships already; they just haven't thought of them or used them in this way. God has designed us to need one another (1 Corinthians 12). Dirks, in his book on soul formation and spiritual

direction, emphasizes the importance of these kinds of relationships and says that, although the early church did not speak of spiritual direction as “a distinct or specialized ministry,” it occurred naturally through pastors, elders and friends (Morris. 2013, Kindle Locations 815-818). In a way, ICR’s help us return to this early church practice of having spiritual friends who journey with us; admonishing, encouraging, and loving transparently (Matthew 18:20).

Participants in the project were to establish an ICR with another participant and agree to meet at the end of each week. During these meetings they were to discuss their ongoing spiritual formation, be vulnerable, share recent CPJ entries, and spend time journaling and praying together. ICR’s are an important part of the discernment process when a person practices Contemplative Prayer Journaling. ICR’s also have the potential to be a way to encourage one another, facilitate discernment all the while experiencing the positive effects of vulnerability and surrender in a safe environment.

The project revealed that meeting only twice was not enough to develop the deep transparent relationship required for an ICR. Participants who engaged in the practice saw value and expressed a willingness to establish and maintain their own ICR’s. It did seem that healthy ICR development was somewhat dependent upon the person’s current Formation Field (see Figure 26).

Conclusion: The Condition of the Heart

During this research project I saw the truth of Henri Nouwen’s view that the effectiveness of any formation discipline is to a large part, dependent upon the

heart condition of the one performing it (Nouwen 2010, Kindle Locations 54-55). The individuals who participated with hearts that were surrendered were impacted to a greater degree. I also experienced this personally through the doctoral program at Tyndale University & Seminary. My heart condition had a dramatic impact on how I was formed during the program. I found myself having to regularly step back and remind myself why I enrolled and to stay the course and do the work with the objective of growth and not just to finish the program.

Each of the three major projects influenced me and in chapter six I will share some highlights of learning for me with respect to each project. I will also share how I have grown and been formed and what my future studies might be directed toward. I will make a few comments on the impact that this program had upon my future ministry plans. I will also share how the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale broadened my perspective and contributed to my own personal spiritual formation.

My hope is that as you read through this portfolio you will have moments of awakening, encounter, and surrender, and that this will help you abide with the Lord. That the Word of God will speak to you and reveal His ongoing work in your life, and you will be encouraged as He interacts with you. I encourage you to read with a journal open by your side to journal when the Word within prompts you. Keep a few questions related to the basic AESA formation cycle in the back of your head as you read through this portfolio:

- Awareness - Throughout your day do you experience moments of awakening and awareness in your mind and/or heart?

- Encounter - During these moments of awareness do you seek to encounter and connect with Him in mind and/or heart?
- Surrender - When you connect, do you surrender to His leading or calling in mind and/or heart?
- Abide - When awareness, encounter and surrender are being nurtured do you sense His abiding presence in experiential union and have peace in mind or heart?

As you read the above and reflected on your own experience of AESA would you say you gravitate toward the heart pathway of formation, or the mind pathway? For me, even in the process of compiling this portfolio, I sensed God at work in my mind (analytical thoughts), heart (emotional feelings) and soul (center of my being – metaphysical) doing and revealing things I didn't expect. The integration of these three projects has resulted in spiritual formation for me. I developed the AESA Cycle as I wrestled with what the Lord was saying to me through my personal experience, the Scriptures, other models, and my research project.

In the next chapter I hope that you will see how awareness, encounter, and surrender to the Word in both mind and heart led me to come to a larger view of Him and His role in my formation. My story of His work in my life is real and raw and not very pretty at times. Grab hold of the things that He, the indwelling Word, and He, the written Word affirm. Let go of the rest. Keep walking forward with Him on the pathways of formation.

CHAPTER TWO:
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY:
AWAKENINGS

The Bible is the written word of God, and because it is written, it is confined and limited by the necessities of ink and paper. The voice of God, however, is alive and free as the sovereign God is free. The words that I have spoken unto you, they are Spirit and they are life. The life is in the speaking words. God's word in the Bible can have power only because it corresponds to God's word in the universe. It is the present voice which makes the written Word all-powerful. Otherwise, it would lie locked in slumber within the covers of a book. (Tozer 2015, Kindle Locations 772-774)

Contemplative Prayer Journal Entry - Jeff Roy

Oct 16th, 2010. Words from the Lord

MY WORD HAS ALWAYS BEEN ALIVE...
SPOKEN INTO THE HEARTS OF MEN AND WOMEN...
JUST AS THE WRITTEN WORD CAME IN THE BEGINNING.

THE REFORMATION RESTORED POWER AND PLACE
UNTO MY WORD... MY STORY... AS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE
BUT A NEW REFORMATION IS NEEDED THAT WILL RESTORE
MY SPOKEN WORD UNTO PEOPLE
IN THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS AND SOUL
THIS IS WHAT BRINGS ABOUT
TRUE LIFE CHANGE AND POWER.

I AM DOING THIS IN YOUR LIFE AND YOU HAVE FEAR... AND
YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS WILL
THINK.
I AM LEADING YOU DOWN A PATH AND BLESSING WILL COME
BUT YOU HAVE TO TRUST ME.

I hope that you have carved out a bit of time and found a quiet place to read. It's what I do when I want to settle in for a read. I have found that time and place really help one be able to enter in to the story. I hope that you will be able to enter in to my story and connect with me. I want to share my story with you.

Years ago, God began suggesting that I write out His story in my life. It was a gentle inner prompting from His Spirit, within my heart, mind and soul. It grew into an urging, a compulsion to write. Finally, it was quite simply a "charge" to write! God said; "Write the book Jeff – I will help you." Let me try and help you get a feel for what I am trying to share. Here is another journal entry like the one above... that surrounds God's call to me to write. (When I am prayer journaling, I use capitals letters when I believe that God is speaking to me. My own responses are in italics.)

May 12th, 2010.
WHAT ABOUT THE BOOK?

I just feel that so many have been written and they are so well done. What could I do that was special?

IF YOU WRITE THE BOOK.... NOTHING...
BUT IF YOU LET ME WRITE THE BOOK...
THEN EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

What kind of book?

WRITE ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY INTO CHRISTIANITY AND THRU
CHRISTIANITY.
WHAT YOU HAVE FOUND OUT. WRITE IT AS STORY AND
NARRATIVE.... I WILL FLOW THROUGH IT.

What about people and places and things. Do I change the names?

YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT SANTA CLAUS AND JESUS.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT BULLIES

AND HONOURABLE FRIENDS.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT MOVING
AND BECOMING PART OF THE COOL GROUP.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT SELENA AND HEARTBREAK.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT OTHER GIRLS
AND CLOSING OFF YOUR HEART.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT SELENA COMING BACK
AND HEARTBREAK AGAIN.
ABOUT UNIVERSITY AND MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENTS
AND WEDDINGS.
YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT TORONTO AND MUSKOKA AND
SKIDOOING AND PARTYING AND DOPE AND COCAINE.
SNOW REMOVAL AND FISH STORES AND COMPUTER
PROGRAMMING AND TREE PLANTING AND
CONTRACTING.

YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT MY VOICE.

ABOUT LEAVING EVERYTHING...
ABOUT MY MOVING IN THE REAL WORLD
- MIRACLES AND POWER.
ABOUT ENTERING THE CHURCH.
ABOUT SEMINARY.
ABOUT ST. ANDREWS AND ABOUT SNOW REMOVAL AGAIN
AND FALLING BACK.
ABOUT CHURCH PLANTING.
ABOUT FAILURE.
ABOUT RETURNING BACK TO ME...

Now I must say that all came fast from the Lord through the Spirit in the pathways of my mind and heart. Prior to this call to write I never thought about writing down my life story. Over the last seven years I have been thinking about writing a book about my journey into hearing God speak. So I was shocked to hear God call me to write about my life story.

In response to this (and many more promptings from within) I began to write in 2010 when I was 46 years old. I chuckle to myself as I confess to you that I had always thought that writing fiction would be a great way to earn a living. I

knew that it is hard to write and even harder to write something that resonates with people. It was during my first attempt to write my story down that I realized that until you sit down and try and write, you have no idea how hard it is to write. I worked away on this book for a bit and then set it aside for a couple of years. It was during this time I sensed the Lord leading me to embark on a Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University & Seminary. Embarking on this path I found out that the first year of the program involved reflecting on your life and writing a spiritual autobiography - I chuckled on the inside. Not only was I being compelled within, by the Lord, to write, but now it was a required part of a course in which He led me to enroll. One way or another... the Lord was going to have me write my story.

The Doctor of Ministry program I entered continues to undergird this call to reflect on my journey and better understand spiritual formation. In the second year of the program I wrote papers that required me to review the way(s) that God worked in my life to form me spiritually. I also reviewed other people's models of formation and from this vantage point I was to come up with my model of spiritual formation. The program required me to read books on discernment, spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation as well as spiritual autobiographies. All of this continues to push me forward toward compiling this book that I have felt the Lord calling me to write. When I first began to write, I wondered if the book was for me... or for you... the reader? I have come to believe that it is for both of us. I

want to be clear...the sense I have is that through it God may use it to help you see His work in your own story.

To facilitate, I want to write in a different way, not... “to you ,” but... “with you.” Can we give this a try? I want to try and give you a little more information than the words that are recorded on the page give. I want it to be more like... I was telling you the story as if you were present with me aware of the pauses... hearing my intonation... and seeing my eyes or facial expression and to even be able to sense when something breaks within me or rocks me as I write. Wow, now that’s a tall order for a written document.

Please have a media device available with which you can connect to YouTube. I want to use YouTube as one way of deepening our connection. You will also need to have a journal handy, something to record thoughts and words that light upon your mind as you slow down and listen. To accomplish this I want to use the ellipse (you may have already noticed). Whenever you see dots... (ellipses) please pause... take a breath... slow down. If I was telling you the story I would pause at these moments maybe even look you in the eye... or look down. Of course, let me be clear you are free to just read on through the ellipses as well!

I invite you to try it... (PAUSE) my hope is to slow you down... (PAUSE) and hear things the way I would speak them, for you to hear this as I would speak it... or share it. Depending on context placement ellipses can also indicate an unfinished thought, a leading statement, a slight pause, a mysterious or echoing voice, or even a nervous or awkward silence. In reported speech, the ellipsis can

be used to represent an intentional silence. I want to use the ellipsis to simply slow you down. For years I have used this when I am speaking to others and teaching from a written document... to slow myself down and pause for emphasis. From here on a comma is still a comma, but a dot dot dot... is a slightly longer pause.

For fun let me share with you the story of the birth of the “pause” ... for effect. While attending university I worked a summer job with a bunch of union guys. They were all very sharp guys (university level thinkers - if that makes sense). One of them used to tell a great story and during the telling of an exciting story... at certain points... he would often stop in mid-sentence and then pause... and he would actually look at you and say the words... “pause... for effect”... and then after a moment continue the story... it worked so well. I believe that it made the stories... (pause) better! Would you agree that there is something special being physically present as one shares a story? The nuances associated with intonation, timing, personal presence, a slight crack in one’s voice, a glance up when eyes meet, or a pause each contributes to the shared experience. In a way I’d like for you to be right here... with me... as I tell my story. I’d like to look you right in the eye... your mind’s eye or the window of the soul some might say. This picture of me in figure 2 will have to do for now.



Figure 2. Jeff Roy. 2639 Dorchester Road, Niagara Falls Ontario. Photograph by Jeff Roy. June 19, 2014.

My hope is to write in such a way that you will be able to experience what I experienced while reflecting on your own experiences... so that in a different way we enter a shared experience. Ultimately, during this, we want the Word to speak. As I share my story, I want to challenge you to think and reflect on your own life experience, your own spiritual formation but also allow room for the Lord to speak directly into it. I believe that the Spirit of the Lord can help us in this. As you read, be aware of His leading... moments of awakening, of Him speaking words that light upon your mind. I hope to word things “differently” ... if I can. God said that He would help me, and I believe Him, so I will try and listen to Him... as I write. If you read with ears tuned to hear Him ... I sense that something special will happen. There is a connection that we can make off the pages and “in Spirit” so to speak.

Life is experiential. It is a journey. A journey... better walked with God and with others. Let's walk together for a little while. I plan to write about most of those things the Lord spoke to me about and even a few more. However, I would like to begin, not at the start of my story... but with a snapshot into my life around the time when I began to write (5 years ago when I was 46). There are a few things you need to know now... to understand things I will say later about my spiritual formation.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

Not long after I began to write this book, something tragic happened.

My 20-year-old nephew took his life... Please... wait... I need to slow down here... this is a bit too real... too raw.

I sense the Lord within saying; "slow down... read that sentence again Jeff"... and something deep within me agrees.

You see I couldn't just type it out... see it appear on the screen, and then go on. Something happened inside me. Strange how the writing out of something that happened... the actual recording of it on paper... or on a computer screen causes the reality of it to hit home.

My 20-year-old nephew... took... his life.

There is a whole lot in that one little sentence. What thoughts came to mind when you read it? Do you wonder about the particulars? How it happened?... Why it happened?... How did he get to that point?... What's his name?

I guess as you read on in my story you will learn about Tony... and my sister (his mom - Suzanne) and his dad (Paul). Paths will cross... then separate... then cross again. I am still dealing with it. Morning by morning - the reality sinks home. You probably know what it is like. To deal with the loss of someone you loved. At the memorial service I used a Bruce Springsteen song entitled... "You're Missing." It is from *The Rising*, an album that was written in remembrance of 9/11 (Springsteen 2002). I understand that Bruce went and met with those who lost loved ones when the twin towers fell in order to better understand how they felt. I think the whole album captures the feeling well. Maybe the song I played during Tony's memorial service will help us share the feeling of losing someone. Please take a few minutes... slow down and listen to the song, the words, the feeling. I'm not going anywhere. Simply search YouTube using exactly what follows "Bruce Springsteen - You're Missing (lyrics)" and look for the daisy pic. A URL link is also provided in the references section (Springsteen 2001b). At the 4-minute mark, the lyrics stop, and the music will continue, and you can come back to the story if you like. It's just 4 minutes but it will communicate and say more than I can in 5 pages so please help us make a connect and listen to the song, the feel of it. The message about loss contained in it. Think about Tony. Think about those affected by 911. Think about your own loss.

Tell me... as you listened did thoughts of people you knew and have lost come to mind? God knows about loss. I think in a way we can feel His heart in this song. Do you think you might have?

Death is part of this journey we are on... and common to us all. We are all walking through the same Valley - the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Inspired by God the writer of Ecclesiastes' writes: "To everything there is a season: a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a). This sounds good but it just doesn't seem right when it happens this way - a boy dies before his father. Life is cut short, far too short, too often... and sometimes, as with Tony, on purpose.

There are other losses like this one that I have experienced; Uncle David, my cousin Brad, friends Allan (Skippy) and Keith... life cut too short... and on purpose. Then there are losses that happen... that are not on purpose, but still... death comes knocking too soon. Your experience too... eh? I thought that might be the case. We are in this valley together in the real rubber-hits-the-road... "I know what you mean... been there" way. In this valley sometimes, something larger than you reaches down and grabs hold of you... and if you don't resist, everything is different... you have awakened, and you know... that nothing will ever be the same again. I made a mistake in that last sentence. It is not a something that grabs hold... but a Someone. This is exactly what happened to me when I was 25. I have never been the same since.

Have you ever felt Him call and something stirred deep within? Did you ever get the sense that something more is going on and we are not seeing the big picture? You have a moment of awakening and you become aware that there is more going on than you think. Often this happens during our experiences, as we meet and connect and live, not in the stuff we own... the cars we drive... or the money we have but in the real deep connections we have with each other and with God.

Are we agreed on this? That it is within our stories that God moves and life happens. We all have a story, yes you have a story... and it is more important than you think. God has been involved in your story... whether or not you recognize it, or whether you will admit it.

SOMEONE IS WATCHING YOU.... CALLING OUT TO YOU.

He as the Word is at work in your life... long before you recognize Him. Even now as you read this book... He knows you so well... He looks down on you. He knows you are reading this... right now... knew that you would come to this point. He has things to say to you. You see, He wants desperately to connect with you... personally. This is truth. I don't have to prove it to you - it is already written on your heart.

Have you ever really listened for His voice?

Do you want to hear Him speak? Maybe not. Are you fearful of what He might say? Maybe you know a lot about God but do not really know Him. Could you be missing something precious? The fact is that thoughts like these probably

excite you, comfort you, and scare you all at the same time. Want to put this book down? I hope not.

A part of you wants to deny this, turn away and close this book and walk away from going deeper. At the same time, deep down, this truth being stated resounds, and you know that there is a God and that He knows you so well and loves you and wants to personally connect with you. He made you, He sustains you, even now He is here... and if you slow down and enter the moment you can feel and sense Him, His Presence. When we talk like this, something happens on the inside... doesn't it? Something stirs, moves deep within you, am I right? At the very thought of the reality of connecting with this being, something stirred deep within and it happened fast... even before your brain kicked in and argued for or against these ideas.

This is okay. This is very normal. There are forces at work here. Forces for good and forces for evil. This is spiritual stuff and it's more real and lasting than physical stuff.

I'm asking you to be aware as you read... of that someone moving deep within you or around you. For me... it is like someone, a force, a presence, a being surrounds me... envelopes me... and I... I feel Him... this force... this presence. When it happens, it rocks me and sometimes even breaks me as His love flows over and it is all very good. Maybe God, and please stay with me here, maybe God knew you would read this now.... maybe He planned for you to read this... at this very moment in your life and that it would raise your awareness of

Him. The first conscious step to being formed spiritually involves an awakening to the awareness of the presence of God in the present moment. For me, from that point on, my spiritual journey involved a growing and nurturing a moment by moment awareness of His presence. Awareness of Him... and His work in your life is the basis for the first stage and then every stage after. This is what my story centers around. A growing awareness of His presence and movements in my life.

Do you have faith in something... someone like this?

For me to share my story with you and for you to “enter in” it is important for you to experience what I am referring to. I want you to do something... I want you to read this next part out loud. Really... I know that sounds strange but read it out loud... and read it slowly. Slow like molasses. Now if you can’t do this (the read aloud part) because you are in a public place then close the book and come back later... I will be waiting... that’s the amazing thing about written words. You can always come back to them. Remember-spoken words become written words so they can become spoken words again.

Okay... Here we go, out loud and slowly and don’t forget to pause... with the dots. (From Psalm 139.)

God... you have examined my heart... and know everything about me...

As you continue to read out loud - let the words flow... slowly over you do not overthink this... just feel and sense the words and what they are saying about this “Being” who knows you. Do not question them... just reflect on the possibility or reality of a “being” like this. Let the words wash over you. As you read if you see more dots then pause - this is little like *Lectio Divina* initially used

by monks. They would read a Scripture passage slowly and reflectively even stopping or repeating at points to reflect and meditate. Prayer and contemplation come into play at this point with the hope of hearing God speak into the passage.

Out loud:

God... you have examined my heart...
and know everything about me.....
You know..... when I sit down... or stand up...
You know my thoughts..... even when I'm far away.
You see me..... when I travel... and when I rest at home...
You know everything..... I do...
You know what I am going to say... even before I say it,
LORD... You go before me..... and You follow me.....
You place your hand of blessing on my head...
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...,
too great for me to... understand!...
I can never escape from..... your Spirit!
I can never get away from..... your presence!
If I go up to heaven..., you are there;
If I go down to the grave..., you are there.
If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
even there your hand will guide me...,
and your strength... will support... me...
(Psalm 139)

The Bible reveals that an all-powerful being who created everything and sustains everything knows you personally. Does this resonate with you on some level? Is there some part of you that senses this as truth, desires this to be true, needs this to be true?

Now I want to do an IF... THEN thing...

IF... the above words are true... THEN God is aware that you have embarked... on the journey of reading this book. Maybe this is a crossroads for you.

Take some time to reflect and listen... and think about these questions for a few minutes and then journal what comes.

1. What thoughts/memories came to mind as you read the words above?
2. What is going on in your life right now?
3. What are you hungering and thirsting for more than anything else?
4. Do you sense there is more going on around here than meets the eye?

If you want to try and make a connection with God then try this... take out your journal and write out a prayer out to the Lord about how you are feeling right now. If you sense words come as you write out your prayer write them down too. You may be hearing from God, but it could also be your conscience or some other outside force. If you write the things you hear down, you can assess them as to source later. If you are a visual person and you see things, then draw them or describe them. Write what you think... but also write what you hear... what you feel. Remember you can always come back and sort out the source of the voices that spoke later. Trying to sort out the source of the voices as you listen only disrupts the intuitive, sensing place you are in.

Take at least 5 minutes. Close the book, the words on the pages that follow will wait. One of the powers that written words have is that once written down they are always willing to wait to come alive again.

Welcome back... Now, as I said, if the words you read out loud earlier are in fact true - then you are on a journey of becoming aware of the God who already knows you. The idea of becoming intimately aware of the reality of God generally causes people to react in three different ways. Some find they are excited, their heart races, wanting more, hungering, thirsting. Others can be excited but

fearful... what if they sincerely reach out and seek a deeper connection with God... but no connection is made? Are they not worthy? Doesn't God care? The third group may also experience a racing heart... but not because they are excited and hungry for more... it races because they are worried, they are fearful of taking a good hard look at things. You see... they like the delusion. They do not want to wake up to the reality of the spiritual realm. I believe I experienced a little bit of each. Are you familiar with the pill scene in a movie called The Matrix (Wachowski 1999)? The hero Neo has two choices before him; take the blue pill or the red pill. The red pill leads him to become aware of the deeper reality around him while the blue pill allows him to stay living in the delusion of a dream life that seems so real. On YouTube do a search using "Blue pill or Red Pill" and watch the scene and reflect on it. The URL can be found in the reference list.

We all have opportunities to become aware of the deeper spiritual reality all around us. In my story you will see times when my awareness was awakened. Many do not want to wake up spiritually... and no matter how hard someone shakes them ... no matter how eloquently someone writes... no matter how brilliantly someone argues for this deeper reality, they will not wake up. Day after day they continue to take the blue pill and never even realize they made a choice. I believe that our free will is involved and respected by God about this awakening. He presents opportunities to awaken to His presence that we can either embrace or not. I want to encourage you to live out your life connected with Him awakened and aware of His presence. He is what each heart seeks. Augustine

of Hippo put it this way after he awakened to God's presence; "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee" (Augustine 1955).

As I share my story, I promise I won't go too fast. I want to share some of my experiences. I'd call them - Moments of Awakening to the Presence. Sometimes I wasn't even aware of what they were at the time. We will move slowly. If you reach out, I will take you by the hand. I promise to be open and honest and real, which is a lot more than you normally get these days.

Are you looking for truth and for honesty...? Then take my hand... read on... walk with me... better yet... reach out and take His hand... the One who created all who watches over all... you are safe with Him.

In this chapter I will share experiences that laid the foundation for my connection with Him. In a sense, I want to walk with you along the path of my life as I became more and more aware of His presence. There will be ups and downs. I will share about things of which I am not proud. My hope is that as you read, there will times when you really connect with Him. When you awaken and see things... as you never have. I believe the right word here for this is... revelation. This can only come from Him. Do not read this book with just your mind – as you read, listen with your heart... your spirit... use the intuitive part of your brain... let the Spirit guide you along. North Americans often neglect this part of the brain. Westerners are accustomed to using the part that rational and analytical and logical. Try and use the intuitive, sensing, emotive parts of your

brain. This is the side you use to see the picture in those 3-D maze, picture puzzles which were a fad around the turn of the millennium. To see the hidden 3-D picture, you need to look through what you see in front of you and focus beyond the paper. In order to see the picture... you must stop trying so hard to analyze... and to focus... you just let go... and then it comes into focus. It's intuitive! The focal point is different than what your logical mind tries to tell you. Try and do some of this as you read on and live your life. See things that you don't normally see. We will talk about this more later.

Hey, let's take a break before we get back into my story... stop reading... sit quietly... watch and listen and become aware of outside forces. Let all that has been said so far percolate. There is no rush. Put the book down and just sit and try to just be... for 5 minutes before getting up. Yes... that's right... you have permission to accomplish nothing at all- just sit and be, for five minutes. Can you do it? Really... try it, it's not easy... but it's okay.

Growing Up

I grew up in a small town named Chippewa, Ontario. Yeh, I know it is a weird name but like any small town... we who lived there... well... we were proud of it. Chippewa! My little gang of friends had about 6 guys in it. We played road hockey, nerf football, guns, built forts, and even built a go cart as many young boys do. Trouble was our middle name: from setting trees on fire, to the famed bike jump (that never worked out - poor Clint), soaping walls with graffiti and skipping school. We caught snakes and frogs and turtles... and stole cigarettes and

smoked them in the back field. We experimented with just about everything... even playing “doctor” with girls from the neighborhood. (I said I would be honest here).

Do these things paint a picture for you? Hey that’s it, I know what you need... here’s a picture for you. I am fourth from the left in figure 3 below.



Figure 3. The Old Gang. Port Colborne Ontario, 1977 by Jeff Roy.

I was part of a middle-class family and had three sisters. I was a cub scout, played baseball and we went to a St. Paul’s United Church each week. Going to church wasn’t a favourite thing of mine mostly because of the itchy clothes I had to wear. There also seemed to be a few strange people there if... you know what I mean. They may have been a bit strange, but they were kind. I always thought I would love church if... I could just wear comfortable clothes! (Try and let go of any negative ideas you may have about the church, although imperfect I found it

to be essential to spiritual formation. For the most part the church gets the words right, but often misses the Spirit.)

Growing up I loved all the special days of the year; Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, my birthday, and summer vacation... but I loved Christmas the best. Things at our house were tight all year long but somehow at Christmas... the floodgates broke, and gifts abounded. Good gifts! If you missed this... then I am sorry for it is something that I think everyone should experience. Society taught me about Santa Claus... and in church we learned about the baby Jesus. It was unclear who was more important but the fact was... Santa gave better gifts. Things got really confusing for me when Santa showed up at church with some pretty good gifts. Confusing or not... I loved it and just embraced Christmas as... the most wonderful time of the year! And it was!

One year when I young, but old enough to start to question the existence of Santa Claus I devised a plan. I told no one. I wrote out a letter to Santa asking for the things I wanted. Then as my family left to go shopping I waited until everyone was in the car. I made some excuse to run back in the house. I raced up to my room and put my letter in between the two window pane sliders. Then I went back to the car and no one suspected anything. When we came home from shopping I raced up to my room and the letter was gone! This opened me up to the possibility that there is more going on than meets the eye. Wait a minute, that phrase I just used... “the most wonderful time of the year” leaves me with a song ringing in my head... it is so ingrained there. Do you know it? Can you hear it?

“It’s the most... wonderful... time of the year.” I want you to stop reading and watch another YouTube video and as you do think back on your own childhood. I hope this isn’t too dated for you... but see if you get the “feel” I’m talking about. It really was a special era. Search for; “Andy Williams – It’s the most wonderful time of the year”, or the URL is included in the references (Williams 1963).

I am not sure what you think about all this and whether thinking to Christmases past is a good thing for you. Generations change and how Christmas is celebrated changes. These days it seems that many don’t connect spirituality to the birth of Jesus or to Christmas at all. For my generation, this video says it all, and just when you think Jesus will get top billing... right at the end of the video... in the very last few seconds... a big pic of Santa Claus shows up. This Jesus / Santa tension was responsible... for shaping many of the ideas I had about life and spirituality. Santa and Christmas were all about stuff... getting stuff... good stuff too! We all learned that this is where the happiness is rooted - and sure to round it all off.... just as in the video... we need a little Jesus in there along with some giving back as well... but not too much - just enough. I am, in part, who I am because I grew up in a confused materialistic generation with a bit of spirituality thrown in.

My family was the average Canadian family of the 1970’s. We were middle class, bought used cars, and were budget minded. My mom was home for most of my childhood and she was quite simply; the greatest. She was always there for us. Meals were ready when dad got home... and we all ate together at the

kitchen table. I believe that eating together is an important part of family life that is slipping away in the busyness and rush of the modern day.

I had two sets of grandparents that we loved very much, there was no abuse in our family, but there were rules and discipline. There always seemed to be enough to go around... we were not spoiled, nor did we do without. Relationally there was a deep unspoken love. What I mean by this was that we were not big on outward expressions (i.e., hugs, I love you, I'm proud of you etc.). Looking back, I see how this had a powerful effect on the way I would relate to God initially. Reaching out to God I was expecting to encounter a deep unspoken and steadfast love from God with minimal outward expression back. For many years this expectation hindered my ability to experience intimacy with God. I wasn't open or prepared for the incredible love He had for me that He wanted to reveal and express personally.

When I was young, I had several strange incidents trying to fall asleep. Everything would seem out of time... like the time-space continuum was out of whack - for lack of a better way to put it. It was so strange... eerie and somewhat fearful - in the sense that it was very weird and not normal. I would call in my mother and she would comfort me, and I would try and explain to her what I was sensing although I could not. This seemed spiritual, but as a child I could not explain or understand it. As I grew up I experienced this on several occasions and came to a place where I am no longer afraid. Everything would become very quiet and my awareness of something beyond the reality of time and space heightened.

It almost seemed as if I was awakening to and becoming aware of the reality of another dimension.

When I was young, I was not very big or very strong... I guess the saying “98-pound weakling” fits. My muscles seemed to exhaust physically or “gas out” quickly... trying to do things that others could do with no trouble. I really didn’t want to share this stuff, but I have come to see that it played a major role in defining me as a person. At age 46 I found out what was wrong with me which gave me deeper insight into my life - more about that later. This limitation defined me (and still does) in many ways.

Maybe you have, or are being defined, by something in your life... and you know how it feels. Let me try and explain. It’s gym class and 30 guys are lined up outside on the tarmac. We are doing the Gold Silver Bronze fitness testing. It is time for the 300-yard run and my stomach turns as I wait for my turn. I think maybe this time I can do it. After all it is just six 50-yard runs. I can do it this time. One after the other the guys go, and some are good, others do okay but everyone was able to run or jog the whole distance. My turn comes, and I push my hardest but after 3 - 50 yards laps the heaviness comes on my legs. They feel on fire and the heaviness grows and the muscles begin to burn and scream; I must stop. Even the embarrassment of stopping to walk cannot push me through. During this fitness test whether it was number of sit ups one could do in a minute or the flexed arm hang, try as I would... my muscles would fatigue early... and if pushed... they would go into an excruciating cramp condition. After 20 or so sit

ups, while others did 50 and jumped up... my stomach muscles would go into extreme cramp and I wouldn't be able to straighten back up. No amount of exercise at home helped; the limit was the limit. For some reason I was weak and no one else was like me. Shortly after the flexed arm hang my muscles would cramp and constrict my arms would close and simply not be able to open back out. Try harder Jeff... try harder I would tell myself and I would... I would try so hard. Little did I or anyone else at that time know that I was pushing up against an immovable wall.

I still remember with clarity walking to a Buffalo Sabres hockey game with my dad on a cold evening. I pleaded with him to pay to park close to the stadium but much to my disappointment to save money he parked far away. We began the long walk to the auditorium and I gassed out right away. After a while I was in agony... legs tightened up and they felt like burning lead. All I wanted was for my dad to somehow pick me up... and carry me. Unfortunately, I was too old for that. We were late for the game and my dad wanted to rush... but I just couldn't... and I knew I was disappointing him. This was the first of many disappointments for me, and those around me, regarding my physical abilities. From hockey, wrestling, running and football I could not excel. I quickly learned the pathways for me... goaltender on the Road Hockey Team... baseball in the summer. I focused on sports that didn't require maximum prolonged physical exertion. I appeared normal and healthy but could not do what most could.

We went to foot specialists and had me checked for diabetes and had orthotic inserts made but nothing helped. It seemed that I was just weak... different... and yet there was no explanation. I wanted a weight set so bad in order to get stronger. I remember saving up and counting the days until I was 13 when I would be allowed to buy myself a weight set to work out and get stronger... but even this did not give me enduring strength. Interesting, as I reflect, I realize I have always kept some form of exercise equipment and currently have quite an extensive gym in my basement. Back then baseball was the only sport in which I could participate ... if I didn't hit homers... I didn't try, because even a fast, all-out-run around the bases was a push for me. I'd be slowing down by third base. I can remember people saying it seemed like you just stopped trying to run fast. I was never able to play my heart out in sports and be limited by my skill, ability and heart... my muscles would always hinder me before this point.

One time while playing little league ball, the team was ahead and so my friend and I got to sub in. He always wanted to be pitcher and I wanted to be 1st base. He struck the first batter out, then a grounder came to me at first which I grabbed and made the out. Then a grounder to the short stop... who nabbed it and threw it over to me and I snagged it for the third out. It was like a special moment where the stars lined up and revealed hope. Ever had one of those? Clint and I were in and they started to play both of us regularly in those positions and we didn't let them down.

I dreaded gym, the wall to wall sprints, and the running of the mile every single day in Grade 9. There I would be, right at the back of the pack running 100 feet or so and then walking again. It was so very embarrassing. Later in High School, down in West Virginia, I would start working out with weights and work at a large Pizza Place that seated 240, washing dishes, carrying 100-pound bags of flour, boxes of massive tomato cans and sweeping and moping every inch of that floor, every single shift. Then I got a membership at the YMCA. I built myself up... so I looked strong... defined ... but still any hard-all-out push of my muscles for any length of time would result in overwhelming fatigue and incredible excruciating cramps. I could lift weights only by controlling how hard I pushed. I learned quickly, never to give 100 percent so that I would not go into muscle cramp. I had strength... just not the ability to push and exert myself in a “all out” situation.

I remember as a young teenager getting in a verbal fight that ended up in a fist fight outside of a group meeting one night. The guy was lanky, and I should have been able to deal with him easily. Yet shortly after it began... I had no strength... my abdominals and arms went into cramp. He won and thankfully was merciful to me. My friends were disappointed and confused by my apparent lack of strength... they expected me to have won based on appearances.

These were a few among many humbling experiences that are etched in my memory. Maybe you have a few painful experiences in the bag of memories that you carry around with you. As I said, I include this stuff now only because of

something I found out not too long ago... some 35 years after that childhood fight. For the longest time I thought... I must be lazy... or not be able to push myself and take the pain like others. Looking back now through the eyes of a spiritual person I ask myself... did I pray back then? Did I seek help from God? Did I complain to Him? I remember praying simple prayers. Not very complex. "Help me be stronger" and "Help me to run and walk." I did not know God... I only knew of Him.

Can you relate? Did you ever pray prayers like this when you were young? For over 40 years I made the best of it and learned the best ways to protect myself from embarrassment over this weakness. I would avoid hikes, let others go ahead or try and start out before everyone. I could never explain that anything in particular was wrong... I had no excuse or diagnosis for my limitation until recently.

The Bully

I want to share with you another defining moment in my life. In first year of High School in Canada (this is before bulking up at the Pizza Place) I ended up being the one a bully (4 years older than me) decided to pick on. You find out who your real friends are during times like this. Some run away... while others... stand right there by your side. I re-read this story and feel somewhat silly sharing it. It is what it is and please remember this is from the mindset of a 14-year-old boy.

Sinesa was the bully's name, he was 18 and had been in a lot of trouble and been held back a few years. For some reason he chose me to pick on. Going to school every day became hell for me. The old story you hear of where a bully steals lunches or lunch money became the reality for me. Every now and then there would be a punch to the face – he chipped a tooth once. It looked like a confrontation was brewing between him and the toughest guy from my middle school. I was happy about this... but then nothing happened... even the toughest we knew backed down. The guy who faced down principals was afraid of this guy. Everybody was telling me... to tell my older sister's boyfriend... who was nicknamed "Frig." I couldn't because I was afraid that this would escalate. I heard that this guy... the "bully"... was bad to the bone and rumor had it... that he had a gun... hung out at the strip clubs and always carried a knife. Seriously, this is a true story, and these were the rumors. My sister found out what was happening and said she was going to tell Frig but I told her absolutely not... and made her promise not to tell. I worried about the guilt I would feel if the bully got a bunch of people to go after Paul. I had seen that in the movies. So, I lived in fear everyday... it was one of the worst times in my life. I didn't know God in a personal way, but I prayed a lot for this "bullying" to end.

Then one day the bully happened to walk into the cafeteria. He saw me and started to come over to see me. I just happened to be sitting next to Sue my sister... who just happened... to be sitting... next to Frig. The bully had a group of 5 with him (he always travelled with an entourage). He started to slap my face and

invite me out into the smoke hole... for a smoke; or... so he said. Now I hadn't become a regular smoker at that point and to be honest – I didn't really feel like a smoke at the time. I just felt like staying right where I was.... sitting there next to Frig... for the first time... in a very long time... I felt safe. I was thanking God at this moment... for this was beyond my control... and all was well. It was very strange almost surreal, I was being slapped in the face, but I felt totally safe... was this really happening? Sinesa slapped me a second time, I glanced over at Paul... who was staring straight ahead... did he not see this happening? Then I noticed it... the right side of Frig's temple started to twitch (later my sister would tell me - this was not a good sign... "the temple twitch" - which resulted from a jaw being clenched and unclenched in anger that was growing – it was a sign that he was not happy).

Paul continued to control himself... for a little longer... looking straight ahead... temple twitching... (he was getting angrier)... and every time this bully slapped me... his jaw clenched more... and the temple twitched more. Frig, as everyone called him was in the "cool" group. Every boy needs someone older to look up to... and I thought that Frig liked me... and not just because... I was the brother of his girlfriend. He worked out, was short but very fit... biceps ripped... he was tough and had cool cars and he would let me sit in them and listen to music when he visited my sister. I guess he was kind of like... "The Fonz" in the sitcom *Happy Days*... and I guess I was like Richie Cunningham. This was just like a scene from that show. It was like the stars had lined up.

During this situation... where a bully (backed by his gang) was slapping me... I could “feel” that all was well. For you see..... Frig’s jaw was clenched... and his temple was twitching... and my sister was not happy either... she just sat there silently, she knew what was up with Paul. She waited... and then slowly after another slap Frig stands up... and I have never seen anything like it (except in the movies of course). He said words to this bully... but words cannot describe the force or the power with which they came... and were released. All my problems... with this bully vanished that day.

As the encounter between Frig and the bully continued all but one of Sinesa’s entourage scattered. The one who stayed was egging Sinesa on... but Sinesa wanted no part of this fight. It is very interesting how powerful intimidation can be. Eventually, my future brother in law laid down a challenge. It did not escalate. It was over. I did cry out to God to save me from this bully. I wonder... did God answer my prayer through Paul...? Does God do stuff like that? If He does, then what about the bigger problems people face or even others who face bully’s but have no rescuer? Did they not pray? Did they pray wrong? For the God that I was coming to know... comes... He always comes - when one of his own cries out. Have you ever cried out to Him?

When a child of the Most High God cries out..... he comes... maybe not when we expect or how we expect but He comes. He may not alleviate the problem, but He comes. He is present. I believe that during pain and suffering a

doorway opens through which one can become awakened and aware of the presence of One greater.

Read this from Psalm 18 slowly - out loud again - just like we did before... with Psalm 139.

I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.
The cords of death entangled me...;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me...
The cords of the grave coiled around me...; the snares of death confronted me...
In my distress... I called to the LORD...; I cried... to my God... for help.
From his temple... he heard my voice; my cry came before him..., into his ears... The earth trembled... and quaked..., and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled... because he was... angry...
Smoke rose from his nostrils...; consuming fire came from his mouth..., burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down...; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.
He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. (Psalm 18)

This is another opportunity for you to take up your journal and to think and listen and write and interact with those words above. Read them again and think of your life... think of the bullies you have faced... or think of whatever comes. Talk to God... be brutally honest and write whatever comes back and for now, do not question what comes... just write, this is private... just for you. Talk

to the Lord, write a letter to Him about times you have cried out... maybe you feel abandoned or separated from him. Talk with Him about that as you write and listen for what He says back... in the depths of your heart and write that too!

The words you read were from a song written by King David somewhere around 3000 years ago (Psalm 18 in our Bibles). Powerful...! Powerful through each generation. Did you feel their power? Did they touch something deep within you... did something deep within stir? Okay... so, here's the thing... as I am typing and sharing this story with you, I can't help but once again think of Tony... my nephew... my sister's son..... yes, the one who took his life. He was Frig's boy (yes - she married him - but they separated after 11 years and that was about when Tony was 10).

Strange, how I am working on writing out my story just after the suicide happened. Yes, it was last Friday night... and we are in fact real time as I write this part of the story. Now as you can imagine this was heavy on my mind and heart, so I took a break from writing to call my parents... to see how things were and how everyone was. My sister is there, and she happens to answer the phone. I speak with her... so very hard. She tells me that some people are concerned because she has not broken enough yet. She tells me she feels like a cracked jar... and all her sorrow seeps out ever so slowly... but that at any moment... she feels the jar will break and it seems to me that she is a little afraid of that. I share as I sense I should... and tell her she should grieve as she grieves... That, if the jar breaks... I am always available... just call.

I decided not to tell her of the powerful memory that I just wrote about Paul. It has been hard for her since their separation. I asked her about Nathan (Tony's younger brother) and she tells me he has gone out with Paul and Barry and Tiff. I finish the phone call and well... I can't help it... please... can I share with you just a bit more of this story?

It was 33 years ago that Frig stood up and confronted the bully and his 5-man entourage. The bully kept insisting that he wanted nothing to do with Frig; that he had no (nor did he want a) problem, with Frig. His problem was with me. Frig made it quite clear that if he had a problem with me... then he had a problem with him... a big problem.

Now as I mentioned four of this bully's gang had departed (strange how that happens). There were also several very concerned onlookers standing close by behind Frig (why was Frig standing up?... and why did he seem so upset and just barely in control?). The bully continued to stress that it was me that he had the problem with, and that he wanted no problem with Frig. Frig informed the bully several more times... that if he had a problem with me... well... he had a problem with him and when this wasn't getting through, an offer was made by Frig. I still remember it.

"I tell you what.... I'm tired of this talk... you go get whoever else you want... get your friends who ran away... get any others you can... the whole &*&^&(&^ school if you like... I will get two... just two of my friends... and we will meet in the smoke hole at afternoon break... and we will go... and we will

settle this... once and for all.” I know it sounds like a scene from a movie... but it all happened just like this. Later I found out from my sister that Frig was referring to two very large and very tough friends (Dave and Tiff). These guys were very large Testosterone filled and ripped and tough. Now both guys were big, but one of these guys, Tiff, was a giant of a man... actually... massive is the right word.

Well, the bully never showed and from that point on never even looked at me in the hallways... he would always look away. He never came around and whispered “just you wait...” It was finished. Over.

Okay so... real time again... 33 years later. I get off the phone with my sister and I share this story with my wife Janice. I told her that I found it strange that I just finish writing this story about these guys only to call my parents, have my sister answer and find out that Paul had gone out that night with one of the guys (Tiff) that he intended to face down that bully with... some 33 years ago. Janice asks me if that guy was at the funeral. I responded... “ I don’t know, but if he was... you would know it... he is a giant of a man ...there would be no mistaking him.” Janice said.... “a man like a big bouncer or one of those ultimate fighter guys... but older...” And I said “YES... you would know if it was “Tiff”... She said... “I saw a guy like that come in... and right away Paul left with him... and went to another room. She said I remember it clearly because as they walked away, I thought that was quite a sight... for he dwarfed Paul... he was huge...” and I said... that would be him. Tiff and Frig.

Now the other guy... Dave... who Paul would have called... to face that bully down... 33 years ago... even though he and Paul had a falling out... and the friendship ended many years ago... well... he was there at that memorial service as well.

Although no longer close friends, both these men came... to see Paul... and Sue on this sad day 33 years after the story of the bully; for their boy was gone and the great sadness had come. It is in, and during, these times... that we can see and feel the heart of God... compassion that comes... and supports... compassion that rises and goes beyond offense. The compassion we see in the life of God's own Son Jesus who He sent to save us. It seems that at times a reflection of His nature within us rises up and shines bright... and when it does..... it is beautiful! Although these are in fact pale reflections... of how He feels about us.

Remember the words from Psalm 18...

From his temple... He heard my voice; my cry came before him..., into his ears... The earth trembled... and quaked..., and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled... because he was... angry... Smoke rose from his nostrils...; consuming fire came from his mouth..., burning coals blazed out of it.

When one messes with a child of His, the response of God is similar... to that of Frig's. Do you see Him? His jaw is clenched and His temple is twitching. This is our heavenly Father responding to the cry of a child of His who is in need. So back to my question.... Does God get involved with these small things? Is it worth asking Him to? I say yes... every time I say yes... it is worth it. For He will come... not always as we expect... or in the way we expect... or when we expect but He will come... at just the right time. He will come and rescue or just be with

us in the hardship. In this story about Frig and the Bully I saw my first glimpse of the heart of God that comes into the darkness and rescues the oppressed.

At Tony's funeral I spoke of just this... how when one cries out to God for help, He comes... and there is no power that can stop Him... He comes into the darkness... and the darkness best beware. The verses you read earlier... are words written about God.

Do you know this "stop-at-nothing" love...? Have you seen glimpses of it?

Deep down is there a part of you that knows this love... you feel it rise up in movies or real life when great sacrifice is made for another. At the funeral I said... "When a child cries out for rescue... the good parent comes... no matter what the cost... spare no expense... move a mountain... stone by stone if necessary... or die trying... for their child." And as I said that... unplanned... and in the moment I looked over at Paul and said... Is that right Paul?... and without a moment of hesitation Frig replied... "You got that right... Jeff." And once again words were said... that all could hear... words said with such force and power and conviction... in the moment... without hesitation. A father expressing his sacrificial love for his son... "You got that right... Jeff." Paul is a forceful man and he lives his life doing things to honor Tony. But what God made clear to me was that neither I nor Frig could fix things or rescue Tony. Only He could. A parent or friend's love is limited in strength or power. Growing up, I was known as the guy who fixed things. The hardest thing about fixing something is not giving up. When Tony was little and something would break, and he would come

running to me “fix it Uncle Jeff... fix it.” God said clearly to me that this was something I couldn’t have fixed. It was in His hands. It was clear to me that if Tony in a moment of desperation had cried out to God... then just as the thief on the cross... just as in Psalm 18 God would come and rescue him, maybe not in the way we think of rescue. The thief died on that cross, but he went to be with God in paradise and there rests my hope for Tony. Figure 4 is of Tony in the Gethsemane garden at 3crosses before it came to be known as Gethsemane.



Figure 4. Tony at Gethsemane at 3crosses, 5595 Aspdin Road, Huntsville Ontario. by Jeff Roy.

Many times, during this hard thing and even now as I write or edit this and reflect on Tony my heart breaks and in the midst of my sadness, I sense the Lord with me and in some way sharing my sadness. It is in these moments that I am

awakened to the Presence and I feel Him and encounter His powerful love. Okay back to the story let's pick up just after the bully incident in 1979.

Country Roads

I was 14 years old when my family moved to West Virginia. I attended church less and less (usually just on special holidays and for my mom). What I did begin to do was try everything that the world had to offer to find satisfaction. You see, I wanted to know what brings lasting peace and happiness. In addition, I wanted desperately to fit in at this new school. I wanted to be cool and I wanted to understand and experience life.

Remember... It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year - Christmas? A few sections back? As I got older, the gifts continued to be pretty good but added to this Christmas scene was the festive mood of the holidays and partying. Santa Claus was replaced with some Christmas cheer which made the season all the merrier! I would soon find out there were many things in life that seem to make things merrier. When I embarked on this quest to discover meaning and satisfaction in life there was no shortage of people willing to help me explore. My sister's boyfriend Paul drove down to West Virginia and visited us and one night I crawled out my second-floor window and we went out to a local bar one night... I was maybe 15... the quest had begun. I didn't like being small or bullied and I admired Paul who was tough, fit had muscles, so I started working out. I was still struggling with trying to overcome the limitations of my muscles. I worked out,

got bigger but my endurance never changed. This will all make sense later in my life we'll get there.

This was when I started to working at the Pizza Place I mentioned earlier. I learned much about life and women from my Italian friends at the Pizza Place. I had a good friend named Adam who was a year older and worked at the Pizza Place. Adam was a big boy and testosterone filled, if you know what I mean. We used to say Adam was as strong as a horse. He was the kind of guy who was ripped without pushing the weights. One night during his high school graduation he came into the Pizza Place tired from being up all night. I was working that night when Mike an all-state wrestler came into the Pizza Place ripping mad, all hopped up on something... accusing Adam of stealing his wallet. This confrontation escalated and soon we were heading out the back door. Mike and Adam would settle this the old-fashioned way. As they were heading out the back-door Mike jumped Adam from behind. They end up on the floor half in - half out of the door in a clinch and I stepped in to try and separate them. As I leaned down to try and separate them, two of Mike's friends jumped on me from behind and I knew I was in trouble. I waited for the blows to come but they didn't.

In a moment both the weight and hands of these guys that had jumped on me were gone. One moment they were there, the next they weren't. John one of the owners from the Pizza Place had come back and he grabbed each of these guys with a hand and threw them off me.

Looking back, this was a glimpse of what the Lord does sometimes when one of his own is being attacked or oppressed. Like the bully, it was like God reached down and intervened through others to rescue me. Through these interventions of grace I awakened to understand God's presence and love. At the time I felt as though God was present and active and speaking to me, in and through the actions of others. He reaches down and with very little effort and pulls the attackers off. He came to my rescue. Now I know that this does not always happen, but for me during these experiences it was a metaphor and I was awakened to the presence of someone larger than me who was looking out for me because He loved me. At this point I did not know God personally, but I came to believe that He watches over His own. What's that? I hear you asking... "What about Adam... what happened... did they fight'?"

After John pulled the guys off me, we called for a clean break and separated them to get them outside and during this, as they are getting back up Mike let a solid shot rip to Adam's head. Adam stumbled back from the blow, but they were now outside. Mike kept asking to see in Adam's pockets and as Adam looked down and turned his pockets out, Mike ran in from about 8 feet and hit Adam with another full arm shot in the head that made Adam spin around and falter. Then they clinched again but Adam broke free and ran into the Pizza Place kitchen grabbed a broom and came out threatening Mike. That was it. The cops arrived, it was over. Adam's face was already swelling up from the blows.

In the end Adam felt let down by all of us, his friends. We all expected Adam to deal with this guy despite the cheap shots. We didn't step in. We let him down. Adam didn't get a glimpse of the Lord coming to save.

His brother Alan (Skippy - don't let the name fool you. Skippy was simply a natural born fighter), wanted to go after Mike but Adam wouldn't allow it. Years later Alan (Adam's brother) would start his own Pizza Place (very successful), see his marriage fail, get connected with the wrong people and end up taking his own life. Adam couldn't seem to catch a break. Adam started a Pizza Place that wasn't so successful, had marriages fail, and oh, did I forget to mention that when Adam and Alan were young, their father (a lovely man) was hit and killed by a drunk driver while walking home from work. Where was the Lord for these guys?

Growing up I experienced lots of things that didn't seem to make sense at the time. God doesn't always seem to alleviate or eliminate the problem. As I continue my story there will be times when God does not seem to come and rescue me or others I love. Regardless, during suffering (that is not alleviated) I have been awakened to His presence with me in the midst of hard times that He does not take away.

During my high school days, I explored life in many ways and did things that I should not have. There were broken hearts (including mine) and broken relationships, bad habits were formed that stayed with me for many years. Smoking, drinking, womanizing and drugs. I was controlled by my emotions and

inner voices. I wanted to be cool and I wanted to get as much out of life as I could. At the age of 15 I purchased a 1970 Dodge Challenger RT 440 Magnum 6pak that was in pieces.

I ended up having to rebuild and change the engine and the transmission and rewire the engine compartment (see pic of car in figure 5). I got quite good at this as I ended up swapping these out many times. I guess it made me feel like I could do something... like I was good at something. It seemed I could turn wrenches without my muscles gassing out. Every young man desperately needs to feel that he is good at something and have someone else affirm it (especially his dad). Fixing things became a passion for me.



Figure 5. Jeff Roy's 1970 Dodge Challenger, Phase II. Autobody Niagara Falls, Ontario, by Jeff Roy.

Growing up we were disciplined but it was not abusive. My mom would use a wooden spoon and pretty much the threat... "I'm gonna get the wooden spoon" was enough to result in immediate behavior change. One day when I came

home I had an incident with my mom. I was getting quite strong and felt like I was a young man. I was disrespectful in some way to my mother and she raised her hand... more as a threat - she had never hit me (outside of the wooden spoon). Even so I reached out and grabbed her hand and said "No mom you're not going to raise your hand to me or hit me... I won't let you." This made her very upset and she said... "Wait till your father gets home... you'll be sorry." I responded that this was fine with me. I was becoming a man and dad would understand, he and I were "buds" – he would listen to reason and understand.

That day I learned my place in the pecking order. I learned that it was he and her long before I came on the scene. He came home, and I came down the stairs to let him know what had happened – he would understand. There was no explaining. I was met by him and he grabbed me by the arm and literally threw me up the stairs 3 – 4 steps at a time as if I was a big rag doll. He was not sending me to my room but delivering me there personally. The whole-time saying things like... "If your mother wants to hit you.. then you will stand there and let her... you will never raise a hand or stop her ever again." He did not hit me, and I felt his love for my mom and gained a new respect for her and for him. I was not angry... just humbled and put in my place. I don't understand it but through experiences like this in some way I was awakened to the presence and nature of God's love, even if they were only pale reflections.

My first romantic relationship with a girl was a wonderful and yet painful experience. As soon as the relationship became physically intimate strange events

pulled her away from me. At the time I had no idea that this was what was happening. She only told me that she had gone through a change and had to separate herself from her old life which included me. I would later discover that she became a born again Christian and went to live with a pastor and his family

At the time I did not understand what she was going through. I was deeply hurt and confused. I believe I had hoped for and prayed for a relationship like this, with a girl like this. Against all odds it happened and then it seemed as if God pulled her away. This sent me spiraling from girl to girl... locking my heart away. Two years later she reappeared at the Pizza Place; someone saw her and told me but by the time I came out front she was gone. I reconnected with her and we started to see each other, and she shared with me the spiritual change that had happened for her. At this time I wasn't interested in Jesus but we began seeing each other again.

Within a few months my dad informed me that we were moving back to Canada. Forces beyond us would once again separate us. I tried to keep this relationship going over the miles and went back to see her in West Virginia but in the end, I had to break things off. I had embarked on 4 years of university and she wanted to get married. I was not ready and wasn't willing to sacrifice. I was too caught up in myself. This breakup left feelings of guilt in my heart for years. For the next seven years I continued to just spiral from girl to girl not seeking any real commitment, just looking for fun and trying to better understand life.

Underwater

A year before my family returned to Canada, I came back to visit my friends. We went swimming at the Bell Docks in the Niagara River where it is channeled into the Welland River. Although I lived next to the Niagara River for 14 years, we never swam in it. It was simply too dangerous, the current too fast with dangerous undertows. I wanted acceptance from my friends so although I was not a great swimmer and had muscle endurance issues, I went along.

A giant concrete wall and a gate on the far side controls how much water flows into the Welland River through a narrow opening. This concrete wall was where the Niagara Bell would dock and it was a good 10 feet out of the water and had those huge spool shaped pylons available for the large hemp ropes of the big boat to tie up to. The dock was not used by the Niagara Bell anymore and people would jump off it into the fast-moving water and be ripped down to another point in the wall where you could climb out.

I finally got up my nerve and jumped in... the fast-moving water immediately grabbed me and sent me spinning downstream. I made my way toward the opening but missed the rope and grabbed a different rope and tried to pull myself back. My friends yelled and said that was an electrical cord and that I should let go and float down around the corner of the concrete wall and swim into shore. It was getting hard to hold on and I realized I could not pull myself back against the powerful current, so I let go. The current ripped me down and when I got to where the concrete wall turned and headed toward shore, I started to swim with all my might. Immediately I realized that I was being pushed back out by the

natural force of water swirling around the right-hand turn of the wall. Within moments, as I struggled with all my might I was pulled away from the dock and was at least 30 feet away heading down river.

By this time, I had exhausted myself and so in one last moment of panic I used all my available strength to head toward shore... but to no avail. The muscles in my arms and legs and stomach were finished. They went into full cramp and stopped working. A friend stood on shore almost 30 yards away waving frantically telling me to swim... but I couldn't. I needed him to come but he didn't understand.

Out of energy an undertow grabbed me and started pulling me down. I went under far enough to see no sky and just the green oxygen filled river water above. Just as people say in those few moments, I saw my life pass by and realized that this was the end. I was surprised to think that this was how it would end. It seemed wrong.

Then, just at the last moment, I felt strong arms lifting me up and pulling me to the surface and then back into the shore. Mark had come after all. He pulled me into the shallows and left me there... I couldn't even stand up. He stormed off muttering and swearing. Later he would explain he had no idea I was in that kind of trouble. That his decision to come was made off-the-cuff thinking there was no need. Halfway there... he realized that he needed to come because I had gone under and he couldn't see me anymore. When he reached me, I was far under the

water and he realized that if he had waited another second... I would have drowned.

I sat there in a foot or so of water for some time. Every muscle in full cramp. Eventually I was able to get up, but these muscle cramping episodes left me in muscle pain for days and urinating strange red powdery like stuff. This was not blood but broken-down muscle tissue.

Years later I would find out that I had McArdle's. This is a genetic disorder where muscles cannot access stored glycogen for energy and in less than 10 seconds they begin to eat themselves for fuel (hence the extreme cramping). The kidneys are not designed to deal with broken down muscle tissue and so rhabdomyolysis begins which leads to kidney failure.

We went back to my friend's house and when his mother saw me she stopped and looked straight at me and said ...“What the hell happened to you?.” Before this I had never ever heard her swear. She said I was white like a ghost and when I went and looked in the mirror sure enough, I was white and pale and very eerie looking.

I had my dad take a few pictures of this spot they are included in figure 6 below. I found it interesting that they have now fenced it off and put up no trespassing signs. The water looks calm and still, but it is deceiving and fools many for the current is actually very fast and powerful with regular undertows.



Figure 6. Niagara Bell Docks, Chippewa, Ontario. Photo by Doug Roy. September 23, 2012. Used by Permission

Reflecting on this event I realize I was awakened to the one who always comes. I was desperate, and I needed Mark to come. I had called out to him but did not see him even start to come... but then at the last moment he was there. He rescued me in my time of need. This time it wasn't about being bullied or beaten up... this time it was life or death. I was glad He came. This was one more rescue incident where I felt awakened to God's presence. Was someone watching over me? It sure seemed so. All these incidents were awakening me to and leading me toward an personal encounter with God's presence.

The Brock Years

I graduated from High School in West Virginia and although I wanted to stay and work toward owning a Pizza Place, my dad had other plans and convinced me to move back to Niagara Falls.

As we settled back into Niagara my only option was to apply to Brock University, but it was too late to apply as classes were starting the next week. In

addition, I was 17 and had graduated high school in the States after grade 12. Ontario still required grade 13 for anyone wanting to attend university.

My dad found out and he wanted to head over to the university to see what could be done. I didn't think that anything could be done and in addition I only knew my dad as a person who did not push too hard. We arrived and tried to get a meeting with the registrar but to no avail... we were shut down. I was resolved to leave but to my surprise my dad pressed and pushed and the next thing I knew we were sitting across from the head registrar. We left that day with me registered in the Honours, BAdmin Program majoring in Quantitative Analysis. The whole time I had no hope I would get in but somehow my dad got me in and I was impressed. He fought for me and this was just one of many parenting lessons that I learned from him.

Through university I continued my quest to enjoy life and find real meaning that would bring lasting peace and happiness. I coasted through my 1st and 2nd year despite the repeated warnings that only 1 in 8 make it through the program. Then during my third year that I came face to face with the fact that I needed to bring my average up to "B" level or I would not graduate. The program I was in was an honours program and without an honours average no degree would be awarded. This turned out to be a powerful motivator. I enjoyed working hard for the next two years and ran through fourth year with straight A's to graduate with Honours.

One incident deserves mentioning. At the end of my third year while riding my motorcycle, a sixteen-year-old girl ran a stop sign and I had to lay the bike down. I slid on my side toward her front end, the impact was hard... somehow the bike went under her front end while my forward momentum threw me over the roof of her car to land on the curb behind her car. I don't remember the impact or even flying through the air. I found myself on the ground with my head on the curb surrounded by several ladies. One lady went to touch me and then another lady snapped "No, don't touch him! I'm a nurse." To which the first lady responded by saying "I am a nurse too." Apparently, it was shift change at the hospital and I was surrounded by nurses. That was comforting and timely. Thinking back, being in the middle of the suburbs, where did these nurses appear from and if they lived on that street why didn't the two tending to me know each other? Angels or not, it was nice to have nurses' right there.

In the end I had purple brown and black bruises all over me, a messed-up fluid filled knee and a very sore back, some road rash on my legs but no broken bones. Recovery was painful and took some time and the accident put me off driving motorcycles for several years. I still cannot explain how I came out of that accident alive with no broken bones. The motorcycle was an unrepairable twisted mess, but I was spared, again.

Uncle David

When I was around 13 I went skiing with my family and my Uncle David's family. He was a successful businessman and a serious skier who owned

a Condo in Vale, Colorado. He was a big proponent of going the extra mile and doing something right, and valued things that were well-made or innovative. While riding the ski lift with him I found my hands to be a bit cold and said so. He let me try his new gloves telling me about how they were made of a new technology called Gortex. I asked him how much they were. They were expensive back then but not outrageous and I mentioned that I was going to watch for a pair like his. Next year he showed up at our house and took me aside and said; “this is just between you and me” and handed me a brand-new pair of Gortex ski gloves the exact same as his. I offered to pay but he said it was his gift to me and to keep it between us. Forty years later... I still have these gloves. I have had them repaired 3 times and the leather repair guy keeps saying just buy a new pair – but he doesn’t understand. Those gloves meant a lot to me - not the gloves themselves but what they stated. That someone I respected knew I existed and cared enough about me... to go out of their way to get those gloves and bring them to the Falls. An expression of love.

In 1986 I graduated from Brock University with a Hon. B. Admin with a major in Quantitative Analysis. At my graduation ceremony this same Uncle showed up. I was surprised, he heard I was graduating and drove from Toronto to be there. He was a self-made man and in a way I looked up to him. Having no formal education, he built up his own business from the ground up and was very successful. There didn’t seem to be anything that he couldn’t do and do well. I really didn’t think I was on his radar; I wanted his approval but didn’t sense it. He

ran an insurance adjusting business and he would often get deals on damaged items. A couple of years before this I was visiting him, and I noticed he had a really nice floor jack that he picked up from an insurance claim. I mentioned that if he ever came across a good deal on another one to let me know because I had always wanted one. I said it in passing and a fair bit of time had gone by... but at my graduation... he said... "I know you'll have plans to go out with your friends, but can you help me with something first." I can still picture the scene in my head. Walking out to his car parked in front of Brock University in the turnaround. He took me to the trunk of his car and opened it saying; "This is just a little heavy for me to unload." There was a brand-new hydraulic floor jack for me in the trunk. It wasn't so much the expensive jack or the fact that he drove up for my graduation from Toronto. It was that he heard me years before... that he remembered... and that he took some of his valuable time and did something about it. I cannot tell this story without tears welling up. Tears well up every time I recount this story and I think it is so powerful because in it I realize that he cared about me a lot more than I thought. My Uncle David never told me that he was proud of me, or what he thought of me, or that I had his approval, but he did the next best thing - he showed me. The fact that someone I looked up to, someone who was important and busy, took time for me - meant so much. Who was I that he was mindful of me? I often find myself thinking about God like this for He is mindful of me and has shown me this often.

For the longest time my dad was the same way. Love and approval were there, but unspoken. It was the way they were fathered and so it was the way they fathered. I think that this had a profound effect on my relationship with my heavenly father. For years He was always there watching over me and this was good - but when I actually heard hear Him speak of His love for me, everything changed. Since coming to know the Lord my relationship with my father and my mother has changed to one that includes more verbal expressions of love. This is very good for I love them very much.

After graduating in 1986, my Uncle David set me up with a job working for a friend of his in Toronto. It was basically a paying job that got me into the city, so I could find something better. I was still womanizing, still partying, still seeking everything life had to offer. I was in the big city (Toronto) and going to make my fortune. The job involved working in a photography studio. Soon I was the head shipper for two studio locations.

Years before I had stopped hanging out with my Uncle David's oldest son; Dave. Trouble just seemed to follow him around. My Uncle David wanted us to reconnect and so I did. We ended up devising a computer program to track inventory at the studio. There was a takeover at the company and the shipper receiver job was going nowhere so I left to start my own business.

I decided to start a Snow Removal Business and over the next 3 years expanded and built that business up while branching out into Contracting, Computer Programming, Tree planting, and a part share in a Tropical Fish Store

(more of a hobby). The expansion took place in the third year of the business when I took in longtime friend Gary as my business partner. To formalize the deal I drove my Nissan 300ZX out to Halifax where Gary was working. For the fun of it (and to get a ring for his girlfriend) he made the trip back with me. We decided to see if we could travel the 1800 km in 18 hours straight including all stops for gas and food, and we did. During this time, I continued to try everything the world had to offer to bring me lasting satisfaction. Trips up to Muskoka with cousin Dave to skidoo and party and enjoy life. Boating and fishing in the summer. Buying jeeps and off-roading, buying a Nissan 300ZX, a 63 Ford Galaxie, installing a 440 6pak motor in my Challenger. Lots of partying and loads of fun. We had a great time. Cousin Dave may have brought trouble along, but he was sure fun to be around – he knew how to have a good time.

To finish sharing about Uncle David I need to jump ahead to 1995. This was when my Uncle David took his life. I need to slow down again. Like before, I need to type that out again. My... Uncle David... took his life. Whew... those are hard sentences to type. We miss him greatly. Yes, I still have the jack and gloves. Dave's younger brother Brad was the one who discovered my Uncles' body. After a day of yard work, they couldn't find him. Brad came upon the shed and found a sign on the shed that said not to come in and to call police. Brad went right through the shed door and found his father with his head blown off. Brad followed suit taking his life within the year. It was never clear whether he took his life on purpose or just took too many pills trying to chase the nightmares of

finding his father that way. These were very sad times. My Uncle left a note speaking of his love for Jesus but for whatever reason the Lord didn't rescue him from the darkness he faced.

Ouija Board

I want to share a story that I have some insight into but haven't fully understood since it is supernatural in nature. Before becoming a follower of Jesus there was a movie called Witchboard and it was about the Ouija Board. As a child we had these "games" so I was familiar with them. I did not know the need to be wary of using them and that demons lurked close by.

I was up at a cottage in Lake Muskoka. It was winter, and the night was dark and cold. We had been skidooing and came back to the warm cottage. I can remember sliding open the door to the upper deck and listening to the ominous sound of ice cracking as the cold swept in and wrapped around me. Sliding the door shut was one of those enjoyable precious moments that we so often overlook. The cold draft is shut off and the warmth of the wood fire begins to wrap around you and you are glad to be inside. My cousin and I had returned from snowmobiling to have a good meal and we had watched this movie called Witchboard. As usual we had been partying and were looking for fun things to do. We decided to make our own Ouija Board. We flipped over the five-foot-wide hexagon shaped white marble coffee table top that sat in front of the sectional. We drew out letters of the alphabet and a place marked "Yes" and one "No." Then we got a small glass placed it upside down and began to try and contact the "spirits."

I was skeptical but to my surprise the glass would move in various directions. Very specifically it would slide toward “Yes” or “No ,” or a letter and then stop and cease to move. I tried to understand the physics behind it, but we were only barely touching the glass... with the tip of a finger putting no weight on it and yet it moved with purpose (if it was just physics and pressure then why did it stop). The glass moved eerily this way and that stopping on letters and the yes or no spots. We got the perception that we may have been connecting with our Great Uncle’s son who had died in the war. This was interesting and yet I admit a bit scary. After a while the glass started to move in perfect circles not in different directions as it had. This made no sense and bothered us a bit. The movie intimated that when this happened the spirits were “upset.” We kind of accused each other of doing something but we both knew we were barely touching the glass and it was plain that one could not control the movement of the glass. Then all of a sudden all movement ceased and we waited. The glass just sat there and did not move. We waited... still no movement. We looked at each other and waited some more. For a long time nothing. This was strange, especially since our arms would get tired and for sure the pressure applied in the light touch by each of us was changing as we would shift slightly. Then, suddenly there was this “ping” and the glass shot off the table and across the room! This room was the full length of the cottage so it had to be at least 36 feet long. The glass shot all the way to the other end of the room! We sat there stunned, looking at each other. With nothing else to say we each said... “You did that.” But we both knew the answer – neither

could have. We sat there a little longer simply stunned. As if to break the eeriness of the moment and bring some sanity back into the moment I got up and walked across the room and picked up the glass. I brought the glass back to the table. I set it down sat down and then cocked my forefinger back against my thumb and released with all my might. My finger cried out in pain from snapping it against the glass and the glass moved 6 to 8 inches. It was becoming even more clear that neither of us could have caused this. Intrigued and undeterred I stood up, placed the glass back where it was bent over and with an open-faced hand gave the glass a full arm side swing hit. I hit the glass hard with a lot of momentum - the glass moved about 4 feet across the table and fell onto the floor. With blank white faces we stared at each other. To get to where it had landed... it had at least another 30 feet to go. Then there was also that loud ping we heard when it happened. We erased the pencil marks as best we could, flipped the table back over and tried to put the incident out of our heads. My cousin was a crazy sort of guy with no fear... always willing to try anything. He never spoke of this incident again and if I tried to bring it up he would not talk about it. It freaked us both out. To this day I cannot explain it physically. At the time it felt like something or someone was saying "do not mess with this." After becoming a Christian and learning about the reality of the spiritual realm and the forces at work - I spent time praying through and severing any connections that were made. Another warning that the movie brought to light was that no one should ever play the Ouija board alone. That this leaves one open to oppression. I believe that at the time I was playing

wholeheartedly but my cousin was not participating in the same way. I feel that I was coming close to making a connection and that the Lord intervened whether through an angel or force and shut down this so called game. I am grateful for this and have never tried to play this game again. I tell the story exactly as it happened. I know that there are many crazy stories out there of paranormal events. All I know is that forces beyond the physical realm were at work that night. What or who protected me? I believe this was an awakening moment for me and I became aware that more was going on that meets the eye. After the Lord drew me into personal faith I would learn that all through this time of “seeking satisfaction and looking to all the world offers” my mother and some other ladies were praying for her wayward son in Toronto. Prayers that I believe God responded to from his mountain (Psalm 18). Yes, when a child or a mother or a father or a friend... cries out... God hears as well. Maybe those very prayers protected me from a spiritual encounter that night that would not have been good. My parents were always there for me - supportive and caring. I am forever grateful for my dad’s steadiness and wisdom and my mom’s love and kindness. I could not have chosen better parents.

Life in the Fast Lane

It was during this time that I also experimented with cocaine. For many years I had resisted the temptation but finally caved in. I met a very interesting friend named Dan who owned a tropical fish store and had recently inherited a

fair bit of money. Dan taught me how to party and enjoy life. We are still friends to this day, although he doesn't share my love for God.

I already had a mind that was constantly thinking and analyzing. Cocaine took that to a whole new level. For a short time after one does a line of cocaine everything becomes so sharp... there was a crisp almost spiritual clarity to things. There is nothing in the way, to thinking and feeling and experiencing... synapses fire at lightening speeds... all senses are heightened. Then the drug wears off and another line is needed... a bigger one... to have the same effect. I need to say that this is not a good drug and I recommend that everyone should steer clear and never even try it. Looking back, it is easy to see that it brought nothing but suffering and darkness and bondage into my life.

During this time, I was blinded to God's Presence, life seemed good... things were easy. Business was good, and I acquired many things and was having a lot of fun but I deep down I knew that I still had not found what I was searching for. I guess the U2 song puts this best for I still hadn't found what I was looking for. Search YouTube for "U2 song about finding meaning in life" or go to the references section for the URL (U2 1987). The song seems to relate that the person has tried everything including Jesus and still hasn't found what he was looking for. During this crazy period of my life... even though I had so much... and was leading a hedonistic lifestyle and enjoying all that life had to offer... things were getting worse. I wasn't happy... long time friendships were strained. The businesses were growing but friends were letting me down and I was getting

disillusioned. There must be more than this. Little did I know that years later after walking with Jesus... and being what I thought was a spiritual person... even a pastor, that this song would come back to haunt me.

3crosses

Things were spiraling in my life and my soul began to cry out for help. I began to sense God speaking and calling out to me through movies and pictures and books. I turned to the Bible and when I opened it I heard Him there as well. I was awakening to His presence, I did not realize but the Eternal Word was at work. My grandfather was not a strong believer, but he liked a book from the Bible called Ecclesiastes. I started there and learned of a great King who had chased satisfaction and found the chasing to be meaningless outside of God. This was exactly where I was at... chasing things and experiences and finding life meaningless.

Oddly enough God used a movie that was rejected by evangelicals to begin to draw me to Him; The Last Temptation of Christ. In that movie I saw a Jesus I could relate to, a Jesus that knew the struggles I faced, a Jesus that was there for me. One who had not given up and had sacrificed everything to die... for me. As He reached out to me, I awakened to His Presence and I reached back to encounter Him. I sensed Him calling me to begin to listen and be aware of Him – in everything. I surrendered and began to watch for Him and surrender as He led. One night He began to get specific and called me to leave the city... to come apart... to walk away from all that I had and head west to the mountains. I sensed

this strong call to get apart and away from society. To build a log cabin and live off the land. I sensed Him saying that if I responded... and followed He would meet with me... face to face. Now I know you are all thinking that this is a phase people go through. I was 25 and had been living the fast life and had come to a place of disillusionment. Maybe so.... fair enough. But still it was where I was at and God was mindful of me enough to call and lead me. That was good and wonderful. During this time of “calling” there were several trips back to the states to visit friends. One friend who owned one of the Pizza Places was investing in our businesses in Canada. Every time I drove down I would see these 3 Crosses... all along the highway. There were two white and one gold... in the center. Just a simple silent testimony that was repeated every 30 miles or so (see pictures of 3 crosses in figure 7 and 8).



Figure 7. 3crosses site in South Carolina, United States. Photo by Jeff Roy.



Figure 8. Jeff Roy at a 3crosses site in West Virginia, 2013. Photo supplied by Jeff Roy.

They were signs to me and made me think of Jesus. In a way they reinforced my awakening to His presence. Something deep within moved when I saw the crosses. I found it strange that I was interested in Jesus and God... but not the church. I had no interest in the church but a lot of interest in Jesus. I think that is the way it is for many Canadians.

I remember driving along the back roads of West Virginia on an expedition to check out a possible old “barn find,” a 1972 Jeepster Commando. It was a cold winter day and I found myself in the back of a Jeep Cherokee pick up. I was in the back because I let the other guy sit up front. I didn’t have to.... it was my right to be riding “shotgun ,” but I sacrificed and let him have the warm seat. There I was lying in the back of a pickup shivering cold but feeling selfless about letting the other guy sit up front. I closed my eyes and began to talk to God (as was my custom those days), I told Him that if He wanted to give me a sign... that

would be okay (Ever done this?). After praying this prayer, I opened my eyes and looked up at the clouds. There it was high in the sky... a perfect cross above me made by two jets... crisscrossing and I mean... perfect! Now I just lay there... in the bed of the pickup truck awakened to His presence, my heart strangely warmed and sensing that this was... just for me. Yet after a few minutes like many touched by Jesus I couldn't contain myself. I mean here was proof... proof that God existed. The truck continued to weave along through these backwoods' mountain roads of West Virginia. I had to show them, so I started banging on the window. It took a bit but finally they found a place to pull off. I started to recount the amazing story and the sign in the sky but when I pointed up to the sky we had moved, and the jet streaks had moved and there was no longer a perfect cross above. They looked at me like I was a bit crazy... oddly enough I was okay with this. The Lord had made it clear that it was for me. You may find this strange but during all this I was still partying and still messed up, living in darkness... but I knew something was happening. I knew in my heart of hearts that God was clearly calling me to come apart. All was well for I was awakening to His presence. Darkness and disillusionment had come... but I knew that God was willing to come into my darkness... into my disillusionment to rescue me, if I would ask Him to.

Darkness

Speaking of darkness, jump ahead with me for a moment to 2006, fifteen years after that truck ride, the darkness would come for a friend of mine named;

Rob. During a prayer time prior to having lunch with Rob I sensed God leading me to ask Rob this exact question... “Rob, what if the darkness was coming and there is nothing you can do... to stop it.” So when I met with him... I said, “this may be nothing... and you might find it weird but I feel compelled to bring you this question: “what if the darkness was coming and there is nothing you, the great Rob Alexander, can do to stop it.””

I said this tongue in cheek for Rob is a highly educated over-achiever and as such he took this serious question about the darkness coming... all in stride. This didn't seem to freak him out at all - including the part about him not being able to stop it. I was impressed. A few days later the phone rang... it was Rob... he wanted to know everything. He said we are going for lunch again and to bring my prayer journal or notes... “I want everything you got in regard to this message about the darkness coming.” Apparently right after I shared this... his office in Detroit lost a 7-million-dollar contract, then a few days later lightening hit his office in Detroit. Rob's Vice President of Sales called him up and said... “Rob I am sitting here in my office looking straight up at the stars.” Lightening had hit this flat 3 story building and tore a huge hole, opening up the VP's office to the night skies. The darkness was coming... and as Rob puts it when he tells the story... “it just kept coming.” Rob did everything he could to hold back the darkness and turn the business around... he held on for 3 years... eventually 800 jobs were lost. At one point when Rob is telling the story he says... “Darkness...? this was just pitch black.” Yet, in the midst of all this... God was at work. I knew

it and deep-down Rob did too. God does some of His best work in the darkness. As Rob faced his darkness little did I know that my own darkness was already rumbling down the track like a big freight train coming straight for me. It would arrive about 3 years later during the winter of 2008 and as I went through Rob's darkness with him... he, along with others, would walk through mine with me.

As I have mentioned when the darkness comes, and one cries out... then God comes. Maybe not in the way you expect... or when you would expect... or even how you expect. He will reach out to the person struggling with their business, family, friends, coworkers, addictions. Whether sex offender, thief, smoker, liar, cheat, or whatever other sin, when a child of His cries out to Him... He comes... into the darkness... and when He does as I said earlier... "the darkness... best look out." He does not always fix everything, but he will walk through the darkness with you sometimes carrying you, and sometimes He carries you unbeknownst to you. Have you had any periods like this in your life?

The first time the darkness came for me was back in 1989 remember that U2 song. As I mentioned during this time I was spiraling, drugs, expanding businesses, and empty relationships left me empty and searching. It all came to a head in Brockville during a tree planting operation. A few of us had gone out to party at a local bar and as I watched the bar scene unfold... it was like I was seeing it through different eyes and disillusionment and inexplicable heartache swept over me.

I made my excuses and left the bar and went back to the little cabin on the St. Lawrence that we were renting. The disillusionment became so strong and so powerful that as I entered the little cabin... I broke emotionally for the first time in 10 years. I stumbled across the cabin and fell to the floor on my knees, humbled, broken and weeping saying these words...

I'm not going to fight you anymore God. I'm not going to fight you anymore... whatever You want I will do... I will serve you I will follow you. I am Yours. For the rest of my life... Do with me as You wish.

Well... that was all it took. Surrender! Awakened and aware of His presence I had encountered Him and fully surrendered... God led and wholeheartedly I followed. I left my businesses and traded away my prized possession a 1970 Dodge Challenger RT 440 Magnum (do you know what that car is worth today!). In trade I received a Monte Carlo, some little foreign import car, a very fancy remote-controlled race car, and some cash. In turn I traded that little import for a camper van (that burned a ton of oil). Not my best trade. I put my things in storage and left town in that van. I was heading West. God was calling me to leave my friends, leave the city, and go to the place that He would show me. During this time God was so present and personal. Looking back on this moment I realize that when I responded and said... "I am not going to fight you anymore.." I was responding to God who was actually speaking into my heart and mind saying... "WHY ARE YOU ARE FIGHTING ME JEFF?."

It is here when we first encounter God we hear Him speak in some way but like me people hardly recognize or realize it at the time. We are so used to the voices that rise up within our mind and heart that we can miss identifying Him as

God speaking gently to us. It is not hard to understand for believer of many years still miss recognizing the Eternal Word speaking to them from within. I was trained in Quantitative Analysis and I am quite a rational and logical thinker - I know when something is too far out and defies normal probabilities. During my journey so many things fell into this category of out of the ordinary. Recently Georgie, a girl who is seeking God gave my wife (Janice) and me a sign that says; "Is it Luck or is it God." When God moves, things happen that defy probability and the only other option is luck. Too often we let chance or fate, or luck be the reason why something happens without even considering that God could be at work. Do you think you have ever done this? Assumed something was luck or chance instead of considering that it might be God. Take out your journal and begin writing out a conversation with God about situations in your life that seemed extraordinary. Spend some time journaling and talking with God about these times and ask Him if He was there working unbeknownst to you. When you sense Him speak back (thru your mind) just write it down... as the words come. Here let me help you.... "God help me to focus in on the times when things happened in my life that seemed improbable. Take me back Lord, bring memories, images, pictures and words to mind. Speak into these times. Now just start to write in your journal and write what comes... write a letter to God... but be aware of Him speaking and write that as well. Journal now.

For me, 1989 was a time that that God was doing a powerful work in my life. In fact, it was so clear to me that He was active and real that I was willing to

leave everything and blindly follow Him... and trust in Him. This must have been what it was like for Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Elijah, the disciples, Nicodemus, and so many more. What seemed to happen was that my blind faith in Him released Him to work in my life in even more powerful ways. The more I believed... the more He worked... the more He worked... the more I believed. I left everything... to head out on this spiritual pilgrimage... and incredible things happened!

The Journey West:

Now I need you to know that as I embarked on this quest to meet with God I did not know much about Him or religion or faith. The first Bible I grabbed was in a motel room placed there by the Gideons (I had heard that you could take it and it wasn't considered stealing). Later as I got ready to head out on my spiritual pilgrimage I bought a big huge Bible; a real muscle builder. I also borrowed a few commentaries on the Bible from my mom who had a deep personal faith that was private and personal to her. I also purchased several books on living off the land including; Back to Basics - a huge hardback guide that Reader's Digest puts out. It contains pretty much everything you need to know to live off the land.

Fact is everyone thought I was crazy; my parents, family, friends, and to be honest even I was starting to wonder myself. People would call me and ask me to come and see them and when I did they would try and talk some sense into me. My business partner (who I had known most of my life) put it all on the line...

“You commit to coming back in the fall or we will split this all up.” I knew I would probably be back, but I also knew that I had committed to follow God and do whatever He wanted. I could not agree to coming back for sure. Gary ruthlessly split things up. For me this was just another affirmation that people... will always let you down.

With the business dissolved I was free to go west to the mountains. First I decided to go south back to West Virginia. My cousin Dave wanted me to be present as he married this girl who worked at the Pizza Place in West Virginia. In addition, a few friends in the States (Pizza Place guys), John in Myrtle Beach and Dave in Clarksburg West Virginia wanted me to come and see them. They wanted to help me and talk some sense into me... to see if I was okay. I hung out with John in Myrtle Beach and actually earned some travelling money by working for them and made repairs to the van in my spare time. I was not deterred in the least regarding my desire to head to mountains to seek and meet with God.

Leaving Myrtle Beach, I went back to Clarksburg West Virginia and visited Dave. While there I built a custom bed in the van and got ready for my trip west. One morning I woke up and sensed God saying in my mind (not audibly) “it is time to go... now... today you go... Come..” The clear sense was... time to leave... leave this very morning... and begin this journey of coming to me and do it now. Right now. Come. Leave! Maybe you have experienced this kind of inner compulsion or drawing. I packed my things, headed off to the Pizza Place and told my friend it was time and that I was going and that I didn’t know when I was

coming back, or even if I would. I said goodbye, got in my van and started to drive West across Route 50.

As I drove out of town I felt freer than I ever have. I was following God's call; the open road was before me. What an incredible feeling! At the same time there were a lot of people who were thinking that I was losing it. You see I did not hide from anyone the fact that it was God who was telling me to do this. Now I want to be clear at this point I had very little understanding of Jesus and the need to be "saved" or "born again." Those words really didn't mean anything to me. I didn't even know the difference between the Father and the Son and the Spirit. I was confused as to who I should address when praying. I decided to leave it with them and pray away. "God, Jesus, not sure who I pray to... but here goes..."

It was only 15 or 20 miles down the highway where it happened. I had all these thoughts or voices jumbling around in my head. "Everybody thinks your nuts." "You have lost it." "Sold your car... your baby... walked away from your businesses... He's crazy." At this point, even with those voices ringing in my head, I was feeling freer and more alive than I ever had. The open road was before me... no obligations... mystery and journey before me. Adventure was afoot. As all these thoughts were rumbling through my mind... when I saw the little sign high up in the trees. It was a little hand-painted sign... way up in the trees... on the side of Route 50 somewhere between Clarksburg and Parkersburg; West Virginia. Three words were on it... each word was painted a different color:

JESUS IS HERE!

As I read this I smiled... and said... out loud... in the van... “Well Jesus... if you are here... then I sure would like to bump into You... “Cause I have a lot of questions for Yah.”

Now as I said this... out loud... in a van... driving down the Route 50... a crooked smile came to my lips. For I realized that I had just spoken right out loud... to myself... in a van... driving down the highway. I began to think that maybe I was losing it. I saw the sign... said those words... crested the hill I was on and saw a bearded man walking toward me along the side of the highway.... carrying a huge..... wooden cross.

On the horizontal cross piece.... a word was etched into the wood:
“REPENT.”

I wiped my eyes as I passed him doing 65 mph and tried to look back... which is very hard to do in a camper – you can’t use rear view mirror. Now I was freaked out, I just had a hallucination. I thought I was losing it and actually said that out loud to myself. “You’re losing it Jeff” and there I was again... talking out loud to myself... only more affirmation of my mental state. I decided I couldn’t drive on, I just had to know. The probabilities of this all happening... the words on the sign... me asking to bump into Jesus... a man with a cross. In the back of my mind the words from God this morning echoed... “Today you leave today.” The urgency with which those words came. The timing of everything... leaving Clarksburg at just the right time... seeing the sign just before seeing the cross

carrier. Everything was perfectly timed. Kind of like those two jets flying above me making a perfect cross.

I turned around – I needed to see if this was all in my head; or just a mirage and imagined. Route 50 is a divided highway with a huge large grass median in the center and it wraps its’ way through small mountains and small towns. I took the next exit and drove back on the other side of the highway. I have to say I was relieved to see that there was in fact a man carrying a huge cross on the other side. I called across to him we had a few words and then I went up to the next exit and turned around to meet this man. I sat at the side of Route 50 and talked with this cross carrier named Larry for a couple of hours. He seemed quite sane, he handed me a Four Spiritual Laws tract about salvation and encouraged me to go to visit his home church as I journeyed west. He said that the pastor there was “anointed” with the Spirit. Now I admit that I was blown away, so many things had lined up. A voice to leave, seeing a sign at just the right time, saying those words out loud, and then cresting the hill and seeing this cross carrier. This was too much to be just “chance” or “coincidence.” I felt powerfully affirmed by God. All of this happened after leaving town that morning because I sensed God saying it was time to go. If I had left 15 minutes later or earlier nothing would have lined up (the sign, the carrier, my words out loud). I took down the information about the church that Larry was from. I wanted to see how far Larry had walked so I would sense how serious and committed he was. Was his church an hour down the road, two, four, or maybe even seven or eight? I had

no intention of going to this church. I wanted God, not the church. I believed the church was filled with hypocrites and out of touch with the reality of life in the 20th century.

After leaving Larry the cross carrier, I drove for 2 and a half days to get to Larry's home church. I was simply amazed that Larry had been carrying that cross for over 900 miles or 1500 km. I drove mile after mile at highway speeds all the time thinking that this guy dragged this cross every inch. On the second day west, by chance, (or providence) I picked up a hitchhiker. Now I never pick up hitchhikers but for some reason I stopped for this guy. A young kid with nothing but a pillowcase full of stuff climbed up in the van. Always weary of hitchhikers I looked at the pillowcase and it looked like he had a big pipe or wrench in the pillowcase. When I asked him where he was going he told me he was going as far west as I was. Now as you know I was on my spiritual journey heading west to meet with God and being that it had cost me everything to make this journey happen I really didn't want company. All I could think of to get out of travelling with him was to say was that I was going to visit this church in Missouri and that I would take him that far. As my words poured forth I realized that I was committing to go to Larry's church. My dad is a man of his word and he raised me to be the same. The 17-year-old kid shared that he was going west to be the sex-slave of some women he had met on a 1-900 phone sex line. At first I thought he was ribbing me, but he was all too serious and committed. My eyes fell upon the Four Spirituals Law track that Larry the cross carrier had given me. I figured

this guy needed it even more than I did. I gave him the booklet and tried to explain to him about Jesus and tried to convince him to go somewhere else. As I drove on and night fell I realized that I wasn't going to make it to the church in St. Joseph's and would have to stop for the night. The question arose in my mind as to whether I would ask the kid to get out of the van. I asked the hitchhiker if he had a tent and he said no. He usually just curled up under a tree. It started to rain and so I began to wonder what to do. I struggled knowing that I would be taking a huge risk keeping this kid in my van. He had nothing, so why wouldn't he rob me or take my van or do something worse. If I was lucky I would find myself broke without a van and calling home collect. If that happened everyone would know that this is where my following of God led... this is what following God's voice got me. At the same time, I couldn't imagine asking him to get out as it poured rain and then locking the door and curling up in my cozy bunk. This didn't seem like something someone who was putting God first would do. I prayed about it and I finally released it all to God and told the boy he could sleep on the floor of the van. He was so happy. Surprisingly, I slept like a baby, woke up the next morning, bought us some breakfast at Hardees and continued west to St. Joseph's. When we arrived, I gave him a Bible with some money hidden in it, dropped him off, and headed toward the church.

At the church I was welcomed by the Assistant Pastor who was encouraged to hear an update that Larry the cross carrier was doing well and still heading East and carrying that cross. As we spoke, he invited me to the Friday

night church service. I told him I couldn't go as I didn't have a suit. He informed me that I could come just as I was, shorts and shirt, and that I would fit in. Well, this intrigued me. Church on Friday night and casual dress - I was interested. He said that the message was the second part of a three-part series on the Glory of God. He went and got me a cassette with the message from last Sunday on it. I looked down at it and it was labelled The Glory of God Part 1 - Satisfaction for the Soul of Man. What is it that really satisfies? This had been my quest for over 10 years... Could my answer be on this tape? Did God bring me here for this?... Ever have moments of alignment like this in your life? Take a moment, open a journal, and let God bring to mind moments of incredible alignment that He brought about in your life. Just let the Spirit within guide your thinking. You don't need to try so hard. Let Him lead you and then come back to my story. It will be waiting. Start by writing a letter: God... tell me... please reveal to me moments of incredible alignment in the life that You were involved in..., and then you simply keep writing whatever you want to say and as you do be aware of another voice and then write whatever you hear in your heart and mind.

Welcome back! I hope that was fruitful for you. It is important that you test the things you hear and the best way is to line them up against what you know about Jesus and what you know about God's character from the Bible. If you are unsure about these things best to start reading the Bible.

After receiving the *Satisfaction for the Soul of Man* sermon on cassette I went to a pawn shop, brought a cassette player and rigged it up in the van and

started to listen. As I listened the pastor seemed to be speaking right into my life, my struggles, and my calling. It was as if God had given him words for me! That maybe God sent that cross carrier named Larry on a walk across the United States just for me (and probably for many others too!) so that I would end up at this church on this day. He called me to leave Clarksburg at just the right time, called Larry to carry that cross and be at that spot, and made it so the hitchhiker was there so I would go to the church. Maybe the hitchhiker was an angel. God can do a lot in our lives without us being consciously aware of Him, imagine what He can do when we are aware of Him.

The message was entitled “Satisfaction for the Soul of Man” and it spoke right into the depths of my soul. I was a man who had sought satisfaction all of my life and found the world empty. I was heading to the mountains to meet with God, to build a log cabin and live off the land. My van was full of books on how to do just this. I also had books on how to understand the Bible... books on how to build a log cabin and live off the land. On the tape the pastor spoke about how everyone is looking for satisfaction in this world, but they just as Mick Jagger sings “I can’t get no satisfaction... well I’ve tried and I’ve tried... and I’ve tried... but I can’t get no satisfaction.” The pastor spoke of how worldly success and money leaves people empty. The person making 25K needs 50K and the person making 50K says I need 100k the one making 100k needs 500k and that guy needs 1 million and so on. He said that the things the world offers are like an oasis in the desert... we see them... and think if I we can just get that new job... a

new wife... more money... a better car... and I... will be... satisfied. Then we get there to the supposed oasis, we just get another dry mouthful of sand - it was all a mirage. The Pastor said one of the richest men ever, Solomon, wrote about this quest in Ecclesiastes. It's all like chasing wind. This was the very book that God had led me to read before leaving which had a deep impact on me. He then shared about Moses, a man who also wanted to find satisfaction for his soul. For forty years he experienced indulgent hedonistic living in the palace of Pharaoh. Moses would have had it all; wine, women, money, and song but it did not satisfy him. Moses left Egypt and ran off to the mountains, got married, and for forty years he tended sheep and lived off the land. So please picture this scene... there I was sitting in my van listening to this message... and the pastor (or God through this pastor had my full attention). This seemed to be exactly what I had been looking for, what I had travelled all this way for. Then the Pastor stated (and quite emphatically) that...

Some of you out there... are thinking just like Moses... that this is the answer... to leave and run off to the mountains... and build a log cabin..... and live off the land... and do the Grizzly Adams type thing..... Well I am telling you.... That.... is not the answer!

I sat there dumbfounded in the van looking down at my books on building log cabins, living off the land and the maps outlining my trip west to mountains. They were all there within reach sitting between the front seats of the van. How did this pastor know... how could he know... then I realized he didn't! The Lord was speaking directly to me through this pastor in my mind and heart. The pastor wasn't even aware of it!

My analytical mind raced, considering the odds of me leaving Clarksburg that morning exactly when I did, seeing the sign, saying I'd like to bump into Jesus and Larry the cross carrier being just over the next hill. All to end up at this church on this date and receive this tape containing a message preached and recorded the previous week before I even heard God tell me to leave Clarksburg. Like the other things that were happening in my life, the odds were astronomical. Having an undergraduate degree in Quantitative Analysis, I knew the probabilities associated with the things that God was doing in my life. This is part of what awakened me to God's presence and supernatural activity in my life. Everything that was happening declared to me that God was real and that He was personally involved in my life and that He cared about me. He was moving in my life. It was all so wonderful! Awakened and aware of God's presence and activity in my life, I was encountering Him. The pastor made a call to surrender to God and I ended up going forward to publicly affirm my desire to follow Him. Deep within I sensed that God wanted me to make my private surrender and confession of faith now public. I was frustrated after going forward for they had a prayer team and I was not able to talk and pray with the pastor whose message had opened up my life and soul. He continued to close the service and I was ministered to by a prayer team member. I went back to the same church on Sunday morning but didn't get a chance to speak to him. I came back again Monday driving in from the campground I was staying at. I wanted... no I needed to meet with this Pastor. When I arrived at the church office I found out that Mondays were his day off. I

left the church to go to a museum that was across the street, but I saw a sign that said it was closed on Mondays. It was a hot day so I started to aimlessly drive through the city looking for a shaded spot to stop and park. I made a few random turns I had no idea where I was going and soon found myself driving down a one-way street in an older section of town. That was when it happened. My passenger door swung open wide. I was shocked. In a natural single movement I learned way over and reached to grab the door. As I did, I found myself staring out through the open door and all I could see as I passed was a man sitting and reading a book on the steps of the porch of the house I was passing. The man appeared to be the pastor of the church I went to Friday night! I closed the van door, straightened up, shook my head and told myself to settle down and get a grip. I must have been seeing things. I found a shaded spot to stop and read and pray. After 20 minutes I just could not shake what had happened and needed to go back. I went as far back as I could to that one-way street and then got out to walk the rest of the way to the house I had passed. When I arrived at it there was no one sitting on the steps. I told myself... "See you imagined it – you are a little unstable Jeff." Then as I walked on past the house I realized that he had moved up to the covered porch and so I started to walk up. Pastor? Pastor Brian...? I realized it was him... and said do you remember me... from Friday night...? Did you by chance see a van drive by and did you see the door open 20 minutes ago? He hadn't seen the van,. We spoke briefly but he expressed it was his day off. I think he thought I was stalking him by coming to his home. I was amazed that by

driving aimlessly through a city of over 70,000 people I ended up at the street the pastor lived on and when passing his house my van door just happened to fly open. Even as I type this I say to myself... “Jeff why have you not simply embraced this - this is quite simply amazing.” There can be no doubt that just as the glass shot of the table, and the van door opened at that exact moment something beyond this level of reality was at work. God was active! The living Word of God was active. The more I sought and believed, the more He worked. Maybe he was there at the river rescue, the bully rescue, during that fight, and so many other times. Maybe He is always there, always present, waiting to be seen, encountered and surrendered to.

I stayed at this church for several weeks and God did other amazing things. I was discipled by several people and they told me that wherever I went... I needed to find a full-gospel church. I was not even sure what that meant but sensed it had something to do with a church believing in the supernatural work of the Lord. I left this to continue my journey west to the mountains (I like to finish what I start. I am a bit stubborn or better yet tenacious); but the zeal and passion and inner drive were gone. I stopped every 2 hours to pray and seek the Lord but had no peace. After 6 hours of driving west... I simply turned around... and started to head home. After turning around, peace flowed over me. I returned home and spent a year reading, studying and serving in the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the church my parents were now part of. Dormant inside of me lay that desire to go to the place God had shown me. Two years later after my

first year at Seminary I drove west and almost made it to the foot of the mountains that God called me to back in 1989... but it was April 1992 and the roads were closed due to spring avalanche warnings. I still couldn't get to the place where I felt God had called me, the famous 10 peaks of Lake Moraine Valley in Alberta (see figures 9 & 10). Finally, in 2006 I made it to this lake. Through a number of strange events, I found myself out west at a conference. I was able to borrow a car and drive west a couple of hours to spend the day hiking and praying around the foot of the very mountains I felt God calling me to seventeen years earlier. I spent an entire day there simply being with Him. It was a special day but I was not yet hearing Him speak so it lacked something. It was still awesome. I could sense Him. So wonderful! Below in figure 9 I am pictured at the base of these mountains.



Figure 9. Moraine Lake, Alberta, Photo by Johny Goerend, used by permission. 2018.



Figure 10. Jeff Roy at the base of Moraine Lake, Alberta. June 12, 2006. Photo by Jeff Roy

Into the Church

After my trip West, I returned home to re-enter the Christian community (this time the evangelical community) and I expected an entirely different experience. My understanding at the time was that the mainline church I was brought up in did not emphasize this personal and spiritual side of Christianity. I felt that this was what I was missing and that the Lord was now showing me this. I believed that much of the hypocrisy I experienced was rooted within the mainline tradition that had abandoned the spiritual side of Christianity. Entering the evangelical tradition I now expected to meet with people full of life and power and personal connection with God in the spiritual realm. In 1990 after trying out several churches (looking for that full-gospel church) I had settled into an evangelical community, Glengate Alliance Church (a Christian and Missionary Alliance Church C&MA). This was the church my parents attended having left the United Church over certain significant changes that had taken place within

that denomination. This church was not exactly the same as the one I visited in St. Josephs Missouri. I was shocked by the limited personal experience and expectations, of those following Him regarding spiritual things. I was hungry and had left everything to pursue God and wanted more... I wanted to be discipled in how to walk with and experience God day by day. I wanted more of what I had experienced, a lot more! During the next year I read through the Bible, studied with anyone willing, and got involved in leading the College and Career group. It was a fun time with deep Bible Study and I was able to see the fire that I had catch and burn within others. I became friends with Steve Kerr who was interning at Glengate Alliance. Little did I know that this connection would be the beginning of a long friendship and spiritual journey together. We began Muskie fishing every year beginning in 1997. We would pray, talk theology, and yearn for more of God. We haven't missed a year yet. Steve and I traveled to India to teach in Bible Schools (2003), to New York to visit Scazzero's church (2007) and to Turkey and Israel to do a 14-day intensive hiking / experiential learning trip (2010). Together we would both come into a deeper sense of God's abiding speaking presence within and be used to help share this with the C&MA.

As I began to attend Glengate in 1990 a number of eligible ladies seemed to hover around. It seems that I presented as a masculine guy who was on fire for God and this was a sought-after commodity within Christian circles. I went out with a few but something seemed to be missing. The Cushing family was a very involved family in the church. The father would often employ me doing odd jobs

around his house and invite me to dinner. He was a very generous man and loved the Lord. He had 6 children 4 of whom were young ladies. I began to think that maybe there was something happening between Janice and I... that maybe the Lord was leading me toward her. I continued to attend Glengate, built up the College and Career group, and was baptized as a believer. At the end of this year I was still struggling with the fact that I did not see others in the church speak of or reflect the intense personal closeness that I experienced during my conversion. Something was missing. I concluded that this must be related to the immaturity and lack of knowledge and experience of those who attended church. I was still hungry for more and decided that I needed to learn more to get a deeper experience and that if I went and studied at a Masters' level I would find spiritually mature people full of faith and power there. I enjoyed seminary. It was just more knowledge and doctrine about God, on an even deeper and more intellectual level than the local church. I expected to learn about and experience deeper life spirituality, pathways to intimacy with God, and the presence and power of God but didn't. Downhearted and somewhat disillusioned I just fell in line with this, readjusted my expectations, and decided my supernatural spiritual experiences and encounters with God happened during my conversion and were not normative for Christian life. It was wrong to expect them to continue. I embraced the intellectual journey into faith which almost sounds apropos. I would walk this path for 14 years leading people to faith, teaching and equipping people, doing spiritual warfare and all of this through head knowledge rather than an

intimate intuitive leading from Him within my soul through the pathway of my heart. I stayed on this path until I would encounter so much pain and dysfunction within the church that I reached a point of disillusionment and brokenness. When the darkness came in 2008 my analytical mind and sturdy theology failed me. The darkness entered my mind and once again I turned and sought God with all my heart... just as I had in the beginning with full faith and expectation that He... as the Sovereign God... would come. He did! It was at this point that my intellectual journey toward faith shifted back to include a heart-based emotional and intuitive experiences. Hey, I just jumped ahead in the story... sorry... back to seminary.

Seminary and Marriage

During my first year of the degree I studied out west at Canadian Theological Seminary (CTS – now Ambrose University) and as I mentioned I found it to be very knowledge based and not as emotional or experiential as I had hoped. It was challenging to enter back into this level of study after being away from school for 5 years. Halfway through my year at CTS I was having a hard time with the level of work required. Except for two friends, Steve and Joel, who were out there at the college, I was alone. Steve and I were hungry for God back then and tried meeting at 5:30 am to pray and that for me was a miracle in and of itself. Just after Christmas I got sick and my mom let the College and Career group know that I wasn't feeling well and asked for people to pray and write to encourage me. One of those who wrote was Janice Cushing. I wrote a lengthy response asking her some very deep questions and our relationship began. We

would write letters and have long distance phone dates complete with Pizza on my end. Upon returning home we decided to have a real date all day long. No strings attached. We had a great time and started dating. I made it through my first seminary year, but finances were really tight. The following year I decided to enroll at Ontario Theological Seminary to finish my degree. This allowed me to work for my friend who had bought all my snow removal clients from my ex-business partner. I was able to offset expenses by working and attending school in Toronto. This had the added benefit of keeping me closer to Janice. Before that year was over I was ready to ask Janice to marry me. I went looking for rings with my dad and asked him to be my best man... for he was (and still is) in fact the best man that I have ever known. I invited Janice's father to lunch to seek his blessing. During lunch we got in a heated argument over something else. At the end of the lunch things cooled off a bit and I hinted at what the lunch was supposed to be for... by saying... "Bob... I have been looking at rings." With that everything changed, and he invited me back out to lunch the next day, so we could do it properly... I received his "blessing." I made a date with Janice and picked her up with a special proposal plan. When I arrived, I suggested that she wear something a little nicer which didn't go over so well. As we drove toward Niagara Falls I casually pointed up to the revolving dining room at the top of the Skylon Tower that overlooked the Falls and said... "Why don't we go there?"

Then I proceeded to drive to the base of the Skylon Tower, parked... and up we went. I asked Janice to spend the rest of her life with me while the dining in

the room at the top of the Skylon tower which revolved around Niagara Falls. When she tells the story she says I was all nervous before actually asking her. We ordered very expensive dinners and after I asked her I was able to thoroughly enjoy eating mine. Janice tells me that she missed out on that lovely dinner because after I asked her... she couldn't eat... she was so excited.

God knew just what I would need to keep me on the narrow path; a godly wife. Janice grew up in a home that held fast to solid Christian beliefs and values. Over the years her mother and father have demonstrated... time and again to me, the meaning of generosity. My wife is a beautiful, wonderful, kind, grace-filled person... who loves the Lord. When the darkness comes... the Lord comes to rescue... but before He arrives... He graciously places people around you to stand with you in the darkness. I have been blessed to have many stand in, and against, the darkness with me and at the head of the list is my wife... Janice.

Ministry

I graduated from Ontario Theological Seminary (OTS – now Tyndale University & College) in 1993 with a Master of Theological Studies. I enjoyed OTS, it had a better balance between knowledge and practical application. Even so I found that my Seminary education fell short of the mark in helping me understand and discern the moving of the Spirit within. Even more than that the actual whispers of His voice, the Word speaking from within through mind and heart. Sorry that's me jumping ahead again.

In 1993 I began working as the Assistant Minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fergus, Ontario. Once again this was on par with my experience so far within formal Christianity... I found that the Presbyterian Church had all the theology right... they said it very well... but the personal experience of, and encounter with, the Spirit was lacking. I wanted to be a success and so I worked hard with the youth and College and Career groups. The same passion that I had to know God and be serious about Him developed within the participants. Janice helped me start an early morning contemporary service. Things were actually going well and we each had wonderful experiences at a Cursillo retreat weekend that was very powerful and full of the Spirit. When the early morning contemporary service we started took off, many people from the later traditional service led by the Senior Minister; Murray started to attend. Although close to retirement he decided he should take it over this new service I started. I told him that this service was my lifeblood and if he took it over I would have to leave. Then unbeknownst to me he began to make the necessary changes through Session. When they informed me I spoke up and told them what I had shared with Murray about leaving if this happened. The committee had no idea I felt this way and was willing to leave me in charge of the service if I would stay. I felt that the writing was on the wall and it was clear that pastor Murray did not want me there and so after serving 3 years I resigned. We sold our house in Fergus, rented a place in Guelph, and I went back to doing snow removal.

The Church Plant

For a year we didn't know what to do and then an opportunity to plant a church in Huntsville, Ontario was presented to us by the Christian and Missionary Alliance. All of this began to happen as my first daughter Phoebe Mae was born. Off to Huntsville we went, excited to do a grass roots thing. We were fed up with the bureaucracy of the established church. It was clear to see that this small group in Huntsville who were trying to plant a church was dysfunctional. It was made up of malcontents from various churches and one tried and true Alliance person. I later found out that six others had been approached, sensed this and rejected the position. Strangely enough we still felt God calling us, so in spite of these concerns we decided to go to Huntsville. The job was half pay and my wife would supply teach when she could (she just had a baby). We went all in and bought a small house. Within three months things were looking really shaky. The two strongest ladies who were running things really didn't want a man to come in and lead. They challenged me from the beginning and within 6 months they called the District in for a meeting. I asked for the District Superintendent to come saying this was serious but the Assistant District Superintendent thought he could handle it. He was a gentle man and was not ready for what was coming. He dropped the ball (his own words) and the initial group blew apart leaving just 3 people. We were left with the original Alliance person, one man from out of town who was moving to Huntsville but had no job, and another family who worked for a Christian camp. Suffice to say that the initial shaky budget was completely shattered with 90 percent of the local giving gone. We were left without a place to

meet as the two ladies trying to take control were in charge of the place we were renting. There we were a new baby, a new home, less than ¼ pay, a congregation of 6 (including the 3 of us) and no place to meet. Darkness had arrived, and I called on the Lord. I still remember being left on my own to dig out the old barn/shop that came with our house so that I could pour a concrete floor and do automotive work to supplement my income. I filled wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow and as the sweat dripped off me the Lord and I had a pretty serious discussion at the end of which I called the DS and told him that I felt the Lord calling us to press on. He agreed. We faced many challenges and difficult times after that but they all paled in comparison... that is until 10 years into the plant... when the darkness I spoke of above came in the form of a perfect storm.

During this difficult time at the start the Lord encouraged and strengthened us by bringing certain people at just the right time. The Director of World Relief was visiting Huntsville and knew of our church plant. He and his wife took us out to dinner and prayed publicly for the Lord to add a tithing family per month over the next four months. Everyone around us at the restaurant could hear his prayer. It was a powerful prayer and the Lord was faithful adding more than four families within the next few months, within a year we had purchased a building. We held contemporary services with coffee, casual dress, skits and multimedia. This time wasn't free from challenges. There were many, but none seemed as challenging as when we first started the church.

In 2004 I experienced Third World living conditions when I travelled with my friend Steve to India to teach in several local Bible Colleges. What an incredible trip! My eyes were opened to third world living conditions. I saw firsthand how the liberating power of the gospel can bring hope to people living in darkness. I realized that the people in Huntsville also live in a different kind of darkness. A darkness not related to food and water and shelter but to materialism and desperation in regard to finding the true meaning of life. I knew this darkness personally.

After seven years in our first building we reached capacity and in response unanimously decided to sell our building and hold services at the Algonquin Theatre of the Arts. We had a desire to find common ground where we could invite those who had turned away from traditional church back out. We moved to the theatre and continued to grow starting to see numbers around 150. We added part-time staff and in 2008 brought our 10 hour per week Youth Pastor up to full-time. All seemed to be going well until my wife started to have seizures. The MRI showed 2 cysts in her brain on the hypothalamus. The day our Youth Pastor began working full-time started an 8-week sabbatical break to care for my wife. The day I returned from that sabbatical was the day he resigned. As I met with him in my office excited to plan ahead I sensed something was up. Digging a little deeper I found out that he was going to work for the Baptist church a kilometer down the road. This wasn't going to be good for us or for him. I tried to encourage him to take a bit more time and do this in a different way. He would

not be deterred and resigned immediately. Several of our key families had been instrumental in bringing this guy on staff. They had sons and daughters who were starting high school and the high school was known to be an easy place to get caught up with the wrong peer group (drugs/alcohol/sex). They wanted a full-time youth Pastor at our church to help keep things stable for their kids. When we lost him they left our church not because they were unhappy with the church but because they knew it would take us a year to recover and they needed someone now. Within one month we had lost one third or \$45000 in tithes and that was just the beginning. When people in the church see a new pastor leave and several pillar families leave it creates doubt and instability. Then... right at this time two brand new church plants began holding services in Huntsville; one by Harvest Bible Chapel (to be pastored by a person from our church who I was using as a guest speaker) and the other; a unique Brethren group from the states who had the same vision as we did at Church Muskoka Style. Our numbers continued to go down, in a 400-seat theatre it becomes noticeable when you fall below 80. Our budget reflected the departures and it was a challenge to pay the bills. In the midst of this darkness as I watched what we had worked so hard for... crumble... unbeknownst to me God was at work in my life. In this difficult time God challenged me with books like *Emotional Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero and *Forgotten God* and *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan. I embarked on a sermon series entitled "Does God" which challenged me even more. We brought in Dr. James Beverley from Tyndale to speak on the question of "Does God Exist."

When I hit the topic of “Does God Still Speak” I really had to work through some pretty tough questions, like why do we not talk to God when the whole Bible is a book of recorded conversations between people and God? Adam, Eve, Noah, Abram, Sara, Hagar, Jacob, Rebekah, Moses, Samuel, all the prophets and so many more have personal conversations with God. God makes things right through His Son Jesus so that we can be filled by His Spirit and become temples of the living God. In the Old Testament sin separated God and people so he could only come to be with them or alongside them but now He lives and dwells within us. He is one with us, we are a new creation. Jesus says He will lead and guide and empower and encourage and convict us... from within, but if not through words/language... then how? The warm fuzzies? This challenged me and I began writing out my prayers to God while listening for what the Word who lived within might whisper back. It started small but slowly... as I got quiet... I was able to hear the still small voice of God speaking from within the depths of my being and it was wonderful. It was like it was when He first called me in 1988. The year was now 2008. I had been seeking, following, learning, pastoring for 20 years; but this... was a game changer. It was living water... once again God became real and personal to me. As I believed, God began to work in supernatural ways just as He did when I first awakened and became aware of Him back in 1988. God began to speak into my everyday life using people, movies, books, and situations to teach me and lead me. I began to thirst for His voice and leading daily. It was like I was given eyes to see and ears to hear. I began to experience what I had learned

about intellectually. Oddly enough just as before... it was the darkness... that actually opened my eyes and ears to see and hear. God became a present indwelling reality for me and He led me out of the darkness and since this time I have been walking with Him, cycling through the AESA Cycle I mentioned in my introduction - awareness, encounter, surrender and abide. The difference at this point was that my intellectual journey was being supplemented by emotion and experience. The Holy Spirit used Scripture passages and other well-known writers to affirm this precious gift of conversation in the depths of my being, with the One who lives within. This all happened in the midst of the most difficult and challenging time in my ministry. I was broken, and the Lord was meeting me in the midst of my brokenness - I cried out to the Lord – and from His temple (now my body) He heard my voice and spoke. Oddly enough... He did not rescue me... He simply came to be present with me... in my brokenness and He wept with me from within. Often this inner weeping would flow out (in tears) as I was rocked by His inner presence and love. During these outward displays of emotion I would see others feeling bad for me thinking this is embarrassing for me a grown man weeping. I would respond by saying... “No, please do not feel bad for me... this is wonderful... for when these powerful emotions reverberate deep within I feel Him... I feel His presence... His love... His own weeping and suffering within me with me. I am deeply connected to Him during these times and it is so wonderful. When things get better and the darkness leaves... sometimes in a

weird way... I find I miss the times of brokenness; for within them comes a deep connection with Him.

The Property and the Building

In 2010 a forested 35 acre property, with a small mountain and scenic views of Lake Vernon became available for \$100000 right next to our home. Figure 11 is an overhead image of the property and figure 12 is a picture looking out toward the lake that you can just see in bottom left corner of figure 11.



Figure 11. Google maps. Public domain image adapted by Jeff Roy



Figure 12. Picture of Lake Vernon from Mt. Sinai at 3cosses. Jeff Roy. October 20, 2010.

In many different ways God affirmed that He wanted it purchased for kingdom use. This was reminiscent of my initial calling to come away and meet with Him on the mountain and build a log cabin. Actually, the idea of establishing a place for people to go and deeply connect with God in a beautiful natural setting was a recurring call that God had placed within my heart, mind and soul. From the sale of our first building our church had just enough money to buy it outright and have some money left over to start a building fund. The sense was that it would be the site for our new church with the rest of the property developed with walking trails and prayer cabins. The Lord affirmed this in several ways with prophetic words of affirmation from others and personal words to me. The timing for property purchase was crucial and the Lord made it clear that Janice and I, or

the church were to purchase the property. About 7 years earlier we had missed a property on the opposite side of me because we were naïve about how shrewd real estate people can be. The Lord made it clear that He did not want this property to slip through our hands. Some might say that if God wants it to be it will, but I have come to understand that God leads us to do things and if we are not watching or aware of His leading and we fail to follow, opportunities are missed. The church had to assess things and so as not to lose the property Janice and I purchased it on faith; so that another party wouldn't get it. This gave the church time to review the property and decide if they wanted it. The property committee and the Elders reviewed and recommended purchase. At the meeting we were getting ready to vote when an elder presented a "mystery property" that none of the Board knew about. We were aligned as a board going into the meeting and this stirred up dissension. The vote to purchase passed but we decided to hold back and send the committee back out to investigate the property the Elder presented before moving forward. They discovered that it wasn't as good as the first property and at \$158,000 it was too expensive. Before proceeding we had the committee once again look for any other local properties or buildings within our budget. For the small amount of money, we had (around \$110,000) there was nothing on the market. Then to everyone's surprise the same elder found a small old United Church building that hadn't even been listed yet that we could afford to buy outright. Everyone was tired of ministry at the theatre and wanted to return

to a building and so we ended up purchasing this little old United Church (see pictures of property and building in figure 13)



Figure 13. Exterior and Interior shots of 482 North Mary Lake Road, Locks United Church. Huntsville Ontario. Jeff Roy December 17, 2009.

We purchased and settled into the new building. This building was less than half the size of the building we initially purchased in 2000 and left in 2007 because it was too small. The building was stuck in a bad reno from the 1960's (see figure 14 below).



Figure 14. Kitchen and Basement. 482 North Mary Lake Road, Huntsville Alliance Church. Dec 17, 2009. by Jeff Roy

We made the best of it in our new building. The church also affirmed the sense that God had plans for the 35-acre property that Janice and I had purchased

at the Lord's leading. An outside supporter had agreed to help us carry the interest cost associated with the mortgage of the property. The Lord was leading me to continue to share with people the intimacy that they can have with Him through listening prayer. At this time many evangelicals found teaching on hearing God's voice very challenging and so there was some resistance to this new message. The sense was that the property would be a part of this in some way, but we did not know how.

Israel

In 2010 the General Assembly of the Christian and Missionary Alliance was being held in Turkey. My friend Steve and I took this opportunity to see sites in Turkey and then to head to Israel for an intensive 14-day rabbinic style teaching – tour. This involved daily hikes and on-site teaching. The preparation required for us to be able to do 300-foot verticals and knowing my limitations I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it. I started to train and make arrangements to see specialists about my muscle fatigue. I wanted to know what was wrong with me. Why did my muscles gas out and cramp so easily? The fifth specialist I was referred to (a Neuromuscular specialist) was able to diagnose me. When I shared my experiences he said he knew what I had and was 99.8% sure. He would confirm it with DNA testing. I didn't get to see him and hear this until returning from the Israel trip. God made it clear He wanted me to go, so I left for the trip with no understanding of what hindered me physically, and a fair bit of trepidation for the embarrassment that might come during the hikes. On the trip at

several points I had trouble keeping up with the group and I tried to explain as best I could that something was wrong with my muscles... but I didn't know what. As usual people would look at me with skepticism... and I would see them thinking... "Look at you... you are built like a tank and look like you have bundles of strength... you sure you are not just..... lazy."

This experience in Israel was to be contemplative, mystical, with an eastern rather than western mindset and to be experiential in nature. I was already listening and journaling and so I was very excited to slow down and meet with God while in Israel. From the moment we arrived it was rush... rush... rush... up one mountain and on to the next... from site to site we went. At almost every site I was saying and thinking things like this.....

Wait a minute... hold on... this is where David fought Goliath.... Hold on just leave me alone for a little while... Or this is where Elijah went to a cave in these hills... or where John's Baptism was.... Or where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.... Wait!... I just want to sit and experience it and take it in... but it was always... okay let's go, back to the bus.

I know that they wanted us to see as much as possible, but this was more of a western approach to sightseeing and I missed the experience in the rush. The final few days involved walking trips into and around Jerusalem. We happened to be there at the time of Passover. I opted to stay back at the hotel – I had a plan. I geared up and headed into Jerusalem on my own. This was against the rules, but I looked the part and often got nods from the Jewish men as if I was one of them (see photos on the next page in figure 15).



Figure 15. Dinner in Israel with the group and Heading to Jerusalem. March 28, 2010. by Jeff Roy

I had a wonderful time hiking through Jerusalem and the next day I got special permission to do it again. This was totally amazing... I was able to go at my pace. I spent extended quiet time in the Garden of Gethsemane and The Empty Tomb. I actually met up with the bus tour at one point and was going to stay with them but it turned out they were gridlocked in traffic and so I left on my own again. I had an amazing time hiking through Jerusalem on my own, with God, during Passover in Jerusalem. This was a highlight of my trip.

The Prayer Mountain at 3crosses

In the Fall of 2010 during our Muskie Fishing trip I shared some material on listening prayer with my friend Steve. Then in December we went deeper and I shared about my personal experience. There was some resistance from Steve at first, but the Lord spoke to me and told me to leave it with Him and Steve. The Word was working in his life as well and not long after Steve was having regular in-depth conversations with the Lord through Contemplative Prayer Journaling

(CPJ). At that time, I did not know it but Steve was experiencing his own darkness. He was a very successful pastor/church planter but still felt that something was missing and seemed to be on the edge of burnout. This new intimacy with God was a gamechanger for Steve. As mentioned, for many years during our Muskie fishing trips we would talk ministry and theology and lament how it seemed that all was well, but something was missing. We now knew what had been missing. It was this incredible personal two-way communion with the Lord, that brought true personal intimacy.

It was at this time that I sensed God call me to go and see both the President of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA – Rev Dr. Franklin Pyles) and another leader of prayer within the Alliance (Rev. Sunder Krishnan). The Lord wanted me to share this new-found communion I had with them and express His desire to commune with His people in the C&MA again. First, I met with Sunder. I mentioned a book the Lord had used 10 years ago to impact me; *The Word and Power Church* by Doug Bannister. Sunder spun around in his office chair and picked up the very book I had just mentioned. This was the only book on his desk. He was currently reading the book I sensed I should reference! Next I met with President Pyles on 2 occasions and during the second I offered him some words the Lord had given me for him. As I shared them, the Spirit came upon us and broke both of us (as much as one can be broken in a restaurant). Even with this inner witness it did not seem like there was going to be outward traction within the C&MA at this time. There were other major issues the denomination

was working through. Both of these men encouraged me to press on with what I was doing but I did not seem to gain any footing. Unbeknownst to me at the time I now believe that a seed had been planted.

Back home our local church was experiencing an identity crisis. We were trying to understand this call from the Lord to develop the 35-acre prayer mountain as an experiential Listening Prayer Centre. In February of 2011 in the wake of an annual meeting it became clear that people were unsure of how the church and the 3crosses Listening Retreat Centre were connected. Several families decided to pull out and I was devastated. Janice and I finally agreed we were done and with many tears we wrote a resignation letter, phoned family, the Elders and the District Superintendent and formally resigned. Brent the Assistant District Superintendent said he would come up and assess things before they would accept my resignation. Brent was to come up Thursday, but a snow storm pushed things back until Sunday. I remember just feeling done... I did not want to go to the service... but also knew that the Lord was calling me to go. I got up Sunday morning and began to get some video worship together. Dan, an elder, called and told me that the worship team was ready to play. This was encouraging; Brent will see our great worship team. As I talked with Dan on the phone, Janice came down to my office to see how I was. I was checking emails when I saw something I thought was spam but it turned out to be a letter from a lady in Ottawa. An email from someone had just come in and it started like this... "I don't know you or your church... never been there but...," as I read I thought -

here is just one more arrow through my heart... one more negative comment... I expected to read something like; "...but I have heard what is going on...." I tensed up... scanned the rest but saw words like dream or vision that seemed to speak otherwise. So I started from the top... and as I read I slowed right down. I felt the Lord's affirming presence. It was an incredible email from someone who knew nothing of us or Huntsville. A lady in Ottawa was given a dream on Friday night... in the dream she was in a town surrounded by a forest... and in the dream she knew it was about 3.5 hours away... from where she lived. She found peace there... in this forest. It was so restorative for her, so much so that she could not contain herself. She had the sense it existed but needed to know if a place like this existed. She did an Internet search for towns 3.5 hours away from Ottawa that were surrounded by forest, this led her to Huntsville. She searched all the churches in Huntsville... and nothing clicked until she found our web site (oddly enough our website had shut down that Thursday and we had quite a time getting it back up Friday). When she found our web site that Saturday the lights went on for her... she saw our pic of Gethsemane... she knew this was it and followed the links to our Exploring Spirituality website. Seeing more pics of a forested property she was so encouraged! The place in the dream that God gave her existed. They had been through a hard time and she believed that God had spoken to her in her dream and shown her this place. She emailed us to encourage us and thank us for creating it and to encourage us to press on. Right away I shared this email with Jan and Dan and we were all blown away. To me it felt like the time

that a guy jumped Adam in the Pizza Place and I jumped that guy... then two of his friends jumped me... and John reached in and grabbed them both and pulled them back off. On the morning of my resignation, God reached down from on high and pulled these spiritual afflictions off. My heart and soul were so very heavy and then in a moment... complete release. As we were reading and being blessed by this email the Assistant District Superintendent Brent calls me on my cell and so I share this with him. He shares that he is in town at Tim Hortons and just met a man who knew Church Muskoka Style – as a place that was laid back and relaxed. When we arrived at the church we found out a couple from Windsor Alliance were visiting. The pastor of their church was Rev. Dr. Garth Leno. He was our sending Pastor; he married us, and he recommended us for the call to the church plant in Huntsville. We were amazed that in the dead of winter during this snowstorm as I offer up my resignation God sent people from his church (6 hours away). Then I also found out a couple from Caledonia, my friend's Steve's church was also present. This was the same couple that had been present one year ago at the first service in the new building. All this happening in the midst of a Muskoka snowstorm! We all (including Brent) sensed an overwhelming affirmation from the Lord. Brent would not accept my resignation seeing clearly that God was up to something. Brent said that our little church was birthing a new ministry that was on the edge and that during birth to a new ministry... things get freaky and people get scared.

Brent took our leadership team to lunch and we spoke of how to incorporate my calling as a prophet to the churches... to send me out (let the fire hose go). I can be pretty passionate about the need to hear God speak. Brent also advised me not always to blast away and that 3crosses will be a place where leaders are sent who need refreshing... awesome wonderful! Then just as the Lord had said President of the Alliance called to set a date to connect again.

The Cleft of the Rock

One morning during my first week back from Israel I was having quiet time and I sensed God calling me up the mountain that He had something special for me. Over the years God called me up the mountain to meet with Him many times. After such meetings people have often said to me... "You need to go up the mountain more often." This day I started to head up the regular way but the Lord impressed upon me to take a different path... one I have never taken... a difficult one that I knew would not lead to the very top. I sensed the Spirit urging me... compelling me to come... so I went. He brought me to the foot of the 40 foot granite wall... and as I approached I knew it was a special place. I could feel it, sense it. Maybe this is something that I was born with... a sensing... I mentioned it earlier when falling to sleep as a child... and then there was that strange Ouija incident. I cannot define it but at times I just seem to have insight or a sense of something more. Standing there feeling this in the moment, I looked up and part way up this solid granite wall was a cleft in the Rock (see photo in figure 16). I sensed the Lord wanting me to climb up into it and I did. The ground was covered

with green moss... and it was damp but I didn't care. As I sat down I heard the Lord say...

THIS IS A SPECIAL PLACE AND PEOPLE WILL COME HERE AND I WILL MEET WITH THEM... PEOPLE DO NOT NEED TO GO ALL THE WAY TO ISRAEL TO MEET WITH ME.... I'M HERE... I'M RIGHT HERE.

I did not know what this meant at the time but this laid the foundation for the 3crosses Listening Prayer Centre.



Figure 16. The Cleft of the Rock 3crosses Trails 595 Aspden Road Huntsville Ontario. June 19, 2010. by Jeff Roy

The Lower 3crosses

I began to take more time seeking to discern God's will for the church and the property. It was around this time that God called me to erect three crosses on the lower edge of the property as a silent sign and statement. At the time these three crosses were not to be a special site for people to visit and meet with God. They were just silent markers... signposts if you will. A silent testimony of the Lord's

sacrifice just like the ones that had impacted me along my journey south and west.

Figure 17 includes pictures of the lower three crosses being erected.



Figure 17. Installation of Lower 3 crosses at 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspden Road Huntsville, Ontario. May 14, 2010.

Slowly through meditation and CPJ the Lord led me to sense and establish sacred places that related to Biblical sites that people could visit, pray, and listen for God to speak to them. As I thought about this and spoke to God about it He spoke to me of certain sites. I located potential sites for the burning Bush, the Tabernacle, Cleft of the Rock, the Foot of the Mountain, the Stable, the Jordan, Gethsemane, Mount of Transfiguration, the Wilderness, Golgotha, the Broom Tree, Elijah's Cave, Elijah's Showdown at Mt. Carmel. I began working trails and

laid the foundation for the prayer cabin on Mt. Sinai. My dad and I constructed an insulated base for a log cabin. I erected a tent on top of that base (see figure 18) and in the fall of 2011 I spent 3 days fasting up on the top of what I started to call Mt. Sinai.



Figure 18. Pictures of the Cabin base on Mt. Sinai, 3crosses Trails 595 Aspden Road, Huntsville Ontario. 11/14/2010. by Jeff Roy

Over time the tent in figure 18 became a prayer cabin on Mount Sinai but it took a little while. The pictures on the next page (figure 19) are of the permanent prayer cabin sitting on the same base that the tent had. Just this past year 2018 someone mentioned to me that this prayer cabin represents the log cabin the Lord called me to build 27 years before!



Figure 19. Mt. Sinai cabin exterior and interior. 3crosses Trails 595 Aspdin Road. Huntsville, Ontario. September 14, 2010. by Jeff Roy

It is the view that makes this spot so special. The picture in figure 20 below was taken standing on the deck in front of the cabin.



Figure 20. The view from the Cabin at Mount Sinai. 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspdin Road, Huntsville, Ontario. September 23, 2018. by Jeff Roy

During this extended time of fasting and prayer, I reviewed my prayer journals and sought God's calling on the property. I sensed God calling me to go to various spots on the property and spend time in listening prayer. I spent time at the lower three crosses and in Gethsemane and Golgotha. As I did, the Lord spoke to me and called me to develop an experiential listening retreat. I did not yet know what that would look like, but I knew it would be set at a slow pace and

involve encountering God at sites that reflected biblical locations and listening for His still small voice.

Awakened and aware of God's Presence, I was becoming more aware of how He is at work in our lives trying to help us accomplish things. To bring this to fruition one needs to move from awareness into encounter, and from encounter into surrender to His leading and plan. By nurturing these three, one abides. A person begins with eyes that see and ears that hear. Through so many little things God was revealing. All along He had plans for 3 crosses and these sites. He was speaking to me in my mind and heart through many different avenues of formation. The three crosses we erected as a property signpost and silent testimony to the work of Christ turned out to be a very special place and a fundamental part of the Jesus Experience. When I was at the lower three crosses God told me that each participant was to begin the Jesus Experience by spending time worshipping at the three crosses set on the public road. This has proven to be a powerful part of The Jesus Experience. It also bears witness to the people in the cars driving by. During a group experience the way that people are released to walk by themselves means that throughout the day for 8 hours someone is always there spending time at the three crosses either kneeling, worshipping with hands raised, or simply touching the cross doing business with God. A powerful, silent testimony to the 1000 or so cars that pass by on Saturdays. (See participants at crosses in Figure 21).



Figure 21. Participants at the Lower 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspden Road, Huntsville, Ontario. by Jeff Roy. June 7, 2013

The Jesus Experience

Work continued on the mortgaged property. This was all by faith with the interest being covered each year by an outside donor. I was developing hiking trails and plans for prayer cabins on a property filled with steep rocky hills that wasn't paid for. The focus was to develop a prayer center that focused on hearing God speak. The church that we started had been through a storm and moving to the little church proved to be a setback. In 2011 I went to half pay and continued working full-time. This was a hard time for my family. My wife only had a half-time teaching contract and so many people had left the church. God stayed close by us, encouraging and helping us to press on. Key people remained faithful. On one Sunday I was telling the church that God was calling me into the deep waters of His Spirit. I was expressing how having seen the movie Jaws I am scared to swim in deep water unless someone else is there and then all the fear goes away. Henry a good friend called out... "I will swim with you in the deep waters."

Everybody laughed especially those who knew that Henry couldn't swim. Along with others at this little church, Henry has been swimming with me in the deep waters and he and his family have never left my side. I am grateful.

Looking back I can see how God was teaching me that awareness, encounter and surrender were key parts to moving forward and abiding with Him. He sent many others to affirm and help me along the way. God called together a wonderful brainstorming board of excellent men (Steve Kerr, Rob Alexander, Ben Prins, and Phil Miller). They have helped me refine the vision for 3crosses along the way. They pushed me to work and revise the material for the Jesus Experience. The written material became spoken material and in two days it morphed into a recorded mp3 guided experience complete with Scripture, music, teaching, and guided listening prayer.

The Jesus Experience was piloted in the spring, summer and fall of 2011. Groups of up to twelve people would book a date and I would send out some pre-reading material on listening prayer and journaling. They would arrive Friday night for a 2-3 hour session, then Saturday morning we would have a full, big breakfast at 7am and another session from 8 to 9:30. Then a participant would be released on the walk every 35 minutes. This ensured that people were on a solitary walk for the whole 3 hours. Lunch was provided during the day and after the last person was back we would share a meal and have a debriefing session. Participants would gather round and share how God met them and what they sensed He said. We encouraged people to read out loud directly from their prayer

journals. Often this was accompanied with the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit as people transparently shared deep emotions. People heard God speak to them and as they shared the Spirit within would affirm and reverberate within and break them. Just like me, they did not care as they wept before others. Some shared in simple phrases from God, others shared longer dialogue with God but somehow each person's cup of blessing was full, from their mountain walk.

Ed Cox from the first group of men that came said he felt God call him to return and help me. I thought he was just caught up in the weekend... but Ed returned and stayed to volunteer work for 6 years. He was retired and didn't have a lot, but he worked tirelessly to make 3crosses available for the people who come. For Ed to come and volunteer several obstacles needed to be overcome. Ed lost his job during downsizing and adjusting to this he acquired \$63,000 of credit card debt. Second Ed needed gas and food money to be able to come. Third Ed's wife Anneke had to be willing to let him come. The Lord took care of these problems and enabled Ed and his wife to give their 5th wheel trailer to 3crosses for visitors to use. In the end, this trailer became Ed's home away from home while volunteering here for six summers. Ed played a fundamental role in establishing 3crosses. At the end of two years of development an outside donor gave enough money to buy the property outright. Hallelujah the mortgage on the property is gone! Over the next three years we piloted The Jesus Experience and in some special way God met with each person who came. Running this was very difficult, amazing and wonderful all at the same time. We renovated 2 Bunkie's and

purchased and renovated an old trailer to be used for those who would come. Every year we would improve the trails with what little money we could pull together. I continued to work for half pay and Ed continued to volunteer.

Gethsemane

Gethsemane was located at the very top of the mountain and had certain peacefulness about it. The first time I took my daughters (Phoebe and Sophie) up the mountain we were chatting all the way up and then... then as we reached the top... they just stopped talking and quietly fanned out from me. Each one found a quiet spot to sit and so I sat down, a little mystified and yet comforted that others felt what I felt in that place. Without saying a word, we spent 20 minutes quietly sitting there. There has been a shared sense of how special this place is by those who have visited Gethsemane at the top of the mountain. It has come to be known as a “thin place.” A place where the veil between the physical and the spiritual seems to be thin. When visiting Israel it was eye opening to realize that almost every spiritually significant site in Israel involved a hike up a mountain to the high places. As God inspired me to develop The Jesus Experience - this “high place” came to be known as the Gethsemane Garden (see picture in figure 22).



Figure 22. Gethsemane Garden 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. Sept 10th, 2010.

Golgotha: The Upper 3crosses

There was a sense that we need to have a private 3cross site farther back on the property. This site came to be known as ; Golgotha or the Upper 3crosses. I spent time hiking to the property and found a beautiful rock face that seemed like a perfect spot. God had other plans. He connected me with Eric a woodsman who grew up on the property and loves the Lord. He was helping me with the log cabin prayer hut and he said he knew of a perfect spot for Golgotha. Eric showed me the spot and it was... indeed perfect... amazing! We had no idea how we were going to erect three 6x8 Hemlock crosses at the top of this rock face without any heavy equipment. We climbed the cliff to assess the situation and it looked grim, and then I saw 3 ironwood trees in perfect position and sensed the Lord's affirmation. In no time at all we topped the rock bases and made the crosses (see pictures in figure 23). The Christ cross and the one on the right stayed alive for 3 years. Now

just the cross of the thief who repented is alive with the dead branches of the Christ cross reaching toward it.



Figure 23. Golgotha – Upper 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. May 26th, 2013..

The 3crosses Cafe

3crosses now owned both the property and the building outright. Slowly we had been changing the old United Church into a more comfortable Café like setting. Out went the old pews and in came cozy coffee tables, chairs and yes couches. I developed a detailed plan to sell the old church building and build a new small prayer retreat center which would also be the home of our Café style church on the thirty-five 35 acre property. I couldn't get enough support to move forward. In my frustration as I journaled and talked with the Lord, He called me to a different vision. He suggested we renovate the existing building into something like the one I had designed for the property. It would be smaller and not on the property, but we could still manage and test out how it would work. Once again the Lord provided the financial support and we moved forward with

the renovation. Ed with others worked to transform the century old building into the 3 Crosses Café. Pictures of this renovation are in Figure 24 below.



Figure 24. Renovation at 3crosses Café 482 North Mary Lake Road. Huntsville Ontario. January 27, 2013, by Jeff Roy.

We worked with a bare bones budget and ran groups as we did the renovation. It took about a year, but we finished and the 3crosses Café began to serve the local body and those who came to 3crosses for the Jesus Experience. Before and after pictures of the renovations are in figure 25 below.



Figure 25. Before and after Renovation of the 3crosses Cafe, 482 North Mary Lake Road. Huntsville Ontario. 2013, by Jeff Roy

Taking Root

Steve continued to help promote 3crosses and he assisted me in making a connection with the new President of the Alliance. When I heard Rev. Dave Hearn speak for the first time in 2006 I sensed God's Spirit on him in a wonderful way. At that point I had no idea that he would become president and come to 3crosses. In 2013 at the beginning of his first term he came to 3crosses with my friend Steve to participate in The Jesus Experience. It was an incredible day. We each had amazing encounters and Dave filled his journal with beautiful and challenging words from the Lord. Steve and I were amazed at how well Dave heard God's voice. We asked Dave how long he had been journaling and listening to God. Dave replied that he had never dialogued with God like that.

After leaving 3crosses he continued to CPJ and right away began to write about his experience at 3crosses and share publicly what he heard God saying with the denomination. He promised to bring back his team of VP's the next year and to my amazement he did. He also wrote an article about 3crosses in Alliance Life and in the same issue I was asked to write an article as well. Quotes from A.W. Tozer and A.B. Simpson... that we use at 3crosses... were being used by the President in his articles to the denomination and put in the Alliance Life magazine. A new National Spiritual Vitality committee was established with a goal of having every Alliance worker have a dramatic encounter with the indwelling Spirit before the end of 2016. Wonderful things were happening.

My friend Steve who had been writing small group curriculum and leading his church into a deeper more intimate experience with God through Listening

Prayer invited me to travel out west to a church from another denomination who was running workshops on listening prayer. I went with him and to our amazement we found that there were people from both districts to which 3crosses ministers. The hearing God's voice material that they took us through was almost identical to what we do at 3crosses. After 7 hard years of slugging, I finally started to see some awakening within my denomination. During this trip, I met a godly man named Charlie who has been helping us build a full-size Tabernacle replica for the Moses Experience.

Steve and I arranged a meeting with District leadership seeking financial support from them. We referenced all the things that were happening and how the National Church was telling the Districts to expect the Spirit to go ahead of them and raise up small ministries that can help achieve these goals of Holy Spirit encounter. We felt that God was doing just this at 3crosses. We didn't get everything we asked for, but we did get a development grant of \$5000 dollars from each District (we were asking for \$20,000 each). The head of the newly struck National Spiritual Vitality Committee (the Midwestern District Superintendent) planned a visit with his wife and in the fall 2015 they came to 3crosses. We had a great time and they gave financial support to us as well. Even with this increased support I was still half pay with no support staff (other than Ed). The Districts are always thinking big and want to transform the numbers in mass and quickly. My experience is that spiritual formation happens in one on one and where 2 or 3 are gathered together, and in small groups of 12. It happens with

deep connection and it requires commitment and accountability. There is no shortcut. No quick fix or pill to take.

McArdle's

I believe that the Lord used my human weaknesses to nurture and build a different kind of strength into me. As I mentioned growing up, I was limited in regard to muscle endurance. I would “hit a wall” while walking, running, swimming, or doing anything that required sustained use of my muscles without rest. I had muscle strength but no endurance and despite all efforts to overcome this I could not. I was not troubled by slow continuous work and could work alongside the toughest, but any prolonged physical exertion without rest would exhaust and send my muscles into extreme cramping. This defined me in so many ways I cannot clearly express to others what this was like. I was forty-six years old when I was diagnosed with McArdle's (a glycogen deficiency syndrome). More specifically, I do not have the gene that produces that enzyme that breaks down stored glycogen in my muscles into usable energy. Only one in 250,000 have this syndrome and it is usually not diagnosed until one is in their 40's. As one ages the effects of this disease become more pronounced and this is what led me to seek help from specialists which is how I was diagnosed. Oddly enough, it was that planned intensive hiking trip in Israel (2010) that spurred me on to investigate this. The 5th specialist I was referred to knew exactly what I had. He confirmed it with DNA testing. I finally knew what was wrong with me for all these years! So many years of not knowing, full of embarrassment, hiding,

covering up or finding ways to cope. Disappointing my dad and my friends who expected more from me was hard to take. During those years I had to find ways to push through or cover up my limitations in order to make it. I also had a desire to succeed in other ways to prove myself and I learned how to push through. I believe that the Lord used this weakness to build into me what I would need for ministry.

A Thorn in the Flesh

In the fall of 2014 while cutting rock on a trail up the mountain... I experienced a full-on McArdle's cramping of muscles. Coming off the mountain I was in bad shape and began urinating a red powdery like substance. It was time to rush to the hospital where they found out I was off their charts for Creatine Kinase levels (broken down muscle in bloodstream) which means at the minimum I was 5 times over the amount set that would indicate potential kidney failure. I was in full rhabdomyolysis. Rhabdomyolysis is the breakdown of the kidneys resulting from excessive muscle tissue damage that releases broken down muscle fiber contents into the blood. These substances are extremely harmful to the kidney and often cause kidney damage. Over the next few days I went back to the hospital for saline drip to try and dilute out the broken-down muscle that could cause my kidneys to shut down. I was instructed to drink lots of water. During this time Steve called and shared that a lady with a prophetic gift who had moved away and no longer attended his church called him up out of the blue and was very concerned about me. Steve hadn't talked to her for years. In the past she had

given us words from the Lord affirming and encouraging us during the hard times when we were buying the property and laying the foundation for 3crosses. The Lord had laid it on her heart to pray for me and given her the sense that something was wrong with my blood flow and to call Steve so that he could call me. I told Steve that I had just had a McArdle's episode and in some ways it was blood flow related but that I was fine and to thank her.

Over the next 2 days I started to have very bad chest pains that felt like indigestion. Every 20 minutes or so... I was gripped by a pain... which caused me to stop talking... after 4 or 5 minutes it would release me. The next day I was back up the mountain to see what Ed had accomplished. When I came down as we sat there in the truck I realized I could not read the texts on my phone. I tried to read the large sign on my shop 60 feet away and it was blurry. This was very strange and with the blurred vision came a headache. My girls went off to a church supper but I stayed home (this was rare). My headache and the uncomfortable feeling in my chest only got worse. No medication I took helped. I even tried taking a sauna thinking the headache was sinus related. When my family arrived home I had been in discomfort for hours and it was getting worse. Soon I was inconsolable and the chest pain was back and worse than ever. It got to the point where I asked Jan to drive me to the hospital. This was a rare request for even with the muscle cramps I would always drive myself. I can still remember that drive and the way the intense pain would come, grip and hold me, and then release me back into the steady pain. The triage nurse looked at me and

bypassed everything and took me right into the ER and began administering pain medication. I guess they are trained to see and sense these things. She was so caring, like an angel, as she watched me and looked into my eyes . She was able to see exactly when the pain left... three hours later after the 5th shot of pain killer (2 of morphine). I finally felt relief and she could see it. Oddly enough by morning I felt fine and was in the care of a great doctor who I personally knew (a former elder at our church). I thought he would just send me home but proceeded to inform me that that would be malpractice, and that I had a serious heart attack and needed to be sent down to Newmarket for an emergency angiogram and possible angioplasty. He told me that Troponin is broken down heart muscle in the blood stream and that it shows up several hours after there has been a heart attack with damage to the heart and that anything over a 1 is considered a heart attack. When I arrived at the hospital my level was around 2... 7 hours later I was 12.3. I was airlifted to Newmarket and found to have 95 percent and 75 percent blockage in two arteries that supplied the heart and they inserted two stints. What encouraged me through this event was that God was aware of my condition and wanted me to know it and spoke to me through this lady whom He had used previously to speak to me.

As I have learned to nurture awareness, encounter and surrender that brings me to a place of abiding I begin to see God at work in the big things and in the details. During the months leading up to this my massage therapist was learning about my rare muscle condition. She had been trying to connect me with

someone who she thought had McArdle's. I was doubtful it is such rare syndrome but told her to pass along my number. The day after arriving home from the hospital I received a call from this lady the massage therapist knew who supposedly had the same thing as me. I found out from her that she really did have this very rare condition, that she had earned a PHD studying McArdle's and had written a book on her life journey. She happened to be heading up to Muskoka the next day with a friend who had McArdle's as well and he happened to be the foremost expert on this genetic disorder in the United Kingdom. This man was heading back to the UK and had never been to Huntsville and probably wouldn't return. In addition, I found out he had eight stents over the years. One day out of the hospital after a McArdle's episode, followed by a heart attack and two stents, the Lord had arranged for these two people to be sitting in my living room! It needs to be mentioned that I was 46 and had never met another person with McArdle's and that there across Canada there are only nineteen people that see the specialist I see for this rare condition. This was all so amazing and encouraging.

At the beginning of my journey... God called me and revealed to me that satisfaction for the soul involves face to face encounter with God. What wasn't clear was how I could continue to nurture this awareness of His presence within day by day and moment by moment. I did not find answers to this in the church or at Seminary or at the leadership level of Denominations. I just satisfied and worked on growing the church without any deep abiding connection with the One

who lives within. God was present, but I was not aware. Tozer describes it like this:

If God is present at every point in space, if we cannot go where He is not, cannot even conceive of a place where He is not, why then has not that presence become the one universally celebrated fact of the world? The patriarch Jacob, in the waste howling wilderness, gave the answer to that question. He saw a vision of God and cried out in wonder, surely the LORD is in this place, and I knew it not. Jacob had never been for one small division of a moment outside the circle of that all-pervading presence. But he knew it not. That was his trouble, and it is ours. Men do not know that God is here. What a difference it would make if they knew. *The presence and the manifestation of the presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of His presence.* On our part there must be surrender to the Spirit of God, for His work it is to show us the Father and the Son. If we cooperate with Him in loving obedience, God will manifest Himself to us, and that manifestation will be the difference between a nominal Christian life and a life radiant with the light of His face. (Tozer 2015, Kindle Locations 662-671, emphasis mine).

I believe that the presence has always been with me, even as with those in the Old Testament. There were times of awareness and connection but I missed the abiding manifest presence in my life. In the first two stages of the model that I will present in chapter four (see figure 28) Pre-Salvation (God without) and Sanctification (God within) God brings about moments for potential awakening into awareness of His presence and activity. Looking back, I see so many things that could fall into this category. These instances usually defy the probabilities of expectation in one's life. I am sure you have had many of these moments as well. Honour God by making a list with Him sometime. I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised. Here's a casual list of things that come to mind for me right now as I asked God to help bring them to mind. Most of these moments were mentioned

above in my story and reveal parts of the expanded AESA Cycle (see figure 30). The Santa Claus letter incident (put this in for fun), the out of time experiences, the bully incident, the drowning experience, the Ouija shooting glass, God's repeated call to come to the mountains, the cross in the sky, the not fighting God anymore surrender, God telling me to leave Clarksburg, the 3-word sign, the cross carrier encounter, the hitchhiker, the Satisfaction for the Soul message, the car door opening incident, affirming words of the Lord from Pam through Steve, the reading of the right books at just the right time, timely Seminars (Hearing God and Promise Keepers Experience), timely trips to Israel, God's Voice speaking through movies, songs, pictures, dreams, darkness, relational encounters, God's Voice speaking from within – journaling, God's Voice speaking through others, God's Voice speaking through the Scriptures, the mountain property being right next to my house, the 3 natural trees at the top of the Golgotha site ready, waiting, and willing to become crosses, the lower 3 crosses installed as sign posts (my plan) that become a sacred space (God's plan), how God connected me years before with the outside donor who covered the property and renovation expenses, how God connected me with Steve Kerr and Rob Alexander whose steadfast support allowed 3 Crosses to continue, Ed's story, connections with all the locals who supported and served 3 crosses faithfully, and so many more. The list regarding God's work in my life is endless. It begins at conception; which is itself a miracle of God. It then continues moment by moment as He the Eternal Word sustains me and the universe. Each breath is a gift from God. Yet so often I go

through life oblivious and unaware of all He is doing and not just in my life but in the lives of billions around the world. I hope that in my story and yours you can see how awareness, encounter, surrender, and abide are key parts to being formed and experience union with God.

God has taken me on an intellectual, emotional, and experiential journey of discovery. He has revealed to me how I can be more aware of Him as present with me. I have not arrived but His work in me continues and I am confident that He will never leave me nor forsake me and that he will complete the good work he began in me. My Story continues... and so does yours!

CHAPTER THREE:
THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD

A voice is more than a message, more than a printed page, more than even an inspired book. A voice means the presence of the person who speaks, and his personal and living words to us. And so God speaks to us, not only in the Bible, but by His own personal voice. (Simpson 2012, Kindle Location 14418-14419).

My spiritual journey, my experience in ministry, and my study of the Scriptures has helped develop my understanding of how people grow spiritually and how that growth can be facilitated resulting in the spiritual formation model presented in the next chapter. A fundamental part of my model involves an awakening to, and then nurturing awareness of, the personal work of the Eternal Word of God in one's life.

Believers commonly use this phrase; "Word of God" to refer to the Scriptures. They say or hear; "Word of God" and in their minds think of a leather-bound authoritative book called the Bible. I believe that a larger and more personal view of the Word of God is fundamental for spiritual formation. Indeed, studying and understanding the Scriptures is also a wonderful and essential part of spiritual formation. However, alongside of this, there needs to be personal encounters with the Eternal Word of God. Through the Spirit the Eternal Word of

God dwells within believers and is the primary agent who can bring about spiritual formation and life change. It is through the Eternal Word that the Father speaks and works in creation, redemption, sanctification, and glorification. Part of my doctoral work involved enrolling in a directed reading course in which I reviewed the use of Word of God in the New Testament and the Word of the Lord in the Old Testament while reporting to Dr. Ron Kidd. I also reviewed the use of these phrases in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. This chapter will present a summary of those findings that will help set the stage for the role that the Eternal Word of God plays in my model of spiritual formation.

Logos Theou in the New Testament

In the New Testament there are 39 references to the phrase *Logos Theou* (Word of God). The Greek word, *logos*, is used to refer to words that are spoken or uttered and is translated in English as word. In the Bible, another Greek word; *graphe*, is used to refer to written words. It occurs in the New Testament thirty-one times and each time it is translated as scripture. The context of these passages reveals that the New Testament writers (and Jesus) used *graphe* whenever referencing Old Testament scripture. With this delineation in mind what were the writers referring to when they used the phrase *logos*? Clearly it was something more than Scripture or they would have used *graphe*. Did they have a larger view of the Word of God or did they see the Word of God as in fact the Scriptures. For sure they could not be using it to refer to the New Testament Scripture which had yet to come together and be accepted into the canon. Indeed, references to *Logos*

Theou found in the earlier New Testament writings could not be referring to books that had yet to be written let alone authorized as canon. These references are made before the idea of adding a New Testament to the Old Testament, came into being. The real question to ask is what the original writers meant when they used the term, and what did the original hearers understand when they heard or read the words *logos*. Jesus speaks of the Word of God as coming to people in his day and even before He was born (Luke 8:11,21; John 10:35). In Jesus' mind, before any of the New Testament was penned, he speaks of people hearing the Word of God. Long before the New Testament books were considered part of the canon, the Word of God is referred to as already existing. Table 1 that follows presents New Testament references relating to what the Word of God did long before the Scriptures were canonized:

Table 1. Sample of the usage of Word of God in the New Testament

“Word of God”	Scripture
Came to John the Baptist	Luke 3:2
Comes from God and is heard	Luke 4:4; 5:1
Is the seed	Luke 8:11
Came to people and is heard	Luke 8:21; 22:28; John 10:35
Spoken	Acts 4:31; Hebrews 13:7
Spreads	Acts 6:7
Grows and multiplies	Acts 12:24
Is preached	Acts 13:5; 17:13
Taught	Acts 18:11
Received	Acts 8:14; 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:13
Is sought after to be heard.	Acts 13:7, 44
Rejected, spoken	Acts 13:46; Romans 9:6
Brings salvation when one hears	Romans 10:17
Comes to people, reaches people	1 Corinthians 14:36-37
Peddled	2 Corinthians 2:17
Can be presented in fullness	Colossians 1:25

“Word of God”	Scripture
Is differentiated from the word of men	1 Thessalonians 2:13
Sanctifies	1 Tim 4:5
Not chained	2 Tim 2:9
Can be blasphemed	Titus 2:5
Living, active, powerful, sharp, works at the soul level	Hebrews 4:12
Can be tasted and is good	Hebrews 6:5
Created all things, in all things, maintains all things	Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1; 2 Peter 3:5
Lives and abides forever	1 Peter 1:23
Abides in people	1 John 2:14
People bare witness too and are persecuted for and slain for	Revelation 1:2; 1:9; 6:9; 20:4
Is proclaimed by angels	Rev 19:9
Is Jesus	Rev 19:13

Logos (Word) in the NT is referred to as living and active, growing and multiplying, proclaiming and being heard, and changing lives. *Logos* is used to refer to Jesus as the One who through all things were made and are sustained (John 1; Colossians 1). Clearly this is referencing something more than words written in a book yet to be compiled and canonized. It would be wrong to give people the idea that the NT writings that proclaim the wonderful, living, active, personal, sacrificial, merciful Word of God are synonymous with Him and His personal presence. My concern in the adoption of this phrase “Word of God” as synonymous with the Bible, is that it de-personalizes and objectifies something/someone who is to be personal, relational and powerfully present. It is in fact the Eternal Word who inspired the written word and illuminates it as one reads and meditates on it. The written Word reveals and teaches us about the Eternal Word with whom we are to have a personal relationship. We don’t have a relationship with a book. The book reveals Him. The Eternal Word was at work in

creation, the Patriarchs, the nation Israel and prophets, kings, and commoners. He manifested Himself in the flesh as Jesus Christ and died for the sins of people, indwells those who repent and believe and follow, and lives forever to intercede on behalf His followers.

The Holy Spirit inspired the writers to add the Greek word *Theou* (God), to *Logos*. By adding the word *Theou* to *Logos*, God was making reference to His presence manifested as a voice that speaks or guides thoughts/words within the hearts and minds of men and women. First calling and enabling people to believe repent and be saved, and then leading them through a journey of sanctification and into a deep abiding experiential union. The context of the *Logos Theou* references in the New Testament supports this. God wanted people to connect the idea that words spoken from Him through the Eternal Word by the Spirit can be received as we think, reflect and feel. This idea of formation from the Eternal Word within makes sense for people in the early church could not afford scrolls and were not able to read. Through His indwelling presence; the Word of God guides us and forms us into His image, as we nurture the AESA cycle path of awareness, encounter, surrender and abide. Herein lies the root of my Formation Model.

***Logos Theou* and the Early Church Fathers**

A better sense of how this phrase was used and understood can be gained by looking at the references to Word of God in the letters and writings of the Early Church Fathers. The writings of the Early Church Fathers emphasized or

expounded deeper theological truth often while arguing against heresy. Those writings were not writings to the common people. They were writings to other deep thinkers (scholars of the day). Context and focus and bias vary from letter to letter and father to father. The Word of God references are rich and full and need to be read through slowly and often several times to comprehend.

In hundreds of references to *Logos Theou* made by the Early Church Fathers none referred directly to the written works of the New Testament. This was the same in my study of the New Testament references. Whenever writers of this time were referring to authoritative written works they used the Greek word for Scripture (*graphe* – 1 Tim 3:16). In the 3rd and 4th centuries we begin to see clear references to some of the NT letters and they seem to be given the same authority of OT Scripture by the Father quoting them. Even so, when this happens these references center in on the New Testament writings being Scripture (*graphe*) and not *Logos Theou*. All *Logos Theou* references in the New Testament & Early Church Fathers referred to a living presence, the second member of the Trinity and not the compiled and authorized canon. It was clear is that the authors believed that the Word was living and active and could enliven many things to reveal truth as seen in the sample references below. Revelation and illumination can be made manifest by the Word of God speaking through creation, writings, teachings, study, meditation, contemplation, relationships, and situations. The Early Church Fathers referenced *Logos Theou* over 1200 times and just the word *logos* can be found on most pages. As one might expect *logos* was a central

theme. It is this very focus that helped define that *Logos Theou* was indeed considered to refer to much more than the Bible. The Word is at work all around us and within us. The early church fathers recognized this and considered *Logos Theou* to be more than mere words or utterances, or even inward concepts. In the following quote, Ambrose reveals his larger view of the Word of God:

The Son is the Word of the Father— the Word, not in the sense in which we understand the term, but a living and active Word... The Son, as the Word, carries out His Father's Will. Now, a word, as we understand and use it, is an utterance... But the words we speak have no direct efficacy in themselves, *it is the Word of God alone, which is neither an utterance, nor an inward concept, as they call it, but works efficaciously, is living, and has healing power.* (Ambrose 2016, Kindle Locations 3734-3741, emphasis added)

The *Logos Theou* lives, breathes, creates, sustains, redeems, heals, loves, forgives, bears witness, restores, calls, sanctifies, and justifies. Indeed, the Holy Scriptures can do many of these things, but only as the Word makes them living and active.

Ambrose also emphasizes that the Word of God descends and dwells within us:

God, indeed, never descends from any place; for He says: I fill heaven and earth. [Jeremiah 23: 24] But He seems to descend when the Word of God enters our hearts, as the prophet has said: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. [Isaiah 40: 3] We are to do this, so that, as He Himself promised, He may come together with the Father and make His abode with us. [John 14: 23] It is clear, then, how He comes. (Ambrose 2016, Kindle Locations 4536-4542)

It is so clear from the Church Fathers, the New Testament writers and Jesus Himself that the Word is to come and dwell within us. We unite with Him and become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The expectation that believers should have is that He (the *Logos*) is one with us and will lead and guide them from within all in accord with what the Scriptures teach. Even more than that; as

we become this new creation, we participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). He is not living within as a separate being, but in and through the Spirit two become one . His thoughts are at times merging with our own; leading, guiding comforting and even convicting. Athanasius relates:

For when the mind of men does not hold converse with bodies, nor has mingled with it from without anything of their lust, but is wholly above them, dwelling with itself as it was made to begin with, then, transcending the things of sense and all things human, it is raised up on high; *and seeing the Word, it sees in Him also the Father of the Word, taking pleasure in contemplating Him, and gaining renewal by its desire toward Him;* (Athanasius 2016, Kindle Locations 23200-23206, emphasis added)

To Athanasius the Word of God was so much more than some principle of thought, guided creation, or rational thought consisting of syllables using air to become manifest. The Word of God goes far beyond all this being different from all things made:

But by Word I mean, not that which is involved and inherent in all things created, which some are wont to call the seminal principle, which is without soul and has no power of reason or thought, but only works by external art, according to the skill of him who applies it— nor such a word as belongs to rational beings and which consists of syllables, and has the air as its vehicle of expression— but I mean the living and powerful Word of the good God, the God of the Universe, the very Word which is God [John 1: 1], Who while different from things that are made, and from all Creation, is the One own Word of the good Father, Who by His own providence ordered and illumines this Universe. (Athanasius 2016, Kindle Location 23910, emphasis added)

I am arguing for a larger view of the *Logos Theou* and the Early Church Fathers and the NT writers were as well. These Greek words *Logos Theou* were the best they had to reveal what needed to be revealed. In their day, many were trying to limit who Jesus, as the Word was. It should be noted that the Arian controversy resulted in many Early Church Father references to Jesus as the

Logos to defend a higher view of Jesus (He's more than a created being). These people (Arians) wanted to give Jesus a beginning and limit his full participation in the Godhead. This makes me wonder if the modern-day use of the phrase Word of God to refer to the Bible limits His inward metaphysical work of transformation (renewal of mind and heart) in the lives of people. When a person picks up the Bible or they immediately automatically say or think Word of God, boundaries may be set in their mind regarding who the Word of God is, what he can do, and how He will do it. The early church fathers would never think to consider the Scripture as *Logos Theou*. They actually wouldn't even have a New Testament available. This left them trying to explain this mysterious active living creating sustaining personal force that took on flesh in Jesus Christ.

When one begins to think of Word of God as an inspired book they can lose the sense of God's personal speaking presence and power within. It is this personal indwelling presence that brings revelation and illumination (from and to the Scriptures), and edification, enablement, calling, and even conviction to the soul.

There is something that is being revealed to me as I read and study. Alongside words that contain truth (written, journaled, spoken or thought) there is efficacy or enablement, or power to change that must come for the truth to be received and acted upon. This is where in and through the Spirit the Word becomes living and active in one's life. For many, the Scriptures do in fact become living and active as they read or hear the Scriptures proclaimed. It is the

living Word that illuminates and brings revelation often calling one to change from within. Without the activation or illumination from the Word the words written on the pages of the Bible lie locked in slumber just as Tozer puts it.

The life is in the speaking words. God's word in the Bible can have power only because it corresponds to God's word in the universe. It is the present Voice which makes the written Word all-powerful. Otherwise it would lie locked in slumber within the covers of a book (Tozer 1982, 74).

In the same way that the Bible becomes living and active by the Eternal Word so can other things like life situations and creation. The *Logos* proclaims and reveals Himself through creation (Romans 1, Colossians 1). The *Logos* activates and brings about awakening and awareness in a person through life circumstances which can lead to encounter and formation. Kittel also presents a larger view of the *Logos* and defines the ways in which the *Logos* was referred to.

Secondly, we have in view Logos; as a metaphysical reality and an established term in philosophy and theology, from which there finally develops in later antiquity, under alien influences, a cosmological entity and hypostasis of the deity... But this Logos is not taken to be something which is merely grasped theoretically. It claims a man. It determines his true life and conduct (Kittel 1964, 80-1, emphasis added).

The Word has complete power to do as He wishes to create, sustain, save, consume, punish and condemn. The Scriptures reveal that His power is simply made manifest by what He says. Thereby, a person can make His power active in their lives simply by doing what He says. In John's gospel Mary reveals the truth of this by saying to the servants "Whatever He says to you, do it." (John 2:5). When the servants do what Jesus says; water becomes wine! Everything that exists was created through the Word and is held together this very moment by the Word (Colossians. 1). The Word has complete power and authority to bring about

change in the physical world, the spiritual world, and in the minds and hearts of men and women as they become aware and surrender (Matthew 28:18, John 17:2, Ephesians 1:21-23, Colossians 2:10).

In the following quote Augustine's lays down his view of the Word of God as Christ the Son of God, unchangeable wisdom, ever-present, always working, unchangeable and coeternal with the Father. He emphasizes the living, active, personal, consistent and timeless nature of the Word and His perfect plan (Augustine 2016, Kindle Locations 51114-51124).

Basil the Great eloquently declares that even voice and sound are not truly reflective of the Word. Basil says... "there is no need for words: thoughts of the soul are sufficient to transmit the will. As I said then, this language is only a wise and ingenious contrivance to set our minds seeking the Person to whom the words are addressed." (Basil the Great 2016, Kindle Locations 156744-156747). This implies that there is a better way, there is a way of communing with God in the depths of the soul that goes beyond mere words and involves the Word of God. Yet for us living on this side of eternity there is a necessity for these deep expressions within the soul to be translated into words that we can respond to (in whatever language we understand). This brings a new dimension to the concept of being a temple of the Lord, indwelt by the Word of God and able to hear Him speak and even commune with groans that words cannot express (Romans 8:23-28). He, the *Logos*; so much more than written words or spoken words for that matter. Basil elaborates that the Word of God does not need audible voice or even

the written Scriptures that only vaguely represents the Word of God, to communicate.

And first let us ask how God speaks? Is it in our manner? Does His intelligence receive an impression from objects, and, after having conceived them, make them known by particular signs appropriate to each of them? Has He consequently recourse to the organs of voice to convey His thoughts? Is He obliged to strike the air by the articulate movements of the voice, to unveil the thought hidden in His heart? Would it not seem like an idle fable to say that God should need such a circuitous method to manifest His thoughts? And is it not more conformable with true religion to say, that the divine will and the first impetus of divine intelligence are the Word of God? *It is He whom Scripture vaguely represents, to show us that God has not only wished to create the world, but to create it with the help of a co-operator.* Scripture might continue the history as it is begun: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; afterwards He created light, then He created the firmament. But, by making God command and speak, the Scripture tacitly shows us Him to Whom this order and these words are addressed (Basil the Great 1989, Kindle Locations 156731-156739, emphasis mine).

Clement of Alexandria, from the 1st Century relates that through the indwelling Word of God and the Holy Spirit we become His finely tuned instrument: “...the Word of God... having tuned by the Holy Spirit, the universe, and especially man— who, composed of body and soul” (Clement of Alexandria 2016, Kindle Locations 158607-158611)

The refining work of the indwelling Lord is clearly pictured. Clement had the clear sense that the Word of God has always ceaselessly and clearly been communicating to people through speech.

And now the Word Himself clearly speaks to you, shaming your unbelief; yea, I say, the Word of God became man, that you may learn from man how man may become God. Is it not then monstrous, my friends, that while God is ceaselessly exhorting us to virtue, we should spurn His kindness and reject salvation? (Clement 2016, Kindle Locations 158656-158658)

The Early Church Fathers are jam-packed with references to the Word and Word of God and His greatness and proper place as a full ranking member of the Trinity. I believe that embracing this larger view of the Word of God with His physical and metaphysical roles in creating, sustaining, calling, saving, indwelling and sanctifying needs to be a fundamental part in one's Philosophy or Model of Spiritual Formation. In my model, the Word of God is active, working through avenues of formation along the pathways of mind and heart to bring about transformation in the soul. To put to death the flesh and to become fully alive and united with the Spirit.

Dabar Yahweh in the Old Testament

Having reviewed the use of the Word of God let's turn our attention toward the references to Word of the Lord in the Old Testament. Does this phrase have any connection to the Word of God in the New Testament? Is it referring to the work of the pre-incarnate Jesus? Does this involve direct communication between God and men? Old Testament Scripture reveals that the Word of the Lord was used to reference times that God was active in communicating His message (and Himself) to people. This came across powerfully when the Scripture survey exposed the importance of six Hebrew words that relate to God communicating (see table 2 – next page).

Table 2. Six Hebrew words relating to God communicating.

Strong's	Hebrew	Transliteration	Phonetic Spelling	English
01696	דבר	<i>Dabar</i>	<i>daw-bar</i>	speech
01697	דבר	<i>Dabar</i>	<i>daw-baw</i>	speak
0559	אמר	<i>Amar</i>	aw-mar	saying
06310	פה	<i>Peh</i>	peh	mouth
06963	קול	<i>Qwol</i>	kole	voice

As we shall see these words paint a vivid picture of how God communicated to people in the Old Testament. In this chapter I will use the phonetic spelling to help bring clarity to which word I am referencing.

The phrase “Word of the Lord” occurs 245 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament (NKJV). These references are split between the giving or receiving of a “word of the Lord ,” and the response to a “word of the Lord” that was already given. In reading through these references several patterns emerge. In over 1/3 (96) of the occurrences, the basic phrase *daw-baw* of the Lord occurred like this: “the *daw-baw* of the Lord came to...(WHO), saying (HOW IT CAME).....

Here is an example; “But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying,....” (2 Samuel 7:4). The context and qualifying verbs of “came to” and “saying” (*amar*) make it very clear that “the Word of the Lord came to” certain people (Prophets/Kings/commoners) and said things. What is not clear is that whether this was an audible word or a word that came into their heart, mind, or spirit. On the next page Table 3 lists people from the Scriptures that received a “word” in this way include:

Table 3. Old Testament characters who received a Word of the Lord

Person	Scripture
Abram	Genesis 15:1; 4
Samuel	1 Samuel 15:102
Nathan	2 Samuel 7:4
Gad	2 Samuel 24:11
Solomon	1 Kings 6:11
Jehu	1 Kings 16:1
Elijah	1 Kings 17-21 (6 times)
Isaiah	2 Kings 15:12; 20:4 & Isaiah 38:4; 39:5 (4 times)
David	1 Chronicles 22:8
Shemiah	2 Chronicles 11:2 (twice)
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 1-40 (20 times)
Ezekiel	Ezekiel 2-28 (47 times)
Jonah	Jonah 1:1; 3:3 (twice)
Haggai	Haggai 1-2 (5 times)
Zechariah	Zechariah 1-7 (6 times)

In sixty-seven of these ninety-six references the phrase is extended and personalized to include; “the Word of the Lord came to me saying (*amar*) . (Moses – 1, David – 1, Jeremiah - 12, Ezekiel - 49, or Zechariah - 4). In five instances, the phrase changes slightly to “the Word of the Lord came to him, but is still followed by the verb “saying” or “said” (*amar*) (Abram - Gen 15:4 Elijah – 1 Kings 17-19, 2 Kings 29:4). Finally, six times, the base phrase is extended to “the Word of the Lord that came to” with the name, immediately following (Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, and Micah). It is quite clear that these 96 references to *daw-baw* of *Yahweh* refer to spoken words that come from *Yahweh* and are directed to an individual, or a nation through an individual. This is not surprising since the very definition of verbal plenary inspiration inerrancy of the Scriptures rests on the idea of God speaking to people with an emphasis that it is not just dictation (Erickson 1985. 207).

An almost equal number of the Word of the Lord references occur without the words “came”, “saying,” or “said.” In these instances, something was being communicated about the “word of the Lord” and often it related to the way the people responded to the word (see Table 4).

Table 4. Responses to a Word of the Lord (daw=baw).

Responses to a “ <i>daw-baw</i> of the Lord	Scripture
Feared	Exodus 9:20
Despised	Numbers 15:31
limits people	Numbers 22:8-20
Declared	Deuteronomy 5:5
was rare	1 Samuel 3:1
not yet revealed	1 Samuel 3:7
Revealed	1 Samuel 3:21
Rejected	1 Samuel 15:23
Proven	2 Samuel 23:31
caused people to cry out	1 Kings 2:1
prophetically	
was fulfilled	1 Kings 2:27
Disobeyed	1 Kings 2:21
was with him	2 Kings 3:12
something heard or to hear	2 Kings 20:16; 2 Chronicles 18:18;
	Isaiah 1:10; 39:5; 66:5 Jeremiah 2:4;
	7:2; 9:20; 17:20; 19:3; 21:11; 22:2;
	22:29; 29:30; 31:10; 34:4; 42:15; 44:26;
	Ezekiel 6:3; 16:35; 20:47; 25:3; 34:7,9;
	36:1,4; 37:4; Hosea 4:1; Amos 7:16
spoken	2 Kings 20:19; Isaiah 39:8
not kept	1 Chronicles 10:13; 2 Chronicles 34:21
inquired for	2 Chronicles 18:4
is flawless	2 Samuel 22:31
written down	2 Chronicles. 34:21
tests people	Psalms 105:19
not delighted in	Jeremiah 6:10
comes to people	Jeremiah 25:3
is with people	Jeremiah 27:18
sought after but not found	Amos 8:12
against people	Zephaniah 2:5
is a burden	Zechariah. 12:1; Malachi 1:1

Comparing these references with the way the Word of God was at work in the New Testament we see a lot of similarity with the kinds of things the Word of the Lord and the Word of God did in the lives of people. The equal split between the Word of the Lord references related to the way it was given versus the way it was responded to is interesting. I believe that through this, the Lord was revealing that the response to His Word was just as important as the giving of His Word. Once again, this parallels New Testament usage. In the Old Testament the Word of the Lord was referenced in Scripture but it was something more than just Scripture; it was a personal message from God that was meant to proclaim truth into the hearts of those who would listen and often demanded a response. “Do not eat from the tree of life,” “build an ark,” “go to the land I will show you,” “Take your only Son Isaac,” “take your shoes off,” “set my people free,” “build a Tabernacle,” and on and on—very clear language communicating what one is being called to do personally. God as the indwelling Word through the Spirit speaks to us this way in the depths of our mind and heart. The accounts of the Word in the Scriptures reflect the AESA cycle. Awareness of the Word precedes encounter with the Word, which is followed by a response, hopefully surrender, which in turn leaves us abiding with Him in peace.

Daw-baw versus Daw-bar

The Word of the Lord references above all use *daw-baw* <01697 *dabar*>. Now we turn our attention from *daw-baw* <01697 דבר *dabar*> to *daw-bar* <01696 דבר *dabar*>. Like *logos* this Hebrew word refers to a thing proclaimed or stated; a

message or command that comes from a personalized source. When *daw-bar* is used, it is most often translated speak, spoke, spoken, talk, commune and has the sense that it is focused on the delivery of the *daw-baw*. Here are a few examples.

Exodus 4:30 And Aaron spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> all the words <01697 - *daw-baw*> which the LORD had spoken <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Moses.
Exodus 20:1 And God spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> all these words <01697 - *daw-baw*>, saying:

Exodus 24:3 So Moses came and told the people all the words <01697 - *daw-baw*> of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words <01697 - *daw-baw*> which the LORD has said <01696 - *daw-bar*> we will do.”

Deuteronomy 5:22 “These words <01697 - *daw-baw*> the LORD spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more.

There are 139 verses where <01696 - *daw-bar*> occurs in this form; the “Lord (or God) spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*>” to (who)... saying <0559>...(what).”

God does this with Moses, Aaron, Noah, Joshua, the assembly, the children of Israel, Samuel, David, Elijah, the prophets, Gad, Manasseh, Ahaz, Isaiah, to Israel and Judah, Jeremiah, against Babylon. A sense of this follows in the next few verses:

Genesis 8:15 Then God spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Noah, saying <0559>,

Genesis 17:3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked <01696 - *daw-bar*> with him, saying <0559>:

Exodus 6:10 And the LORD spoke <01696> to Moses, saying <0559>,

Leviticus 15:1 And the LORD spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Moses and Aaron, saying <0559>,

Deuteronomy 32:48 Then the LORD spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Moses that very same day, saying <0559>:

Joshua 20:1 The LORD also spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Joshua, saying <0559>

2 Kings 21:10 And the LORD spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> by His servants the prophets, saying <0559>,

1 Chronicles 21:9 And the LORD spoke <01696 - *daw-bar*> to Gad, David's seer, saying <0559>,

The Scriptures are very clear that God was speaking, and people were responding. One response phrase was “according to the Word of the Lord,” which occurs 33 times in the Old Testament. This phrase occurs seven times in the Pentateuch and each time the Hebrew word; *peh* <06310> (mouth) is used instead of *dabar* <01697 - *daw-baw*>. A literal translation of this would be “according to the mouth of the Lord.” *Peh* has imagery of an opening, and as such is used to refer to a mouth or the mouth as an organ of speech. In the Bible *peh* is translated as “mouth” - 340 times, as “commandment / command / instruction” - 37 times, and as “word” - 22 times. Using *peh* for commandment / command / instruction gives the sense that the command came from the Lord's mouth. This discovery shed some new light on this study and how translations can be misleading. For instance:

So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command (mouth) <06310> of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command (mouth) <06310> of the LORD they would journey. (Numbers 9:20)

Translating the word *peh* as command, betrays this sense that the source of the instruction was in fact from the mouth of the Lord which the Hebrew translation is very clear about. This should not be taken lightly for the original use

of *peh* makes a direct connection between the laws and commandments as being the spoken words of the Lord that came directly from His mouth; personally. This is important to my model because I believe spiritual formation happens as God speaks directly into the hearts of men and women. The fundamental difference is that in the Old Testament the Word came to, or upon people, while in the New Testament because of Jesus sacrifice the Spirit dwells within making it possible for the Word to speak from within. The verses that follow reveal how *dabar* and mouth link together to clearly communicate the personal source of the message. This gives a clear sense of how the Bible reveals that God communicates personally with people.

Exodus 34:27 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words <01697 - *daw-baw* - *dabar*>, for according to the tenor <06310 - *peh*> of these words <01697 - *daw-baw*> I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”

It is very clear that the words from the Lord are in fact, initially spoken (audibly or in heart or mind), for the Lord asks Moses to write them down.

Deuteronomy 18:18 I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words <01697 - *daw-baw*> in His mouth <06310>, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

Ezekiel 3:17 Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word <01697 - *daw-baw*> from My mouth <06310>, and give them warning from Me:

Jeremiah 36:6 You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction <06310 - *peh*>, the words <01697 - *daw-baw*> of the LORD,

From these passages, it is clear to see that the imagery of the word *peh* is the opening (mouth) out of which words, instructions or commands flow. This

only serves to substantiate that *dabar* <01697 - *daw-baw*> is referring to the Lord's personal words being spoken. In the Old Testament instruction or commands from the Lord come as they are spoken from His mouth. God still works this way to form and lead people only now He whispers from within. This is fundamental to the application of the AESA model. Indeed, in the church, obeying or disobeying objective rules and rituals is very different from obeying or disobeying a personal Word of the Lord that is spoken into one's heart. The personalizing of it brings an empowerment to those who love the Lord to rise up and obey. It is important to note that any inner leading from the Eternal Word will line up with the objective teaching of the written Word. This is also reflected when a message is preached intellectually and received and enjoyed intellectually, it may not bring about repentance and change. When the same message is preached personally and with the Spirit and it is received spiritually and personally by someone; there is an enabling that can bring about or initiate change. A rulebook specifying generic rules to be followed from a father or mother has less impact than a personalized encounter where the parent looks in the eyes of their children, assures them of their love and pleads with the child to change, obey, or follow. God's Word from within made manifest and spoken to people personally is where the power lies. When God speaks personally to me from within, I receive His message in a different way than when I just read about His message. This can cut both ways for sometimes I may avoid listening so I will not hear what I expect Him to say.

Dabar Yahweh in the Early Church Fathers

Upon reviewing “the word of the Lord” phrases in the writings of the Early Church Fathers, it became clear that most references occur as simple quotations from the Scriptures. As with the early church father references to Word of God, many of the Word of the Lord references relate to the Arian controversy. The connected Word of the Lord references in the Old Testament to Jesus, in support of arguments against the ideas of Arianism.

Ambrose also clearly sees Jesus as the Word of God and uses this as a defense against Arianism...

But perchance you believe not others, nor the Son. Hear, then, the Father saying: My heart has brought forth out of its depth the good Word. The Word, then, is good— the Word, of Whom it is written: And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [John 1: 1] If, therefore, the Word is good, and the Son is the Word of God, surely, though it displeases the Arians, the Son of God is God. Let them now at least blush for shame. (Ambrose 2016, 29, Kindle Locations 2414-2417).

Use of “the word of the Lord” and the “Word of God” in these ways lends credibility to the idea that the Church Fathers saw Jesus, the *Logos*, the *Logos Theou* as *Dabar Yahweh*; for they are quoting both *Dabar Yahweh* passages and Word/Word of God to prove that Jesus is not a created being. In doing so, they infer that they believe the Word of the Lord, the Word of God and Jesus to be analogous. Indeed, the following passage was used often by the early church fathers to reference Jesus ministry (Micah 4:1-5).

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and

we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

The context of “the word of the Lord” passages clearly refers to a whole entity, a person, a complete perfect message of hope and truth and love embodied in/with/as person, presence and power - the second member of the trinity. Not just a particular *dawbar* (message or saying of the Lord) but the Father’s manifested metaphysical personal presence and power at work (speaking, creating, sustaining, saving, sanctifying) as the Word of the Lord, Jesus, the Word of God, the second member of the Trinity (with no beginning or end). Tertullian puts this so succinctly: “God, however, neither ceases to be what He was, nor can He be any other thing than what He is. The Word is God, and the Word of the Lord remains for-ever, — even by holding on unchangeably in His own proper form” (Tertullian 2016, Kindle Locations 485952-485953). Augustine of Hippo relates that; “the Word of the Lord is right: for the Word of the Lord is right, to make you that which of yourselves ye cannot be.” (Augustine 2016, Kindle Locations 133069-133070). This incredible salvific/sanctifying role of the Word is reflective of something quoted earlier by Kittel referring to the work of the *Logos* in a person’s life... “But this *Logos* is not taken to be something which is merely grasped theoretically. It claims a man. It determines his true life and conduct (Kittel 1964, 80-1).” In this final quote Origen connects the *Logos* with the Word of the Lord;

In the same way, now, some have faith in that Reason which was in the beginning and was with God and was God; so did Hosea and Isaiah and Jeremiah and others who declared that the Word of the Lord, or the *Logos*, had come to them. (Origen 2016, Kindle Locations 441131-441132).

The early church fathers inadvertently declared their understanding that the Old Testament references to the Word of the Lord refer to Jesus; the *Logos*. Caught up in a battle against Arianism; part of their defense was to turn to Old Testament references to “the Word of the Lord” that revealed the character, nature, and role of Jesus as Messiah. They often simply referred to the things that Jesus said as... “words of the Lord.” Scripture and the church fathers affirm a direct connection between Jesus as the “Word of God” and “the word of the Lord.” Both phases incorporate a sense of the manifest presence of the Lord’s character, nature, as being revealed to men and women through words that bear witness to heart, mind, and soul.

Summary

In the Bible right from the beginning the Word plays a central role in creating, sustaining, revealing, calling, redeeming, communicating, and honouring and glorifying the Father. This was affirmed by the New Testament writers and Early Church Fathers in how they spoke/wrote of the Word of God playing a central role in salvation and sanctification. This makes sense, for in this role He deserves and gets all the glory due Him for creating, sustaining, saving and sanctifying. New and the Old Testament references to Word/Voice of the Lord and Word of God, refer to something beyond the Scriptures themselves. In fact, the Scriptures emphasize who the Eternal Word is, what He is saying, how He is

spread / heard / encountered, and what hinders Him. The Scriptures also reveal what is happening as He is being shared (hearing, reception, salvation or rejection and opposition), and the importance of safeguarding, discerning and nurturing the Word. The Scriptures reveal much about the process of becoming aware of and surrendered to the working of the living active Word in one's life and the world around them. One might even say that that is the reason why the Lord gave us the Scriptures. Through them as we watch others, we learn how to connect and commune with the Lord. Like Abraham and Moses, we go on a journey of learning to walk in ways that please Him. We also learn the things that do not please Him. All through the Scriptures the Word people are formed when they become aware of the Word, encounter Him, surrender to, and abide with Him.

Surprisingly enough it was the Hebrews words (01696 - *daw-bar*- dabar, 0559 - *amar*, 06310 - *peh*) surrounding the "word of the Lord" phrase, that gave the most insight. Of course, this is what context does. The focus of the phrase appears to be centered around the source of the message itself and the actual personal presence, power, content, substance, or truth, rather than just the actual speaking of it. However, this does not preclude that it was in fact spoken. The speaking or proclamation of the specific "Word" occurred but "Word of the Lord" refers to more than just the speaking or the transmission process of the message. It refers to a living and active message and the personal power/force/presence with which the specific message comes (both at the time of original delivery and subsequently as people are open to receive). In this way, *Logos* is always living

and active and so can the Scriptures be. There is no better “word” than “the Word” (*logos / dabar*), to encapsulate to us this sense of God’s character, nature, revelation, illumination, power and potential power; past, present, and future as manifesting, and being made manifest in, the created order (including people’s lives as they are saved and formed spiritually).

Scripture reveals that the Eternal Word can come to people through leaders, angels, prophets, and regular people. This is the story that the Scriptures tell. The story of the living active Eternal Word at work in the lives of people. As we read them we learn how the Word works, who He is, what He does and how best to respond to His Word in our lives. The Scriptures provide the means to test any leading or promoting we may receive. The Scriptures reveal that formation begins with a faith expectation that God is, in fact, going to reveal Himself.

The AESA model that will be presented in the next holds that a fundamental part of the formation process is learning how to nurture an awareness of, and surrender to, the Eternal Word as He works in our lives to sanctify us. In the present day, a journey to be transformed by the Eternal Word must begin with faith to receive the Word as truth. It is by faith that the Word of the Lord is considered truth; perfect and holy, able to save, revive and bring peace. The first step toward this end is to believe that the written Word, the Bible, is in fact truth. In our day, many come to this conclusion and then struggle (as Old Testament believers did) for the rest of their lives, to intellectually understand what it says and then to obey. Usually these people find themselves consistently falling far

short of the standard, not able to live out the truth of God's Word. They, as legalists, become quietly disillusioned. They miss the living and active Word. Jesus points this out to the Pharisees in this passage as He differentiates between Scripture and Word.

I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (John 5:36-40)

Others in our day turn to freedom and grace thus releasing themselves from living according to the letter of the law. Some begin to follow Paul's rhetorical statement in Romans 6:1 "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" I am beginning to see that Paul was referring to two extremes. In Chapter 8 of Romans he answered his own questions by saying that we need a personal relationship with God through the Spirit made possible through sacrifice of the Eternal Word incarnate; Jesus. Through this sacrifice we can be born again of the Spirit making it possible for God's Eternal Word to dwell within us. Then as we listen and obey the Inner Word, (Nouwen puts it "the inner voice of love"), we are changed from glory to glory as we put the flesh to death. Nouwen is so clear on this:

Conversion is certainly not something you can bring about yourself. It is not a question of willpower. You have to trust the inner voice that shows the way. You know that inner voice. You turn to it often. But after you have heard with clarity what you are asked to do, you start raising questions, fabricating objections, and seeking everyone else's opinion. Thus you become entangled in countless often contradictory thoughts,

feelings, and ideas and lose touch with the God in you. And you end up dependent on all the people you have gathered around you. Only by attending constantly to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy. (Nouwen 1998, 6).

I believe the inner voice Nouwen speaks of is the indwelling Word of God or Word of the Lord. The Word that will call us to change is more than just a thing (a book or set of laws or rules) it comes to us through a living Spirit, that once received, indwells and joins with us to speak His Word from within. By faith this living force is at work- drawing, calling, and enabling one to surrender and receive and be sanctified in and through the Word.

So, what does all this mean for us today and for my model. We can read and study the Scriptures, and that is good, but for changed lives... we need to become aware of, encounter and surrender to the *dabar/logos* that the gospel refers to, as a real personal presence. The AESA Cycle reveals that nurturing these three things (awareness of the Eternal Word, encounter with the Eternal Word, and surrender to the Eternal Word) will lay a foundation for an abiding relationship with the Lord. We need to awaken to His presence, invite Him into our lives, nurture awareness of His presence, seek encounters with Him personally and surrender to His leading. This is the pathway to abiding with the Lord. AESA - Awareness, Encounter, Surrender, Abide. The AESA cycle involves nurturing and developing an ongoing, daily, moment by moment personal two-way relationship with the Word who dwells within and nurturing relationships with those in our inner circle.

To function properly, a believer must be grounded in the body of objective knowledge and truth about God (Scriptures and Doctrine). This grounding also needs to become alive and active through Him, the One who dwells within through the Spirit. Without an awareness of this personal connection there is no enabling, encouragement, edification, or personal exhortation from the Lord. We need a connection with the One who dwells within and becomes One with us. This connection happens through the Spirit. Jesus makes it clear that the Spirit will speak to us from within:

There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, "The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me." (John 16:12-15)

This connection is the only way we can know and rightly divide and apply the Word of Truth (written and within) and live it/Him out, being changed from glory to glory. What does this connection look like, how then do we live, how does the Word communicate with us from within and without and what does He communicate? These are important questions for everyone seeking to be formed by God. Appendix A gives a broad overview of how the Word of the Lord and the Word of God are revealed as working in both the New and Old Testaments. These references give a clear sense that in both the New and Old Testaments the Word is alive and active, ready to be received and will affect those who will surrender, accept and receive. The Word is everywhere, He created all things, and holds all things together (Psalm 139, Col 1:16-17). For believers, because the Word took

on flesh in Jesus Christ and paid the price for us, he is now able to dwell within by His Spirit (John 1:1, 3:16, John 14:17, 1 Cor 3:16). Yet, despite the overwhelming Presence and Power of the Word, (revealed in both the New and Old Testament and the present day), the presence of self can overwhelm and block one's ability to really hear and see God's Word in their life (both Old Testament saints or New Testament believers). It is like the veil to the Holy of Holies opens and closes with one's decision to enter in by faith, be aware, and seek encounter.

At 3crosses, along the trails, there seem to be spiritually "thin" places where there is a deeper sense of His presence. A thin place can be identified as one where the veil between the physical and the spiritual is thin. At 3crosses people call Gethsemane a 'thin' place. It is at the top of the mountain like the high places mentioned in the Scriptures that seemed to be special. Another 'thin' place is called the lower 3crosses. People seem to encounter the Lord at these places in significant ways. Is it that these places physical locations where the veil is thin? Or is it what happens within a person's heart and soul that opens a doorway (the veil) to encounter. For it does seem that some have powerful encounters and others not so much. This begs us to ask the question; "What is the heart or soul condition that opens up these "doorways/veils" to encounter?" The testimonies of those who had had dramatic encounters reveal that the heart, soul and mind condition that precede an encounter with the Word is one of faith, presence, focus, desire, surrender and often brokenness. At 3crosses, people enter

the moment with the aid of an audio guided prayer time. They are also immersed in nature. They are encouraged to let the myriad of thoughts and worries in their mind, to escape the daily grind and center in on the present moment. Then, all of a sudden, it happens, the veil opens, eyes see and ears hear and the Word becomes living and active and usually brings some form of healing. At 3crosses, reflecting on the stories in Scripture and entering in to them helps a person connect and encounter the Lord. This is a pathway that many people have used. I have been with Moses, standing before the burning bush, feeling the ground beneath my bare feet, hearing the Word of God who knows me, speak. In my life with Him I have been with Abraham, ready to leave and head to the place that God was going to show me. Like Jonah, at times I have run away from proclaiming the harsh truth. I have felt Job's frustration with suffering and cried out to God (although not to his extent). Like Elijah after battling the false prophets, weary and downtrodden I have sat under the broom tree, only to later run with supernatural energy to get away, only to miss God's presence while looking for Him in the big and loud things. You see each story from the Scriptures helps me understand what an encounter with the living Word is truly like and I often find that in the midst of Scripture reflection and immersion, the Eternal Word speaks. Entering the story can trigger intuitive thinking and the Word becomes living and active as the Spirit speaks from within through the story. In the New Testament, encounters with the living Word continue. I, like the blind man wanted to see. As the Centurion; God speaks to me about simple faith in Jesus' authority and power. I know what it is

like to be the woman who reached out to just touch the hem of His garment seeking healing, or to be like Peter and deny the Word after saying I wouldn't, and yes I admit it, I have been with the sons of thunder wanting to sit and reign with Jesus on his right and left. I have been on many roads to Emmaus where Jesus would show up and be so powerfully present that my heart burned from within. The Scriptures contain so many encounters with the living word, so many conversations and prayers to, and with, God. They form a rich springboard into our own personal conversation with God about His current work in our lives. Yet the conversation doesn't stop here, for the Scriptures proclaim story after story of how God is waiting in each moment of each day, waiting to speak into the ongoing story of our life and the lives of others. All we need to do is slow down enough to enter the moment with the expectation that He will be there; waiting. Every day a burning bush awaits us if we will slow down to take note. The Scriptures recount God's Word at work in the hearts, lives, and souls of people down through history. History continues to tell the story of the Word at work in the hearts and minds of people bringing about change. In 2017 with the busyness of life it is essential to center oneself and connect personally with God through the Spirit each morning. Starting the day by reconnecting with the Word and then going with Him into our day.

This chapter laid a foundation for the essential role that the Word of God plays in my Spiritual Formation. Most theological positions would agree that there is no salvation or sanctification outside of personal encounter with Christ

that brings enablement. He comes and brings what we need - grace, love, instruction, affirmation, encouragement, mercy, forgiveness, edification, rebuke, strength, hope and so on. All we have to do is listen and receive with faith. The Word of the Lord/ the Word of God still speaks into the hearts, minds, and souls of people; proclaiming the Father's goodness, beauty and love. The Eternal Word of God, speaks through and into the Scriptures, books, movies, life situations, relationships, suffering, meditation, study, teaching, preaching, contemplation and so much more to lead us down through the stages of spiritual formation; pre-salvation, sanctification and glorification. This is simply the Father manifesting His good pleasure and glory, in and through the Eternal Word, made possible by the Spirit. Chapter four will now present the AESA model and review the contemplative models of spiritual formation that helped me to develop the AESA.

CHAPTER FOUR:
PATHWAYS TO ABIDING:
A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

I believe that much of our religious unbelief is due to a wrong conception of and a wrong feeling for the Scriptures of truth. A silent God suddenly began to speak in a book, and when the book was finished, He lapsed back into silence again forever. Now we read the book as the record of what God said when He was, for a brief time, in a speaking mood. With notions like that in our heads, how can we believe? The facts are that God is not silent, has never been silent. It is the nature of God to speak. The second person of the Holy Trinity is called the Word. The Bible is the inevitable outcome of God's continuous speech. It is the infallible declaration of His mind for us, put into our familiar human words. (Tozer, 2015, Kindle Locations 852-857)

Spiritual Formation is a lifelong process that occurs as a person journeys through life. This process is initiated, sustained, mediated, and completed by the Triune God. The previous chapter laid the foundation that references to the Word of God and Word of the Lord in the Scriptures refer to something larger than a book. The Word, an actual living being, second member of the Trinity, one who loves, creates, takes on flesh, rescues, redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies. He is the basis for all spiritual formation. Coming to hear Him whisper beautiful things into the depths of my soul through my heart was a key part of my formation. It involved a releasing from my mind of the felt need to be in control, to be the one

protecting myself. In complete vulnerability, I opened my mind to awareness and let my heart reach out to embrace encounter. For the first time I put my complete trust and faith in God, quieted my heart and listened for His still small Voice.

When I opened-up like this, the Word spoke directly into my heart and everything changed. In that encounter something special happened; I became conscious that He was within me. From that point on, He has made me increasingly more aware of His work from without and within to change and form me into His image. I should not have resisted for so long. This basic pathway and cycle of formation that I have experienced is the very thing that I try to reflect in the AESA Formation Model .

The Scriptures reveal God as active in history, working personally in people's lives over long periods of time to bring about change among the nations. I believe that the development of these four contemplative Models of Spiritual Formation reflect this ongoing work of God in history through men and women:

1. Ignatian Spirituality (Ignatius of Loyola – 16th century)
2. Quietism (Molinos, Guyon and Fenelon 17th century)
3. The Fourfold gospel (A.B. Simpson 19th century)
4. Formation Field Theory (Adrian Van Kaam – 20th century).

Four Historic Contemplative Models of Spiritual Formation

In this section I will highlight the aspects of each of these contemplative historical models that influenced my model. The models will be presented in historical order which will reveal that later models were impacted in some ways

by earlier models. These contemplative models focus on the need for an awareness of God's personal presence and activity around and within a person. They also have an emphasis on encountering Him and surrendering to His leading. They use disciplines like meditation, contemplation, practicing the Presence, listening to the still small Voice, and considering the impact of your formation field on your formation journey, to help you move forward. Later in this chapter when I present my formation model to show how these disciplines can be applied within my model through CPJ and ICR.

Ignatian Spirituality

The spiritual exercises developed by Ignatius involve: a dynamic process of prayer, meditation, and self-awareness (Brown 2019). They are designed to help us recognize and be attentive to God's activity in our world. This awareness is to lead to an appropriate response. Ignatian spirituality is not just an inward, self-absorbed journey. It is designed to bring people closer to God and connect them to His activity in the world. Ignatius founded the Jesuits and called them to be "contemplatives in action" (Jesuits 2019). These 10 points about Ignatian Spirituality by Paul Brian Campbell as quoted by Joe Paprocki give us a sense of what it is about and how beautifully it reflects spiritual maturity;

1. find (recognize) God in all things
2. develop a personal relationship with Christ and love for the Church (bruised and broken as it often is)
3. live a life of reflection (self-awareness/discernment) leading to gratitude and a life of service (becoming a man or woman for others)
4. live a life of contemplation in action—not a monastic existence, but an active one that is, at the same time, infused with prayer

5. live with an inner freedom (the result of self-awareness and discernment)
6. translate our faith into working for justice—the realization that there can be no true expression of faith where concerns for justice and human dignity are lacking
7. recognize, like Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God”—the positive, energetic and engaged vision of God's constant interaction with creation
8. live according to the maxim “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” (For the Greater Glory of God)—praising God and dedicating oneself to participate in God's healing work in the world
9. be flexible and adaptable, following the example of the 16th century Jesuits who wore Chinese robes and generally adapted to various cultures; respecting people's lived experience
10. seek the union of minds and hearts—as brothers and sisters, we listen for the God who is present among us, admitting no division based on ethnicity, nationality, background, age or gender (Paprocki 2016)

Ignatian Spirituality calls believers to a high standard and the prayer of examen is one of the spiritual exercises that Ignatius designed to help people “rise up.” David Sherbino sees this form of prayer as one; “that helps people enter into the presence of God in a more experiential manner and discover the different ways God reveals himself in daily life” (Sherbino 2015, Kindle Locations 383-385). Sherbino shares five basic steps to the prayer of examen.

Basic steps of a daily examen:

1. Recalling the Presence of God
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to Help You
3. Looking Over Your Day With Gratitude
4. Review your Day
5. Reconcile and Resolve (Sherbino 2013, Kindle Locations 1076-1128)

As one can see Examen prayer is a powerful way to pray meditatively and reflectively. One reflects on and examines one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions to sense where God is at work and then join in with Him. Ignatian Spirituality also calls us to be aware of feelings of consolation and desolation which are more

contemplative in nature. Consolation helps one to recognize that God is involved (am I aware of a sense of being drawn closer to God and peace), while desolation reflects a movement away from God and out of peace.

This is complicated, for our spiritual enemy often brings negative feelings to push us away from something or positive feelings to move us toward something. Discernment through consolation and desolation involves more than just negative or positive, emotional feeling. The following explanation of each by Margaret Silf (Silf 1999) as summarized by Loyola Press (LoyolaPress 2019) helps one to gain insight:

Desolation:

- turns us in on ourselves
- drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
- cuts us off from community
- turns us in on ourselves
- makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us
- takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision
- covers up all our landmarks
- drains us of energy

Consolation:

- directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
- lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
- bonds us more closely to our human community
- generates new inspiration and ideas
- restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
- shows us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us
- releases new energy in us (Loyola Press 2019)

I see Ignatian prayer as an excellent way of becoming aware of the Eternal Word at work in everyday life (from within and without). Although there are contemplative listening aspects to Ignatian Spirituality fundamentally they are person-centered and focus on one's feelings, thoughts and actions during the day.

This is an excellent and very useful kind of contemplation is called active and acquired which refers to the fact that the person and all their faculties are involved. The Holy Spirit can also be involved in this type of contemplation. A higher form of contemplation is called infused or passive and this is where God steps in and brings revelation or illumination. Here is how Molinos spoke of these two forms:

There are moreover two ways of Contemplation: The one is Imperfect, Active and Acquired; The other Infused and Passive. The Active (whereof we have treated hitherto) is that which may be attained to by our Diligence, assisted with Divine Grace; we gathering together the Faculties and Senses, and preparing ourselves by every way that God would have... The other Contemplation is perfect and infused. Wherein (as St. Teresa says) God speaks to a man, sequestering his intellect, questioning his thought, and seizing (as they say) the word in his mouth; so that if he would, he cannot speak, but with great pain. He understands, that without the noise of words, the Divine Master is instructing him, suspending all his powers and faculties, because if at that time they should operate, they would do more hurt than good. (Molinos 1688 (Kindle Locations 173-174; 200-202). Kindle Edition.

They key difference is that the individual is passive, and God is active. My model seeks to incorporate both active and infused contemplation by incorporating the still small voice through examen-styled Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ). At times in a conversation with the Lord I am very active but at other times I become passive and God leads me down a road of infused contemplation. He reveals to me things that were beyond me and often very counterintuitive to how I normally think. Whatever is received must be tested against the clear teaching of Scripture and character and nature of God. He may personally lead you to surrender something, bear spiritual fruit, or move forward as He empowers you from within, through His indwelling presence. Incorporating

both kinds of prayer, at the end of the day, can leave you in the beautiful place of abiding in peace. This is accomplished by simply following the basic steps to the daily examen as listed above, while using a journal to have a two-way conversation with the Lord, regarding what happened during your day while also leaving space to still all your thoughts and feelings and allow the Eternal Word to bring something that is beyond your ability to think, feel or reason. The fundamental difference here is that God speaks into the prayer personally rather than Him speaking into and through our own thoughts and feelings regarding what we believe He might think. Meditation and active contemplation are our own inner work of the mind, heart, and soul. Infused contemplation is when God steps in and we simply receive from Him without much effort on our part. These two operate on a continuum from pure meditation where I do all the work (at least consciously) to pure contemplation where God is doing all the work. This is explained very well in the video link provided in the reference section (Bartunek 2012, 0:50-2:30 min).

Over time I have found that this examen style of contemplative prayer becomes a natural way of praying when one uses CPJ. In CPJ one enters a quiet-centered state and begins to talk to God. This quiet-centered state is part of what makes conversational communion with God possible. Most often the conversation between you and God is centered around what you are doing, how you are doing it, how you are feeling, what God is calling you to. It will often include words of

encouragement, affirmation and edification that empower. Meditation will often lead one into a deeper and more contemplative prayer experience.

Quietism

Quietism as a movement arose in 17th century France and Italy and emphasized the importance of getting still to be able to hear God's voice to cultivate and deepen one's interior life (Nienkirchen 2012).

The basic premise of quietism is that to hear God, a person needs to slow down, detach oneself from the world, become still, get quiet and listen from within. This is all very Ignatian right up to the point where one listens for God to speak from within freely without context. Quietism is about getting still to freely listen while Ignatian Spirituality focuses one on having God speak into the events of the day, a passage from the Bible, a situation one faces (Knub 2012, 13). Both of pathways of communion build on the foundation that the Eternal Word, through the Spirit, dwells within us and will speak.

Quietism as a form of inner mystical contemplation has a long history that extends back to the early church and down through medieval times. Like anything else, it can be taken to the extreme and it is these extremes that usually cause something like Quietism to be rejected and denounced as heretical.

This is exactly what happened, when a Roman Catholic priest named Miquel de Molinos wrote a widely published and very popular book with a long title, *The Spiritual Guide which Disentangles the Soul, and Brings It by the Inward Way to the Getting of Perfect Contemplation*. Molinos became well

known for his views on contemplation and Quietism and as a director of consciences he had quite a following. He initially pretended to be a disciple of the Jesuits which means he would be familiar with the meditative/reflective disciplines of Ignatian Spirituality (Christian Classics Ethereal Library 2019).

In the beginning, he had significant influence among many important people of his day. After initial acceptance and popularity, his book was contested by several in the church and although initially upheld by the Inquisition, it was eventually labelled as heresy and he was imprisoned. It may be that this harsh response had more to do with the political and religious climate of the day than the actual teaching Molinos puts forth in the guide (Knub 2012, 20).

Molinos was teaching people how to be formed internally by the Spirit, with the aid of a director, thus usurping the role of the church. His work about “infused” contemplation lines up well with St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (Knub 2012, 9). Mystical things tend to be scrutinized, questioned and sometimes judged without a proper assessment, by those who are not “inclined that way’ and do not have ears to hear. Molinos points this out to his readers at the beginning of his book (Molinos 2010, 54).

It is far easier to objectively assess and compare doctrine than to assess and compare the subjective spiritual experiences of mystics. When one considers Jesus teachings, prayer life, Spirit encounters, and miracles one would need to place Him in the category of mystic. He too was persecuted by those whose minds were open to doctrine and analytical reason but closed to things of the Spirit or

heart. Paul fits this mystic category too (with his dramatic conversion and “being caught up to the 3rd heaven”), as does John with the Revelation. The list goes on: Noah, Abram, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the prophets all had mystical experiences.

When the prophets tried to bring the leading of the Word of the Lord to the people, they were often persecuted. Jesus was persecuted by the Pharisees. Paul said that those without the Spirit would not be able to discern nor understand the things of the Spirit and they would see those with the Spirit as foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14; Romans 8:5). Molinos, Quietists, and Quakers among other contemplatives were persecuted primarily for their belief that they could hear from God. There is no justification for God-loving followers of Jesus to persecute someone based on ideology, philosophy, theology, or spirituality. If this is happening something has gone off the rails. Anything mystical should be assessed and tested; but not with closed-minded, critical, judgmental, world-focused attitudes but with the Scriptures.

Reading the preface to Molinos’ guide helps one understand the challenges he faced putting forth such a teaching in his time. Ultimately, Molinos relates that it is up to the Spirit to affirm or deny what he is teaching, for his teaching is about spiritual things. This seems to go a bit far for the Scriptures could be used to assess his claims.

Molinos also knew the importance of recognizing other writers who were accepted by the church. And although he believes his work will stand on its own,

validated by the Spirit, he admits that he will quote others to lend credibility to his work (Molinos 1688, Kindle Locations 94-95). The writers who influenced Molinos included people like St. Thomas, Teresa of Avila, St Francis, St. Bernard, and St. John of Damascus. Molinos begins his spiritual guide by making differentiation between meditation and contemplation. He clearly views one superior to the other:

There are two ways of going to God, the one by Consideration and Mental Discourse, and the other by the Purity of Faith, an indistinct, general and confused knowledge. The first is called Meditation, the second Internal Recollection, or acquired Contemplation. The first is of Beginners, the second of Proficients. The first is sensible and material, the second more naked, pure and internal. (Molinos 1688,8)

I believe Molinos is making a distinction between mind and heart, or knowledge and thought versus experience and feeling. The first way of going to God is through knowledge gained from study, reason, analysis, and reflection (meditation). The second way (contemplation) is more about experiencing an inner spiritual truth that one already knows. It is the difference between knowing doctrine and truth about God versus experiencing these truths in spirit, feeling Him, sensing Him and encountering Him as He reveals truth to you. Molinos really helps us to understand what Quietism is about. In point 17 below he clearly relates what he refers to as an intimate encounter with God;

17. When the Soul attains to this state, it ought wholly to retreat within itself, in its own pure and profound Center; where the Image of God is, there is amorous attention, silence, the forgetfulness of all things, the application of the Will, with perfect resignation, hearing and talking with God hand to hand, and in such manner, as if there was no other but those two in the World. (Molinos 1688, 10)

Then the next point in his guide (18 - next page) explains in even more detail the differences he sees between meditation and contemplation.

18. Good reason have the Saints to say, that Meditation operates with toil, and with fruit; Contemplation without toil, with quiet, rest, peace, delight, and far greater fruit. Meditation sows, and Contemplation reaps; Meditation seeks, and Contemplation finds; Meditation chews the Food, Contemplation tastes and feeds on it. (Molinos 1685, 11).

In my model, both pathways are utilized. First without any hidden agenda one quiets oneself and has an encounter with the Eternal Word in Spirit. After this, there is a need to take what has been received, or experienced, and meditate upon it using reason and test it against the Scriptures and take the more difficult or questionable things to a person in their Inner Circle to get help with assessing, discerning, learning, applying, and growing. It is this meditative and relational follow-up that sets the stage for sanctification and the next contemplative encounter.

Molinos further defines contemplation into the two categories I mentioned in the introduction to the section:

20. There are moreover two ways of Contemplation: The one is Imperfect, Active and Acquired; The other Infused and Passive. The Active (whereof we have treated hitherto) is that which may be attained to by our Diligence, assisted with Divine Grace; we gather together the Faculties and Senses, and preparing ourselves by every way that God would have.” (Molinos, 12).

The basic difference between active/acquired and infused/passive contemplation is whether the person is involved. In the former, man actively focuses and thinks through and acquires something through contemplation with the Lord's help (the

Ignatian Way). In the latter, it is all of/from God and a much deeper spiritual experience as Molinos relates (28 - next page):

28. The other Contemplation is perfect and infused. Wherein (as St. Teresa says) God speaks to a man, sequestering his intellect, questioning his thought, and seizing (as they say) the word in his mouth; so that if he would, he cannot speak, but with great pain. He understands, that without the noise of words, the Divine Master is instructing him, suspending all his powers and faculties, because if at that time they should operate, they would do more hurt than good. (Molinos 1685, 13)

What is described here, with reference to St. Teresa, seems to reflect stages 5 through 7 of St Teresa's ascent of the soul. It is easy to see the influence that the stages or mansions of Teresa of Avila's work, *The Interior Castle*, find in Molinos had on Molinos. Mansions one through three are purgative and relate to meditation. Mansion four is illuminative and relates more to active or acquired contemplation. Mansions five through seven are unitive and move into infused or passive contemplation (Teresa of Avila 2012, Kindle Locations 239-240). When one reflects on the Bible, it seems that those who hear Words from the Lord are receiving infused contemplation.

Molinos got himself in trouble by outwardly differentiating between two types of spiritual people; Internal and External. External are those who focus on discourse, imagination, and consideration. They seek to acquire virtues and chasten the flesh by outward discipline. They focus on outward talk and outward acts while not dealing with the inner life (Molinos 1685, p 63). Molinos hits these people hard saying, "they will not even take one step toward perfection, as is proven by the experience of people who, after fifty years of exterior exercise, find

themselves empty of God, full of themselves, and spiritual in name alone”

(Molinos 1685, 138). This is reflective of how Jesus spoke about the Pharisees.

Molinos says that those who are of the Internal type have already (next page);

passed through much trial and mortification often both outer and inner. This has left them in a state of inner peace, regardless of circumstance. And although many temptations and troublesome suggestions of the enemy come, they find no purchase for God who dwells within and fights for them. (Molinos 1685, 138).

Molinos refers to an interior state of which outer, worldly affirmations, pleasures, pious actions and good works do not play a motivating role (Molinos 1688, 64). It is easy to twist this around and accuse him of calling people to withdraw from others and from helping those in the world. Molinos calls us not to stop doing good works or even receiving affirmation from others but to look not to those things for satisfaction and affirmation and look only to the One who dwells within (Molinos 1685, 65). This leaves one seeking to please Him only.

It is a very difficult thing (quite possibly the hardest) to separate the ego from getting involved in our good works and accomplishments even if motivated by service for God. We are all so needy that we seek to satisfy our need through doing good works and receiving affirmations and praise from others. Isn't the ultimate selfless service then, one that is given solely to please God? Molinos was not calling to people to stop outward service but to change the motivation for, and expectation from, doing such things. This is the stuff of the true, deeper life.

Indeed, Jesus called the disciples and the Pharisees to just such a level of maturity (Matt 6:1; Matt 23:5).

Around the same time that Molinos was living, George Fox concluded that real spirituality was achieved through consciousness of the presence of God (Fox 1906, 30). Fox founded the Quakers (Society of Friends) who were persecuted as well (Fox 1906, 389). Quakers emphasized the priesthood of all believers which is possible because Christ dwells within and will teach and guide each person who is surrendered and aware of His presence. Fox himself claimed to get teaching directly from Christ who dwells within. He emphasized that the Lord does not dwell in temples made by human hands but in human hearts. Hearts that were led from within, to act rightly toward God and others, through the indwelling presence and power of the Lord. The Quakers were less concerned about theology and more concerned about living and loving as Christ directed from within which is dangerous when leadings are not measured against Scripture (Williston 1985, 561). Quakers had significant impact in areas of social justice and equality (abolition of slavery and women's rights). The fruit of the Quakers, while focusing on being taught and following the Voice within, places them in the category of Christ followers.

Another quietist of this era was Frances Fenelon, a Roman Catholic Archbishop and cousin to Madame Guyon. He was a close friend to Guyon and influenced by her. In my mind, he breathes new life into the idea of what it means to be indwelt by God. Fenelon's writings still impact Protestant and Catholics.

The following quote of Fenelon reveals the longstanding difference between people who focus on reason exclusively and those who want to practically incorporate the Spirit.

It is certain, that the scriptures declare that “the Spirit of God dwells within us,” that it animates us, speaks to us in silence, suggests all truth to us, and that we are so united to it, that we are joined unto the Lord in one spirit. This is what the Christian religion teaches us. Those learned men, who have been most opposed to the idea of an interior life, are obliged to acknowledge it. Notwithstanding this, they suppose that the external law, or rather the light from certain doctrines and reasonings, enlightens our minds, and that afterwards it is our reason that acts by itself from these instructions. They do not attach sufficient importance to the teacher within us, which is the Spirit of God.

Fenelon’s quote below reveals the foundation of my model so eloquently. What I really appreciate is that it was written by someone 300 years ago and yet speaks to my heart and experience today. It reflects what I understand and teach about the inner voice of the Word. Upon reflection, my understanding came about through other writers who had been influenced by Fenelon and the Spirit. Even A.B. Simpson the founder of the denomination I am ordained with was influenced by Fenelon. Here is this powerfully persuasive quote about the inner work of the Word;

God never ceases to speak to us; but the noise of the world without, and the tumult of passions within, bewilder us, and prevent us from listening to him. All must be silent around us, and all must be still within us, when we should listen with our whole souls to this voice.

It is a still small voice and is only heard by those who listen to no other. Alas! how seldom is it that the soul is so still, that it can hear when God speaks to it.

Our vain desires and our self-love confuse the voice within us. We know that it speaks to us, that it demands something of us; but we cannot hear what it says, and we are often glad that it is unintelligible. Ought we to wonder that so many, even religious persons, who are engrossed with amusements, full of vain desires, false wisdom, and self-confidence,

cannot understand it and regard this interior word of God as a chimera (serpent)... If this truth be admitted; that God always speaks within us, he speaks to impenitent sinners; but they are deafened and stunned by the tumult of their passions and cannot hear his voice; his word to them is a fable. He speaks in the souls of sinners who are converted; these feel the remorse of conscience, and this remorse is the voice of God within them, reproaching them for their vices. When sinners are truly touched, they find no difficulty in comprehending this secret voice; for it is that which penetrates their souls; it is in them the two-edged sword of which St. Paul speaks. (Graves 2019)

For Fenelon the awareness of the indwelling Presence speaking was a central part of spiritual formation.

Quietism continued to develop and become more acceptable during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The influence of contemplatives from the previous centuries (St Francis, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, St. Ignatius, Molinos, Madame Guyon, Fenelon) had created an environment where inner-life disciplines like meditation and contemplation were more accepted but were still scrutinized. This was happening in both Protestant and Catholic traditions. During the 1st and 2nd Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a focus on people having a personal experience of God's love. It was a shift away from ritual, ceremony, sacramentalism and hierarchy, and toward a personal experience that the average person could have as they fostered a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption. There was encouragement toward introspection and maintaining a commitment to a new standard of personal morality (Kidd 2009, 32). As people were called toward a deeper experience of, and personal connection to, the indwelling Lord there was good fruit.

David Kowalski makes this challenge to Quietism;

In the Christian tradition, quietism refers to a passive approach to living which sees intellectual stillness, and the inward quieting or negating of our wills as the key to victorious, Christian living. Instead of teaching a self, renewed in Christ, quietism teaches a kind of self-annihilation. (Kowalski, 2013)

A close reading of Molinos, reveals that he believes that the inward journey helps annihilate, not the soul, but the passions and inappropriate appetites (flesh) that are opposed to the law and the Spirit. This is what I see to be the central battle of the sanctified life which takes place in the soul. I incorporated this into my model as a battle in the heart and mind between the Spirit and the flesh for the control of the soul.

If the presence of the Eternal Word speaking and leading within our soul through the Spirit was to be a central part of God's renewal work, then listening and being led by this Inner Voice would in fact be an essential part of God's plan. Since Jesus died to make it possible, then one would expect it to carry on until the second coming and quite possibly beyond.

One would also expect the enemy to continually try and redirect attention away from inner experiences of the Spirit and toward peoples' worldly ways of thinking. Whenever the focus did shift toward inner personal experience and renewal by the Holy Spirit, there would be opposition and persecution, which, if overcome, would result in revival. History records that this, in fact, happened with the Great Awakenings and the Holiness movements which were founded upon a deeper, inner, personal experience of God's presence and power leading to conviction, repentance, holiness, and healing.

The Holiness movement, which also had roots in Wesleyanism, included the idea of a second work of grace in the life of a believer that was connected with a deep personal inner work of the Spirit. It is amazing to read through the historical accounts of these movements and see God's common inner work of grace, through the Spirit, across so many different denominations with differing doctrinal beliefs.

The Fourfold Gospel

A.B. Simpson was influenced by the Quietist writings and he felt strongly about the importance of stillness and hearing the still small voice with regard to walking the pathway to sanctification and union (Nienkirchen, 1989). When speaking of the second work of grace, Christian and Missionary Alliance founder; A. B. Simpson, uses the image of the Holy Spirit not just being "resident" but becoming "president" within a person. This relates to the surrender part of the AESA Cycle and is essential for one to abide. As the Eternal Word leads, guides and empowers a person through sanctification it is important for the person to get quiet, become aware of and encounter Him through the Spirit and surrender to His authority.

A.B. Simpson, who began as a Presbyterian minister and then became the founder of a Missions movement and a denomination, was focussed on missions and the Deeper, Spirit-Filled Life (Draper 2009, 149). He himself had a second crisis experience when he came to know Christ as Sanctifier 11 years into ministry and he began to experience a victorious Christian life and power for

service. A.B. Simpson after his second crisis experience was a changed man who founded a worldwide church focussed on the Deeper Life and Missions. It all started for Simpson when he read an old medieval book entitled, *A Guide to True Peace* (Simpson 2013 Kindle Location 14460). This takes us right back to the beginning of the quietist movement. This book was compiled from the writings of Miquel Molinos, Madame Guyon, and Francis Fenelon. The following quote entitled; *Be Still and Know that I am God*, describes how Simpson came to hear God's Voice;

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

A score of years ago, a friend placed in my hand a little book which became one of the turning points of my life. It was called *True Peace*. It was an old medieval message, and it had but one thought, and it was this, that God was waiting in the depths of my being to talk to me if I would only get still enough to hear His voice.

I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced, than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din.

Some of them were my own voice, some of them were my own questions, some of them were my own cares, some of them were my very prayers. Others were the suggestions of the tempter and the voices of the world's turmoil. Never before did there seem so many things to be done, to be said, to be thought; and in every direction I was pushed and pulled and greeted with noisy acclamations of unspeakable unrest.

It seemed necessary for me to listen to some of them, and to answer some of them; but God said, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, and its duties and cares; but God said, “Be still.” And as I listened and slowly learned to obey, and shut my ears to every sound, I found after a while that when the other voices ceased, or I ceased to hear them, there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak with an inexpressible tenderness, power, and comfort.

As I listened, it became to me the voice of prayer, and the voice of wisdom, and the voice of duty, and I did not need to think so hard, or pray so hard, or trust so hard, but that “still, small voice” of the Holy Spirit in my heart was God's prayer in my secret soul, was God's answer to all my

questions and was God's life and strength for soul and body, and became the substance of all knowledge, and all prayer, and all blessing; for it was the living God Himself in my life and my all. (Simpson 2013 Kindle Location 14460).

In the reading Simpson relates that he was impacted by *True Peace* which was an old medieval work written by the Quietists; Molinos, Fenelon and Guyon.

A.B. Simpson found that the deeper life came through the One who dwells within and speaks from within. This Indwelling Presence drew him to have a zeal and passion for worldwide evangelism.

Through his own experience of Jesus Christ, A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, developed his spiritual formation model called the Fourfold Gospel which, like Methodism, incorporated the idea of a second blessing. Simpson believed that during a person's life they will experience Christ in four ways: first as Saviour, second as Sanctifier, third as Healer and fourth as coming King. (Simpson 2013, Kindle Location 7076).

The role of the "speaking voice" as the indwelling Word, becomes clearer, more defined, personal and present, as one progresses from call, to salvation and right on through to sanctification and healing. Therefore, stage two of my model focuses attention on one becoming aware of the One who now dwells and speaks from within. This is consistent with the idea that God is personally present and active in our lives. Ignatius, Molinos, Guyon, Fenelon, Fox and others through the 18th and 19th centuries believe just this and develop the practice of getting still to listen and be guided by the Presence. This all syncs up very well with A.B.

Simpson's Fourfold Gospel, my own personal experience and my adapted view of Adrian Van Kaam's formation field theory (next section).

Formation Field Theory

Adrian Van Kaam's Formation Field Theory reveals that each person faces a unique environment (i.e., genetics, ethnicity, culture, family of origin, friends, circumstances, world's influence, inner thoughts) and God is actively working in and through all, or in spite of all these things, to draw us to Him. I really appreciated his theory and built a new dimension into it that helped me see and account for how a person's Formation Field changes and extends out over time through their lives. This opens the possibility for powerful points of convergence that can bring about a transformative or crisis event.

Adrian Van Kaam's Formation Field Theory regarding how people are spiritually formed, was studied in the doctoral course at Tyndale Seminary taught by Dr. Graham Standish. This theory sees God at work amid several avenues of formation. The theory is best presented in a diagram created by Graham Standish (see Figure 26) .

Four areas of formation surround one's preformation which includes genetics culture and tradition. These are Interformation (relationship with others), Intraformation (Self), Situational (the present), and Mondial (Influence from World/Culture). God works in and through all these areas to form one as they allow. Events and forces can line up to bring about a transformative event in a

person's life. At any given point in time, a person faces a unique Formation Field that changes as one moves forward in time.

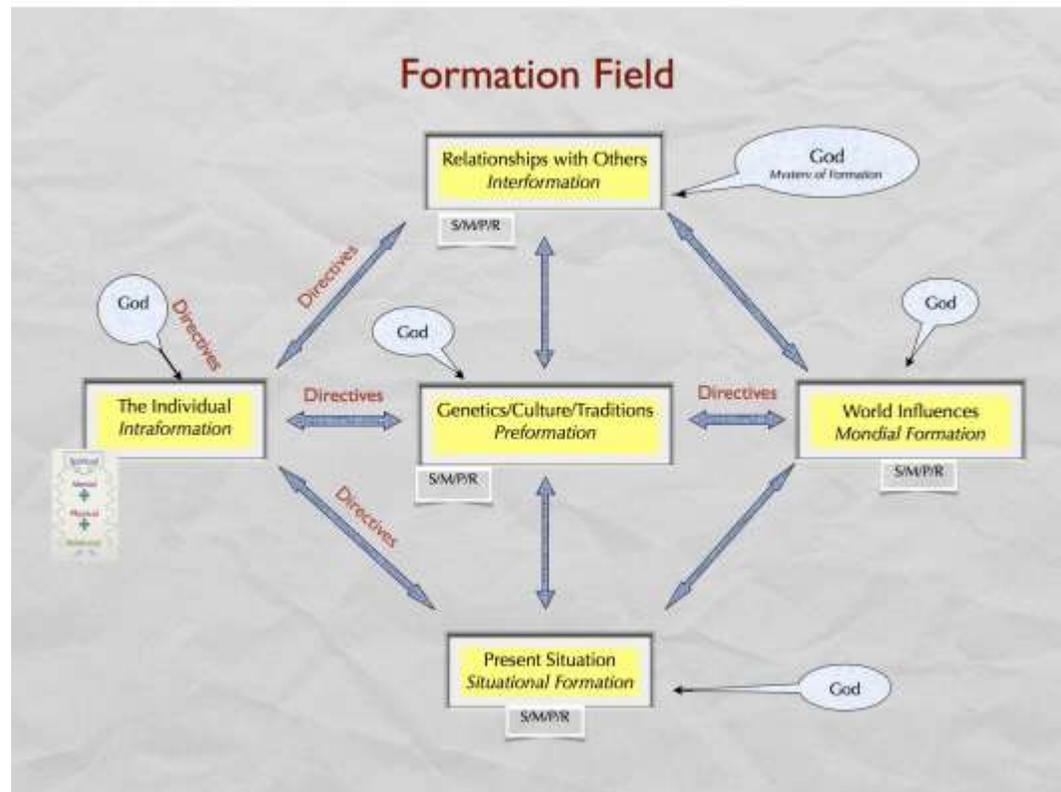


Figure 26. Formation Field Theory – Dr. Graham Standish (used by permission)

The formation field as represented above looks a certain way at a given point in time. I modified this theory by looking at the field theory incorporating the dimension of time. A person's formation field as depicted in figure 26 changes moment by moment. One could picture different formation fields rising off the page. In doing so one can see how certain events can have a certain effect at one point in time (a transformative moment) and then reverberate out to have effects down the road. They become part of one's future formation field and can come together with other transformative moments from the past and the present to result

in a crisis event or defining moment (often involving brokenness). This field and the events that occur can be looked at on an “X” and “Y” axis graph. “X” would represent the event and “Y” would represent the extent of effect on the person.

I proposed this adaption of Van Kaam’s Formation Field Model that would allow for formative events to echo out over time and come together to form powerful transformative experiential events in the life of the believer. This came through the writing of my Spiritual Autobiography. I noticed how several events happened at different stages of my life (i.e., muscle weakness, first girl, God, conversion, seminary, marriage) would then reverberate out through time to come together with other events (i.e., churchplant, darkness, hearing God speak etc.) to form a major transformative moment. Below a graph is presented to give a sense of how this works. A description of the individual events is not included but the type and year of occurrence (horizontal axis) along with the extent of impact (vertical axis) can be seen. Transformative events from each area of formation hit highpoints for me at ages 10, 15, 25, and 33 and come together again at age 43 to result in a second crisis event leading to a deeper and more personal experience of the indwelling Lord. A sample graph is included on the next page (see figure 27). Each transformative event associated with a avenue of formation is shown as a colour. The higher the colours rise the more impact they have at that point in time. There are times when other events are affected by this transformative event. When several come together a transformative or crisis moment may occur.

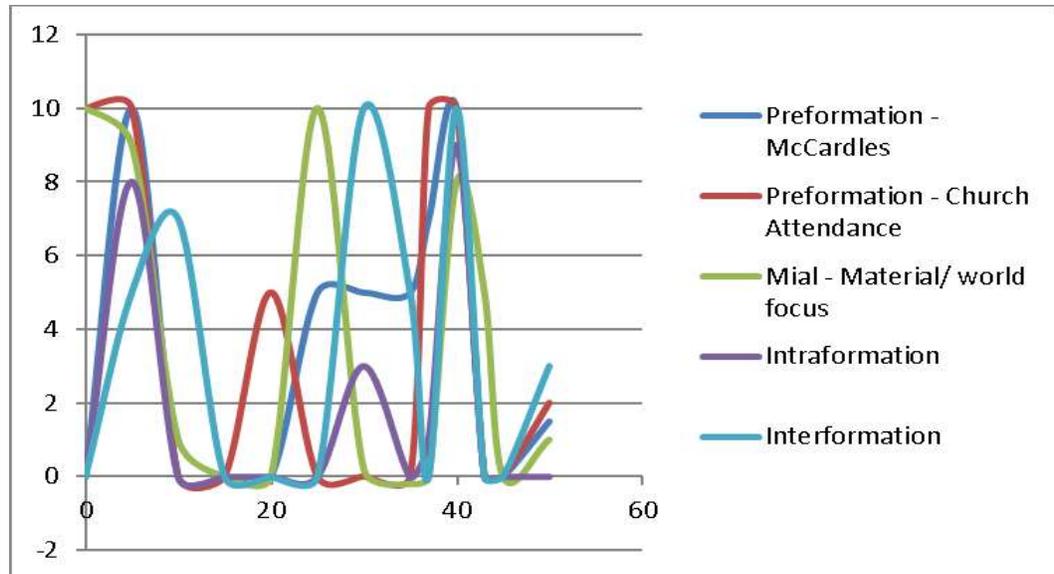


Figure 27. Formation Field Graph - Jeff Roy

Have things from your past come together at a defining moment. Until I wrote my autobiography and started to classify things on Van Kaam's Formation Field I didn't see the whole picture. God is forming each of us on many levels just as the formation field of Van Kaam attempts to reveal.

Van Kaam and Muto sees the value in both meditation and contemplation. Focusing on one type of prayer limits a person. He presents a balanced approach that incorporates both meditation and contemplation. Meditating and reflecting upon one's formation field and events while also taking time to enter a contemplative state to have a conversation with God about events that are happening is what he suggests.(Van Kaam and Muto 1980, 94ff).

God also seems to use nations, people, cultures, theological differences, political climates, and even technology to create transformative events that reverberate out down through the ages, only to come together again at certain

points to manifest a major transformational event. Major events like these were often preceded by other transformative events that led up to them. Consider how these events reverberated out and affected other events; slavery in Egypt, the Exodus, Davidic Monarchy, Babylonian Captivity, rebuilding the temple, and Jesus. Another would be Early church times, Crusades, Indulgences, St John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila , Huss and Wycliffe, Quietism, the Reformation, Great Awakenings, Missional movements, abolition of slavery, and rights of women. From this study the Eternal Word speaking through the indwelling Spirit was active in the lives of people like St. John, Teresa, Molinos and Fenelon. Their writings influenced and were part of the domino chain that resulted in a Great Awakening. In studying Quietism down through the ages, I noticed a coming together and a revising of ideas about the inner life, awareness of His presence, and people coming to personally experience His presence. God certainly seemed to align many things to bring about the Great Awakenings and the Holiness movement. I find it most interesting that this movement seemed to cross denominations and theological boundaries having impact among each group (i.e., Roman Catholic, Methodism, Calvinism, Arminianism, Anglican, Presbyterian, Alliance, Pentecostal). God used unique men and women from each tradition to spur things along. The common tie was an emphasis on personally experiencing the power and presence of the Word who dwells within.

When one sees that the Eternal Word is working through men and women to bring about these transformative events in history, the idea that spiritual

formation happens as one becomes more aware of God's presence and surrenders to the leading of His Presence is reinforced. The wonderful thing about having a theory about spiritual formation like this is that every single person has the potential to have an impact on things that are much larger than themselves.

I believe God works like this all the time. God is also working within the Formation Fields of people while respecting their free will, transforming them and laying the foundation for a larger movement of His grace in their life and in the world. This entails a coming together of many smaller, individual Formation Fields that impact each other. This, of course, includes you, but it is predicated on you being open to the awareness of God's presence, encountering and surrendering to Him and His work in your life; moment by moment. God has plans for you. (Eph. 2:8-10; Jer. 29:16). God wants to work in you to will and act to fulfill His good purpose (Phil 2:13). In and through our faith He allows, brings about, and aligns things over time. Spiritual Formation happens over a lifetime. With eyes to see and ears to hear, you can become tuned into not only what God has done in your life in the past, but also to what He is currently doing. More than that, you can become aware of His wonderful love and grace and kindness that will overwhelm and empower you to move forward. Through this close, personal, two-way relationship the very nature of God begins to be formed in you as you and He unite. You are enabled by Him to live a life that reflects and brings His love, grace, kindness and personal presence to others.

The AESA Formation Model

The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to presenting the AESA Model of Spiritual Formation. It will begin with an overview of the stages, pathways, cycle and disciplines that the model is built around. Scriptures that relate to spiritual formation will then be reviewed, the role of the Eternal Word of God summarized, and the power of stillness considered. A theological rationale that advocates the need for balance between mind and heart-based formation and a focus on growth rather than theological debate will be considered.

The AESA model is founded upon my personal experiences in life and ministry (Chapter Two) and the Scripture-based study of the Word of God and the early church fathers, in Chapter Three. It also incorporates aspects of the contemplative historical models of spirituality presented in this chapter. This model places a heavy emphasis on the role the Eternal Word of God plays in the basic Stages of Spiritual Formation as outlined in Figure 28 that follows on the next page.

The diagram reveals that the first stage of spiritual formation, Pre-salvation, begins at birth and ends when one becomes aware of, personally encounters and surrenders to the Eternal Word of God experiencing salvation. Within this stage prevenient grace is at work through the Eternal Word as He calls and draws people to His love as expressed through the Incarnate Word, Jesus (John 1:1; 3:16). People move through this stage at different rates and in different ways and some never make it through this stage. When a person comes to repent of sin and receive God's love they are born again, filled with the Spirit, and enter the next stage of Sanctification.

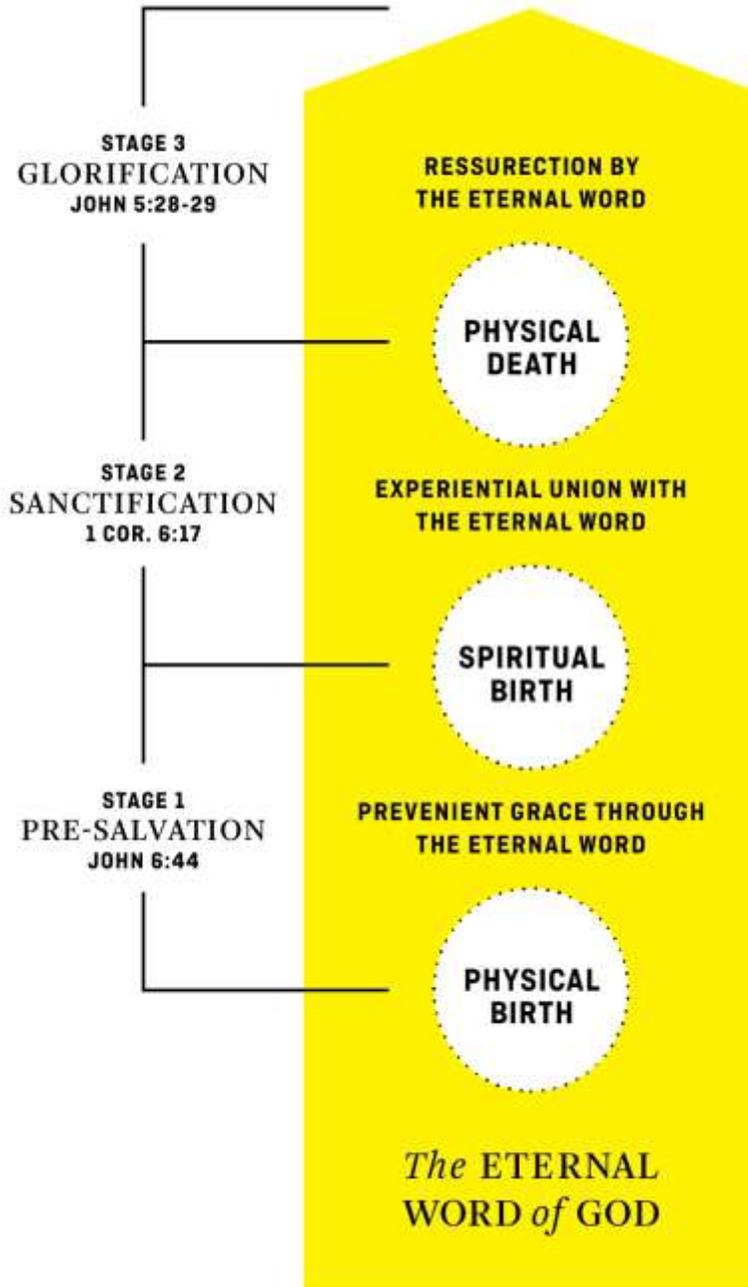


Figure 28. AESA Model – Basic Stages of Formation

Sanctification is the process of becoming conscious that by the Spirit the Eternal Word dwells within you and will lead you toward holiness. This involves putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh and the bearing of fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). In this stage the believer is learning how to abide . This stage begins with spiritual birth and positional union between Jesus and the person (Erickson 1990. 818; 959). As with stage one people move through this stage differently. Some become aware of and begin to appropriate the communion they experienced with the Eternal Word during salvation. Others take time before they come to a place where they are truly experiencing the intimate two-way communion they can have with the Eternal Word who now dwells within. Some believers may never experience the wonderful two-way communion that is possible while here on earth. As one becomes consciously aware that they are now a new creation, the work of the Eternal Word working from within and without through the Spirit to put to death the flesh and strengthen the position of the Spirit is in a way supercharged (Murray 27). Since sanctification is a supernatural work of the Eternal Word it is essential that we have His help and cooperate with Him (Erickson, 969). It stands to reason that the more we can sense Him and commune with Him the more we can participate through surrender. This involves learning to discern His Voice, trust Him, and surrender to His leading. When a person becomes conscious of the One who has joined with them they begin to experience this wonderful communion. I have chosen to use the phrase Experiential Union to refer to this two-way connection we can have with the Eternal Word. The final

stage (3) is glorification or perfection. Glorification occurs after one's death and involves a moral and spiritual perfecting (Erickson, 1967).

Experiential union is a part of the sanctification stage and it involves knowing that Christ dwells within and becoming aware of and experiencing this union. This includes the sense that you are joined with the Eternal Word as One and He is quietly leading from within without opposition. Two way communion begins to happen as you sense the Eternal Word speaking from within through the Spirit. The flesh loses its foothold in the soul and the Spirit begins to reign. This sense of the abiding presence and rule of the Eternal Word in the soul is the defining mark of Experiential Union. It is important to realize that this two-way intimate communion with the Eternal Word is moment by moment and can be easily lost when one fixes their attention on the world and self.

Experiential Union is all about interacting with others and facing life situations naturally as united with Christ. It is one thing during a prayer or worship time to get quiet and centered and realize that Christ dwells within and you are one with Him and can speak with Him. It is quite another, to be conscious of being joined with His abiding presence throughout the challenges of daily life.

All along the journey the Eternal Word of God is at work calling, drawing, saving, forming and shaping us into His image through the basic AESA Formation Cycle (see figure 29). The AESA Cycle helps people progress through the first two stages as they receive the enabling grace of the Eternal Word of God who is always active around them.

Many people born in this world never get through stage one and Jesus affirmed this (Matthew 7:13-14). Of those who reach stage two, I find that many do not come to know, understand, and experience the full depths and riches of God's love for them in Christ Jesus. I believe that the main reason for this is that they have not been equipped to understand and experience the spiritual and mystical. To come to know and experience that they are united with the Eternal Word and that He will speak and lead from within, through the Spirit in their hearts and minds, opposing the flesh, refining their soul, and changing them from glory to glory into the image of Christ.

The AESA Cycle

AESA stands for Awareness, Encounter, Surrender, and Abide. The basic cycle is depicted in the following diagram.

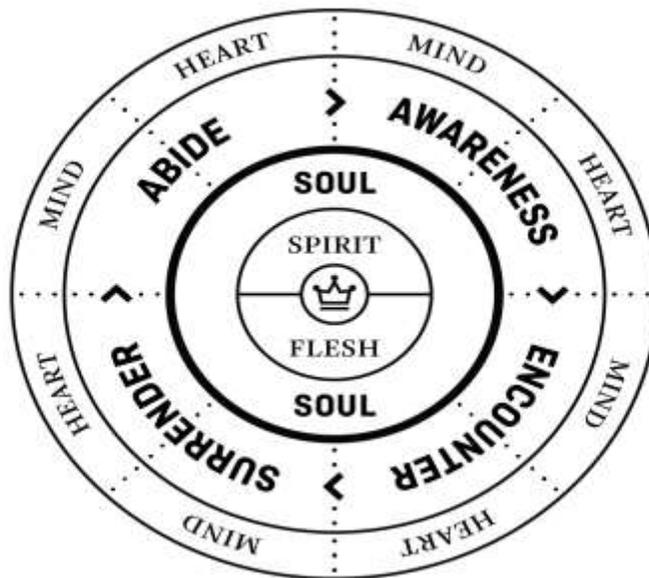


Figure 29. The Basic AESA Cycle

The AESA Cycle can be applied to soul formation through the mind and heart in many areas of life. With the mind one can become aware of a new concept or idea and encounter it through research, surrender to it as truth, and begin to live and abide in that idea. With relationships, one first becomes aware of a feeling, a sense in your heart of a potential friend which leads to an encounter where each person explores the other in mind and heart, sharing thoughts and feelings, surrender to friendship and a commitment to trust each other may follow leading to communion in an abiding two-way friendship. Once established this friendship continues to grow and that cycle can be depicted by AESA. Awareness of each other can grow, encounters enriched and surrender deepens all which can reinforce communion and abiding.

The same is true for our relationship with the Eternal Word. We seek to be more aware and attentive to the Eternal Word who dwells within our soul and speaks by the Spirit. We encounter Him as we quieten the thoughts and voices in our heads and become still, seeking to sense and hear Him. He speaks into our hearts and minds along the various avenues of our current formation field. He quietly and gently leads us down paths of righteousness and as we surrender, we abide and the flesh's grip on the soul weakens and the Spirit's is strengthened. This is soul formation where our soul begins to shine brighter and brighter as God does His refining work and we with His help oppose the enemy's work. Heart and mind are the pathways that this formation occurs. As one abides in Experiential Union conscious attention toward the Eternal Word brings new opportunities for

awareness and encounter. When one fails to surrender and/or withdraw ones attention to the Eternal Word's leading through the Spirit formation is hindered. A simple question can be used to reflect on with you are abiding. Are you with me? This can help maintain encounter through awareness. You simply ask this question more and more throughout your day. This can lead to encounter and surrender is simply doing what He reveals as right which is already written on your heart and mind. A believer can does know when they are abiding with Him. A volunteer at 3crosses named Charlie practices this abiding or experiential union. Throughout the day, he nurtures and fosters a conscious sense of the Eternal Word is whispering through the Spirit. Abiding like this in Experiential Union leaves you aware of the Word working around you and within you which starts the cycle again. Encounter opens up the possibility of surrender or going your own way which shuts down you your ability to abide. The Spirit doesn't leave you but your sense of Him as present leaves not in the sense of the union you have but in the abiding sense of experiential union. We as Christians need to become champions of abiding.

The Father's will is made manifest through the Eternal Word's action in the world through the power of the Spirit. It is the same within the lives of people. We when are filled with the Spirit and abiding can sense what the Father wants to do and say through the Word.

The Mind and Heart Pathways

People seem to be wired differently with respect to the pathways of mind and heart. Some gravitate to and focus on mind-based formation while others gravitate toward heart-based formation and some find a precious balance between the two. Satan, our enemy, will try to take advantage of imbalance and use it to his advantage to oppose the work of the Eternal Word in our soul.

The AESA model emphasizes the importance of the Word's work in both mind and heart for healthy spiritual formation. Through the Spirit, the indwelling Word of God works in a believer through the AESA Cycle along the pathways of mind and heart opposing the flesh and producing fruit of the Spirit and Christlikeness.

There is overlap between the pathways of mind and heart, but each one has a natural bent. For instance, the pathway of the mind focuses on knowledge, facts, rules, doctrine, scripture, theology, objective reason, science, and numbers. This pathway loves to study, organize, calculate, and process thoughts and ideas. Natural pathways of the heart are quite different including things like beauty, love, ego, creativeness, intuition, faith, music, subjectivity, art, poetry, relationships, feelings, prayer, worship, gifts & giving. This pathway is more creative, intuitive, and sensing. These are very different pathways and as mentioned people usually naturally gravitate to emphasize one side or the other. On my personal journey to salvation, the Word worked in both my mind and heart at different times. I believe that the heart was where the will and passion came for me to turn away from everything to seek an encounter with Him. At the same time

my mind was amazed at how God was at work doing supernatural things and wanted to study and learn more . After my heart conversion my journey shifted dramatically to the mind side upon entering the church. I was so hungry to know more, I sought out mentors, participated in small group Bible study, and listened to one sermon a week and often a daily message on the television. It was all very intellectual, I embraced the mind pathway, reading through and studying the whole Bible using commentaries. When finished, I went off to Seminary to learn more. I had embarked on a very intellectual path to encounter God. Oddly enough I found that this hindered my experiential union.

The pathway of the mind is a very common path for North Americans and it is reinforced in many ways. For instance, a person will naturally seek out and gather together in a church with like-minded or hearted people, who focus on the same formation pathway (birds of a feather). Or a person will adopt whatever focus the church they attend emphasizes (which I in fact did). This only exasperates the initial problem of imbalance. We need people and churches to seek balance in their experience of God through Spirit-filled mind and heart encounters that bring about renewal.

It has been my experience that many evangelical churches of North America emphasize an intellectual mind-based Christianity that is solidly and rationally rooted in the Scriptures while being very leery of the power of the Spirit. Indeed, at the far end of this focus we have Dispensationalism or Cessationist Theology. On the other hand there are also churches who place an

emphasis on the Spirit and power. Theirs is more the pathway of the heart and they call for a Spirit-led return to recognizing the essential importance of the personal presence and leading of the Lord for salvation and sanctification in both heart and mind.

The important thing is to seek balance between the heart and mind. With this said, my mind-based intellectual journey into formation served me well, and with the Spirit involved, He brought revelation and illumination and helped move me along. In my heart I felt that although everything seemed okay, something was missing regarding my spiritual life. It was hard for an ordained pastor of 15 years to humbly say... I think I'm missing something in my experience and understanding of God. My mind had to interpret and express what my heart was feeling... and my heart had to open and be vulnerable as my mind shared these feelings with those in my inner circle.

Heart and mind are always working together in some way, but they are very different pathways of formation. We need to find and nurture a precious balance between these two essential pathways. I believe God designed it to be this way. People of the heart and people of the mind need each other. The AESA model seeks to help the pathways of mind and heart to work together and separate at times to bring balance in formation.

Down through the differences in the way people think and feel has caused people to think about and experience God differently. In our day, intellectuals root their spiritual formation in Scripture and reason and are often cautious about using

experience or emotion as a basis to understand and follow God. For them the pathway to understand and know God is primarily one of the mind. On the other hand, people shifted to mystical side root their spiritual formation in the experience and power of the Spirit moving and leading in everyday life. Some evangelicals like Doug Bannister try to find middle ground and argue for an appropriate balance between Word (Scripture) and Power (Spirit) (Bannister 1999. 78). This is the same precious balance that I seek to find.

In the AESA Model sanctification happens as we nurture Spirit-led meditation and study (mind/Scripture/thought), and Spirit-infused contemplation and listening (heart/Word/feeling). Nurturing the work of the Eternal Word in both mind and heart through the Spirit in the soul leads one to produce fruit of the Spirit while putting to death the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:15-25). This is accomplished as the Eternal Word speaks into our lives in and leads us through the AESA Cycle producing fruit including; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and mutual affection (Galatians 5:22, 2 Peter 1:1-7).

This communication from the Word is a deep inner life process that must utilize the safeguards of Scripture and Inner Circle Relationships with other believers. Of course, words from the Lord will always line up with His revealed will, character, and nature as expressed in and through Jesus, Creation, Scripture, and History. The mind plays a fundamental role in the testing and discernment words from the Lord.

The concept of a formation field through which God actively works through has been incorporated into the expanded AESA Formation Cycle diagram (Figure 30) below as a circle of possible avenues of formation around a person's life. Awareness of one's formation field can facilitate encounter and surrender to the Word who is at work. I experienced the benefits of this myself as I became conscious of my Formation Field through the writing of my spiritual autobiography and the studying of Adrian Van Kaam's Formation Field Theory. You will notice that CPJ and ICR's are also a part of my formation field as avenues of formation, they have been instrumental in helping me work through the AESA Cycle when the going gets tough.

The AESA Cycle diagram (figure 30) reveals sample avenues of formation in the outer ring of words through which God or Satan can be at work in the life of a person. This diagram will be useful to gain a deeper understanding of the inner-workings of the AESA model, and I will use it as the chapter progresses to show how the avenues, pathways and stages function. The following diagram (Figure 30) depicts a person who is in Stage 1 – Pre-Salvation. They are spiritually dead, the flesh rules the soul through the pathways of mind and heart.

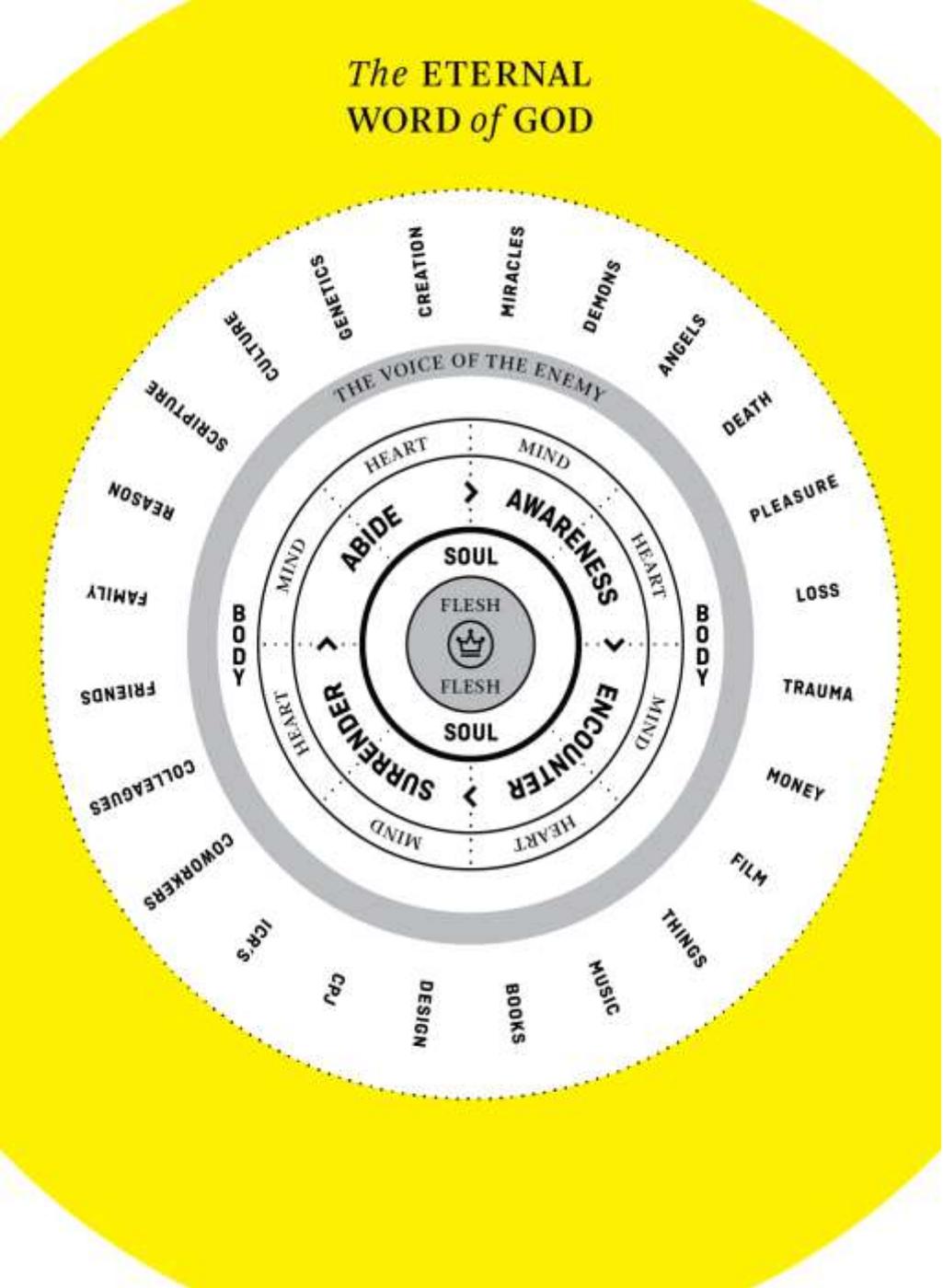


Figure 30. AESA Model Stage One – Pre-Salvation – flesh reigns spirit is not present in soul.

In stage one a person is dead to spiritual things. As they walk through life the Eternal Word graciously proclaims Himself again and again in different ways through the formation field of the person. These gracious acts of the Word create possibilities for spiritual awakening. When a person becomes aware of the working of the Eternal Word of God in their lives through mind or heart, encounter is possible. The person must choose to be open to the possibility of encounter and seek it wholeheartedly in faith.

Encounters with the Word in mind or heart can bring revelation, illumination and opportunities to repent of the flesh driven life they have been living, surrendering to God's love through Jesus Christ. If one chooses to appropriate the opportunity, repent and surrender to His love... they are born again of the Spirit. At this point, the Spirit takes up residence in the person's soul and begins to renew and strengthen mind and heart to put to death the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:17; 13:5, Colossians 1:27). Andrew Murray believes that believers must come to recognize that their only hope for victory and fruit bearing is through the Holy Spirit (Murray 2017, 23). In the soul, a constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit begins. To win this battle and be transformed into His image we need the Word to remove the veil and lead us from within. Paul speaks of this transformation in the following passage.

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's

glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:14-18)

The AESA Formation Cycle reveals a way that one can nurture the work of the Eternal Word of God through avenues of formation in their lives to bring about transformation in heart, mind and soul, putting the flesh to death. The next diagram (figure 31) depicts the change within the soul of someone who has entered Stage two. They have awakened to the Eternal Word, encountered Him and surrendered to His call, receiving His Spirit. The Eternal Word (yellow) now works from within and without. Experiential Union is now possible yet dependent upon one's awareness, encounter and surrender .

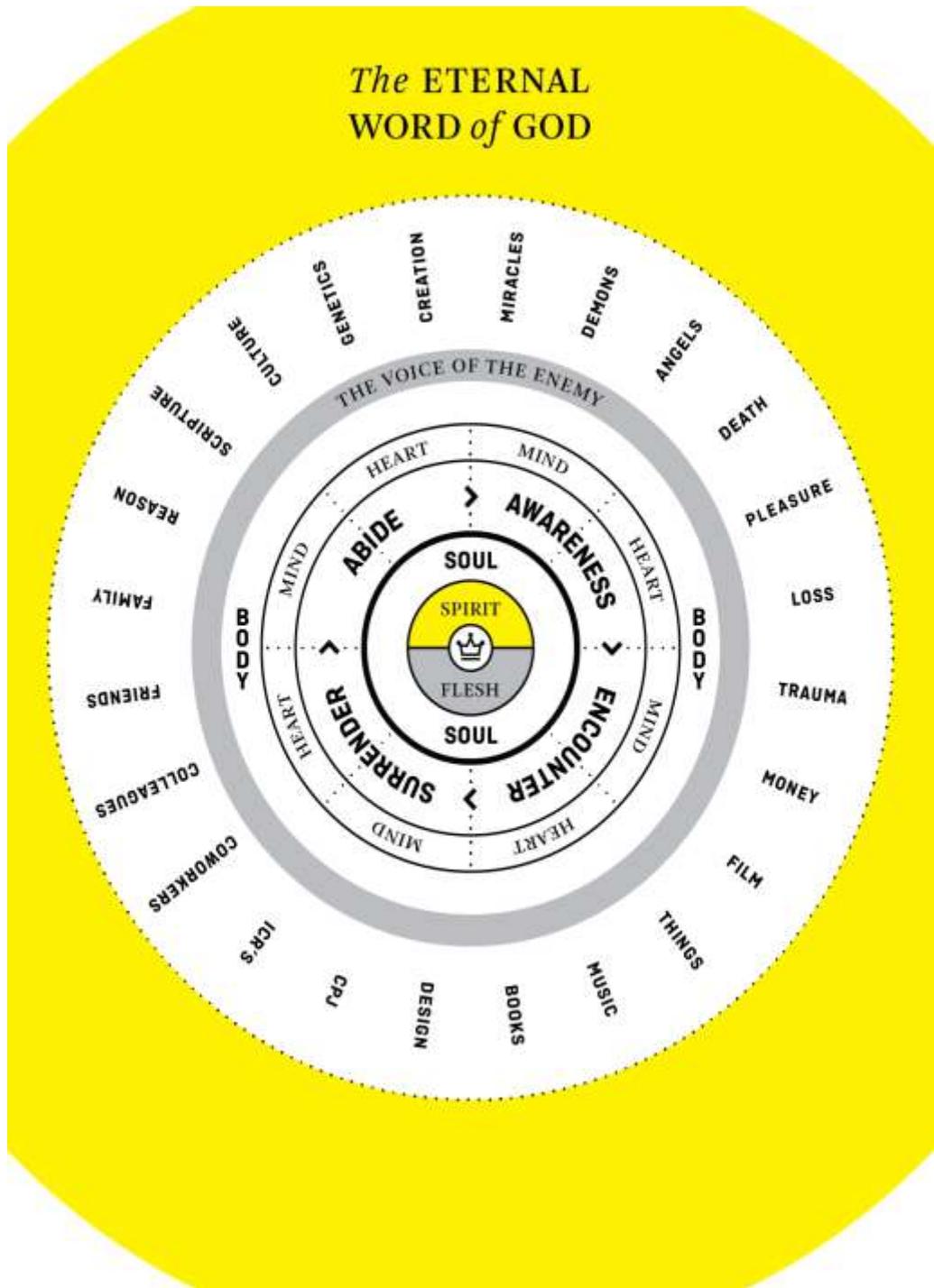


Figure 31. AESA Stage Two – Sanctification – Spirit now resides in the soul making communion with the Eternal Word of God possible.

When a person first awakens to and becomes aware of the Word of God, encounters Him personally, and surrenders, they are never the same. Something has fundamentally changed in the metaphysical or spiritual realm. No longer does an individual just “know” a bunch of things about God, they have encountered the Word of God who calls them into personal relationship. It is essential that people realize this and are equipped in how to live following the leading of the Word within. During my conversion I experienced the work of the Eternal Word from without and then from within but was not disciplined in how to nurture this connection. I am speaking of a voice speaking from within. This is not a loud voice trying to push us to do or not do. It is the gentle voice of the shepherd who leads you down paths of righteousness for His namesake. In fact, His voice is so gentle we often miss it, talk over it, or think it is our own voice.

In my experience, North Americans tend to think negatively of a person who hears inner voices (and yet we all hear them – all the time). People don’t go around telling other people that they hear voices in our heads, but I have yet to find one person who, when asked, will deny that they hear voices speaking in their head. Most people I know, believer and unbeliever, will admit to having conversations in their head. Conversations where it is often difficult to know just who is speaking.

People often share with me that most of these voices are negative in nature (relationally – i.e., bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, pride) and always flesh-focused (lust, money, food, ego). This has been my experience as well. People

freely admit to experiences of caving into the voice(s), and accepting the negative viewpoint of others or themselves, or surrendering to a fleshy temptation (Rom 3:23; Rom 7). I have categorized the voices in stage one into four categories:

1. SPIRITUAL - God/angel/Satan/demon (from without)
2. FLESH - body/ego (within)
3. MIND - conscience/moral/analytical (within)
4. HEART- feelings/sensing (within)

We know these voices very well for they have been with us all our life. They do change in intensity dependent upon which voice we are feeding or fighting.

I want to be very clear here that the move from Stage One to Two involves a new voice entering the picture. The Eternal Word enters in and becomes present within us, through the Spirit, able to speak into our hearts and minds just like the flesh does. When a spiritually dead person awakens and becomes aware of the Eternal Word of God, then seeks, encounters and surrenders to Him; He, the Eternal Word, joins with the them through the Holy Spirit. There is a soul surrender that takes place and the two are metaphysically joined and become one new creation and this is the part I wanted to emphasize, a new voice is present among those other lifelong voices! It takes time to learn how to discern this new voice. Most important is that one immerses themselves in the Scriptures. They come from the Eternal Word through the Spirit and have been accepted and validated by Him through church councils and the Word and the Spirit testify. In addition, the Eternal Word will speak and lead directly through the Scriptures

often bringing words and phrases and stories to mind. The Eternal Word within will never contradict the written Word. It is His Word and He does not change.

You will know the truth of this through personal experience or through a basic undeniable desire that you have for this communion that is already written on your soul and speaks from within, affirming what I write. You have either heard this voice speak from within or you haven't, and if you haven't then I can't explain to you what you are missing. Dallas Willard quotes John Baillie who says this in such an eloquent way:

Our knowledge of God rests on the revelation of his personal presence. . . . Of such a presence it must be true that to those who have never been confronted with it, argument is useless, while to those who have, it is superfluous. (Willard 2012, 29)

This is not the voice of the conscience but a new voice that may, or may not, line up with your conscience, depending upon your Formation Field (which play a role in forming your conscience/ethic/morals). This is an entirely new voice that speaks so softly, never pushy, never forcing, gentle like a shepherd most of the time. You may have heard Him and not even known it.

If you have never heard this voice, then I would encourage you to invite the Eternal Word of God directly into your heart and surrender your soul to Him as completely as you can and ask Him to tell you how He feels about you. To hear His voice from within as one with you is the most wonderful experience you will ever have. That the God who made the universe, the most powerful being in the universe loves you and adores you as His own child and even holds you in the palm of His hand (Chan 2009, Kindle Location 2978). His voice, the Word within

affirms the truth in this and the Spirit testifies. Many have not been taught to be aware of Him speaking so when He does, they just toss Him in with all the other voices (most often conscience). This doesn't need to happen. Tozer says that if a believer gets still (preferably with their Bible spread before them) and listens they will hear the speaking voice (Tozer 1948, Kindle Location 837). His voice speaks of different things and He has a different unique tone that is beautiful and in sync, rhythmic in nature and at peace.

The key to all spiritual formation and growth is awareness of, encounter with and surrender to, the Eternal Word who now dwells within by the Spirit. Conscious awareness of the metaphysical reality of Christ within allows for ongoing encounter and surrender as He speaks from the depths of their being, in and through things in their formation field. Through the mystery of the baptism of the Holy Spirit they have become one with Jesus and the Father (John 17:21). Mind and heart are being renewed through the whispers and promptings of the indwelling Word of God (Roman 12:2; Ezekiel 18:31; Ezekiel 36:26). Through the Spirit, the Eternal Word of God takes up residence within, bringing words of love, encouragement, affirmation, edification, guidance, calling, comfort, and at times rebuke but never condemnation (Philippians 2:1-2; Thessalonians 2:16-17; John 14:26; John 16:12-15) .

At the center of the AESA Cycle diagram is the soul which is where the battle between flesh and Spirit takes place in the believer. This battle is influenced by the mind and heart which are the pathways of soul formation. Mind and heart

are influenced through the body by events in our formation field. There are many avenues for formation, the diagram lists some basic avenues. The enemy Satan tries to block you from seeing and hearing the Eternal Word by attempting to speak into events in our formation field and use them for evil. The Eternal Word of God wants to use these avenues of formation for good and now He works from within as well (Nee, 2014, Kindle Location 70). Think of the outer outside wheel containing the avenues of formation as able to spin, stopping wherever an avenue of formation becomes active, energized by the Eternal Word of God, or Satan, to possibly become an active part of one's ASEA Cycle for good, or for evil. Satan tries to darken our awareness of the light of the Eternal Word. Yet, God's Word easily penetrates the darkness, and this is especially so when we seek, or are broken and cry out to, Him. The battle for a believer becomes one of nurturing and maintaining awareness of, encounters with, and surrender to, the light of the Eternal Word of God shining through the darkness, along various avenues of formation though both heart and mind. The diagram below (figure 32) illustrates what it looks like when a person is being formed by the Eternal Word through a formative event along an avenue of formation; death. In the diagram the Eternal Word is penetrating and influencing the soul for good through the heart and mind pathways through exposure to death in some way. For example, reading this paper you may have had a moment like this as you read about my nephew's death and reflected on your own life.

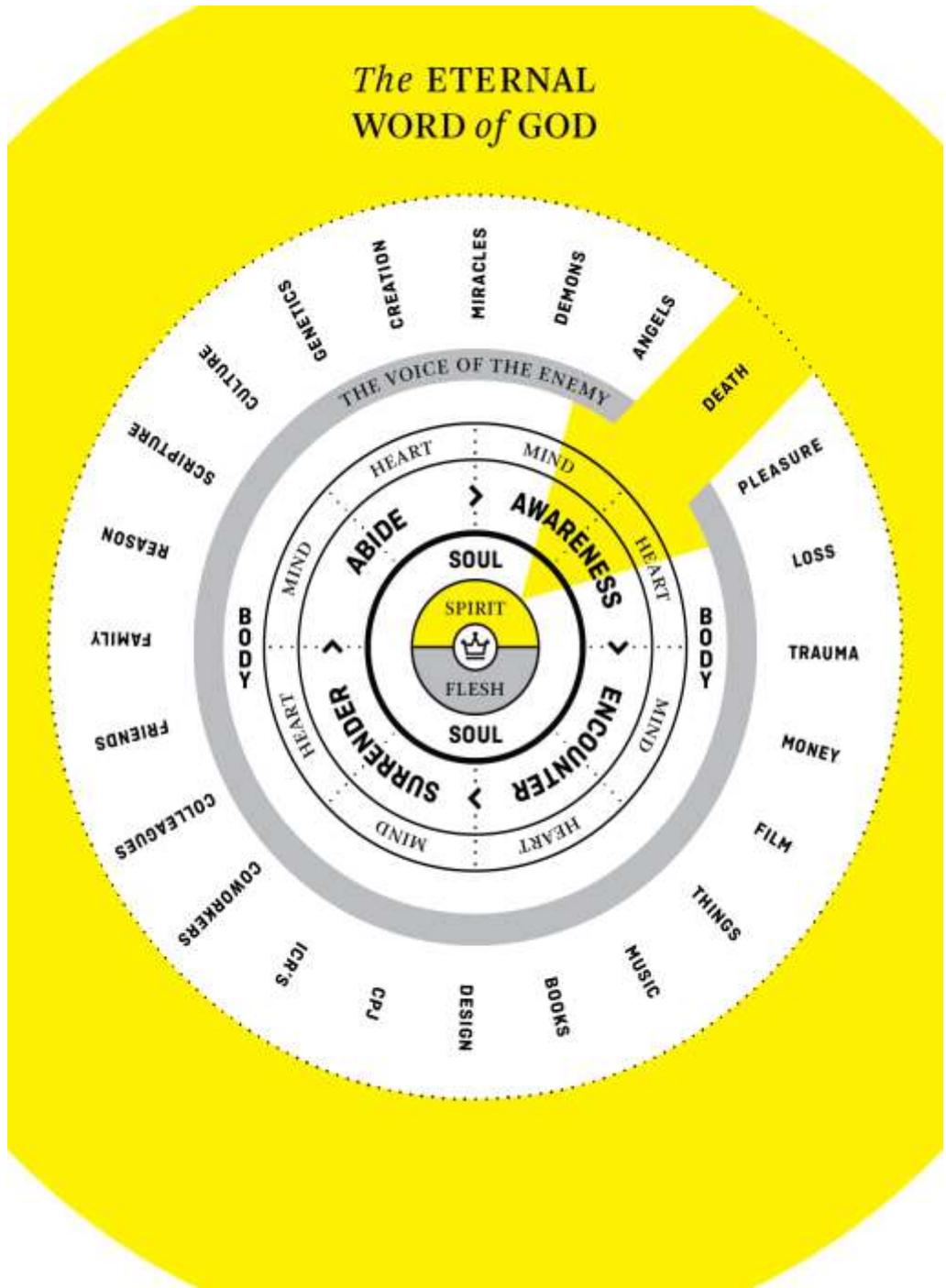


Figure 32. Word of God influences soul for positive spiritual formation in the soul through the pathways of mind and heart along the avenue of formation – death.

Death, always has potential to be a formative event for good or for evil, often working in both mind and heart. The next step in formation when using AESA would be to seek to encounter with the Word through CPJ or another means about this formative event. Simply talk to Him openly and honestly about the event, reflect on the event and write out your own thoughts and feelings to God. While doing this be ready for Him to enter the conversation and share His thoughts and feelings (write them down)! Encounter will lead to the possibility of surrendering to the Word's leading. Surrender will bring one to rest and abide in peace. Remember the leading from the Eternal Word is always about soul and character formation and not usually predictive in nature.

The AESA Cycle diagram also reveals that our enemy Satan can also use the formation avenues to lead our hearts and minds astray influencing the control that the flesh can have on the soul. This is revealed by Satan's dark ring of influence just outside the body. One must be diligent to discern Satan's attempts to use the AESA cycle to get us to indulge in flesh formation. He seeks to speak through the heart and mind pathways, through various formation avenues, to stimulate and arouse flesh formation and control, within the soul. The next AESA Cycle diagram (see Figure 33) reveals how this works. In the case below through an encounter involving money, the soul is being influenced by Satan, along both mind and heart pathways. The inner soul circle spins to line up the flesh side of the soul, with whatever avenue and pathway(s) of formation is currently active and vice versa for the Spirit.

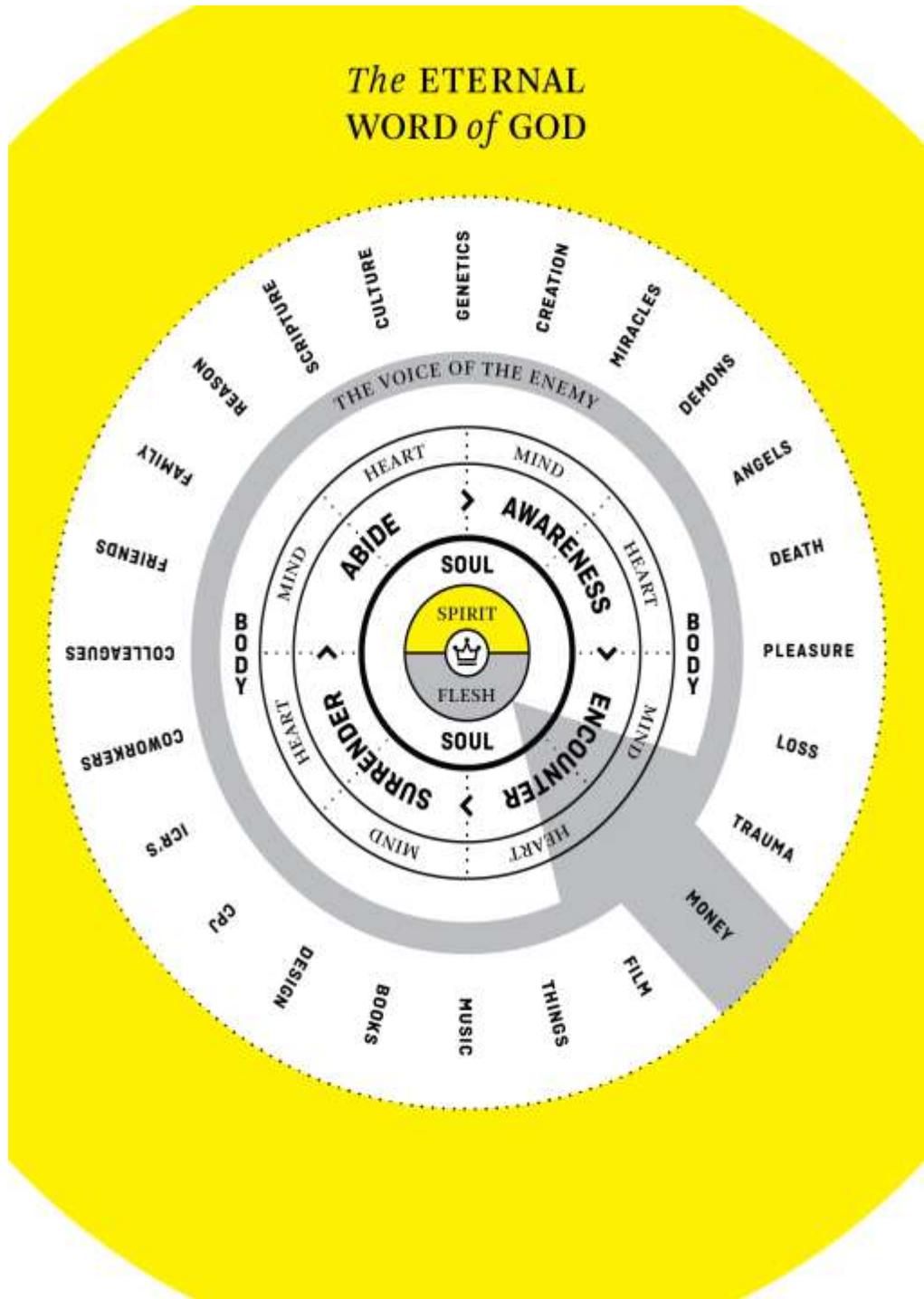


Figure 33. Satan influencing flesh formation in the soul through the pathways of mind and heart along the avenue of formation – money.

Formation begins with an awareness of the Eternal Word of God through an avenue of formation in the mind or heart. Awareness brings with it the possibility of an encounter with the Word. Encounter is followed by surrender to the Word's leading, and surrender is the key to abiding with the Word. Then as we are attentive to the Word and continue to nurture awareness, the cycle can begin again which moves us to deeper levels of surrender, diminishing the flesh's control and influence, in the soul.

Helping people develop and move through Stage two (above) is the fundamental focus of my model. I believe that Sanctification is bolstered when people become aware that each event in their lives has potential to be used by God for positive formation or by Satan for flesh formation. This conscious realization helps them seek to encounter God and have Him speak into an event. For instance, an email or a word from another causes an offense to rise up in the flesh. The AESA Cycle is designed to help one realize what is happening and to seek for God to speak through the Spirit into the event. When believers fail to understand these dynamics, they can get stuck early on in this stage and the primary commission of Jesus (to share His message of love and forgiveness to the world) is hindered. This is exactly what our spiritual enemy wants. The character and nature of the Word is not being formed in the individual and they do not know how to access or utilize the power associated from Him working from within to crucify the flesh and bear fruit of the Spirit. The AESA model seeks to try and remedy this by helping people become aware of the Word and know that

the Word is always at work and to seek encounters with Him and surrender to His leading. He will lead us to springs of living water and into deeper levels of Experiential Union during sanctification. Sanctification is the stage that believers we should be pressing into, with everything we have and straining with all our might, toward full mind, heart, and soul surrender and an ever-deepening experience of union with the Eternal Word.

Experiential Union in the AESA model is represented in the cycle by the word; abide. This occurs whenever one is aware of and surrendered to the Eternal Word. One moves in and out of this place of abiding dependent on their awareness of and surrender to God. They do not lose salvation they are just not in communion. A. B. Simpson would describe this as when the Lord who dwells within moves from being resident, to President. I have always liked the way Simpson described the change that happens in the soul when the heart and mind come together to surrender to, and participate in, the love of Jesus.

Maturity comes from having more and more moments of Experiential Union. One comes to abide naturally, surrender comes easier and at times there is no longer any inner dialogue, thought, distinction, or feeling expressed between the Word and the person; for they have become one. A person just begins to think and act like Jesus naturally.

This should be something that believers strive toward. Adopt a rallying call like; "Toward Experiential Union with all out abandonment." We need to have the church adopt this idea that union or maturity as reflected in

Christlikeness is attainable and should be sought after. Not as an end, but as the means to the end of sharing Him with the world. In this state we shine brightly and outreach naturally happens. This moment by moment sanctification state of Experiential Union depicted is the AESA diagram below (figure 34). In my research project (chapter six) some comments revealed that certain people were already having moments of Experiential Union. Participant G22 described their day like this;

I start my day with Jesus and a lot throughout the day I'm praying/communicating with God about how to respond in situations or to people or worshipping him but there are some situations where I want to respond in my flesh and it takes a minute to realize this, which then leads me to Jesus and praying to have him help me in the moment. At the end of the day, I'll typically read a few verses or passage from scripture and journal about how/if/when I saw God moving and leading me that day.

This is very much a balanced Ignatian/Quietist type comment. When one abides in Experiential Union people sense something different about you. It is more than just your behavior or responses, it is a metaphysical thing. Most of the time you live dead to the flesh and at peace regardless of circumstances, you are real and transparent. You can't hide. this especially in current North American culture believers and unbelievers can sense this. Van Kaam and Muto say that those present to the Lord... "radiate like specks of light their inner harmony with grace and nature" (Van Kaam and Muto 1980. 42). Those searching are drawn to people in this stage, while those opposed or afraid of God's work in their life may distance themselves.

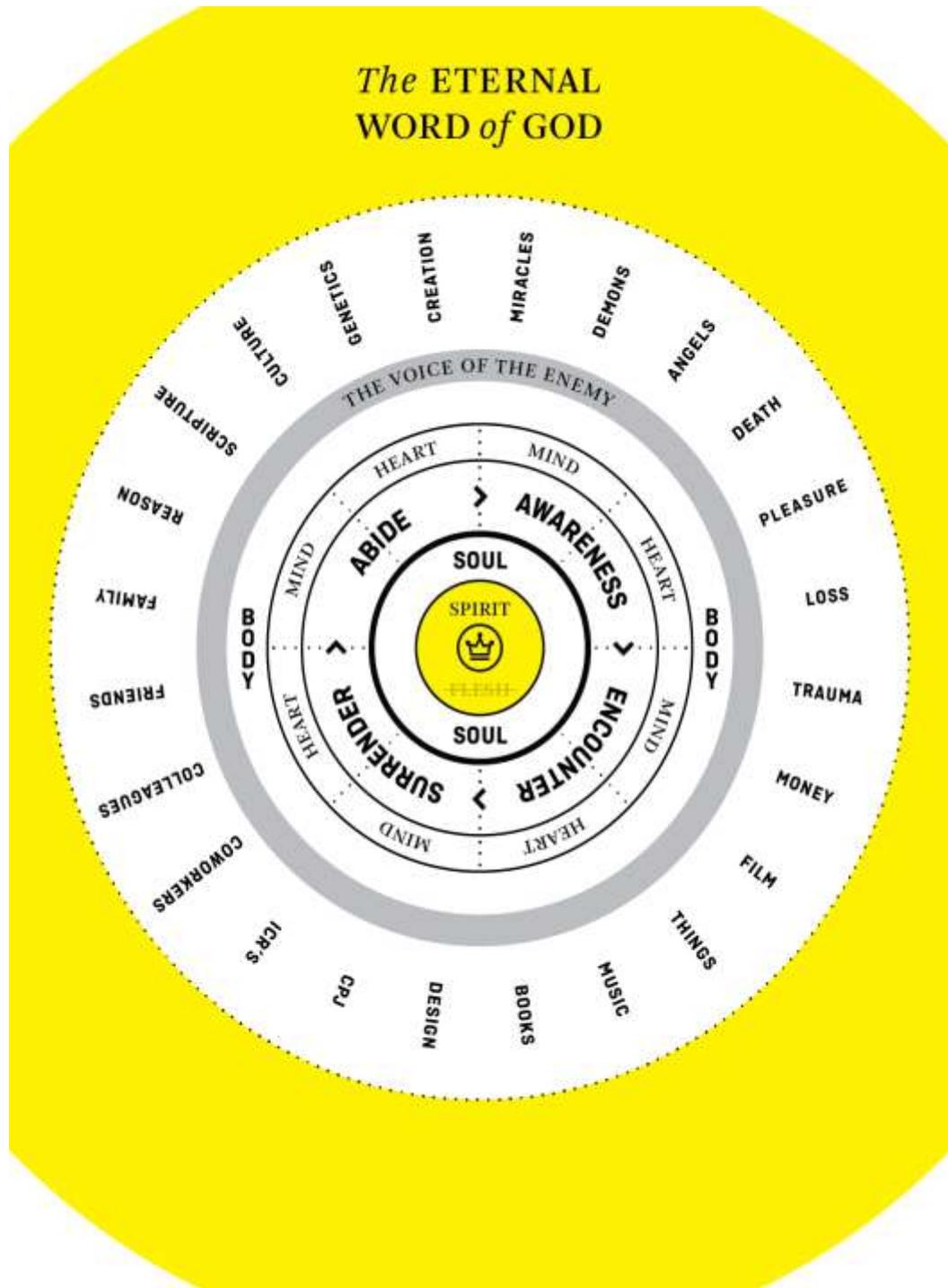


Figure 34. AESA Stage Two – Sanctification - Experiential Union

Few believers these days are experiencing this but when you meet one and are in their presence you know it and they naturally draw people to Christ by exalting Him in and through their lives as He leads from within. It is wonderful to behold. Mulholland states that the premise of his book *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*, is loving union, that the source of this union is the unfathomable love of God for us and that the larger purpose of this union is that the world may believe (Mulholland 2006. Kindle Locations 99, 105 & 147). He references this phrase loving union in relation to God ninety-three times, eighty-five of them as “loving union with God” in this book. Clearly being in loving union with God is central for the Christians daily life and that this is what makes outreach possible. Mulholland also speaks of what makes union impossible: “We will never experience life in loving union with God as long as the roots of our identity, meaning, value and purpose are grounded in something other than God” (Mulholland 2006 (Kindle Locations, 1134-1135). This quote reflects Molinos and other quietist thinkers powerfully.

Scripture and the “Word of God”

This portfolio is arguing for a larger view of the Word of God. I have tried to delineate this by adding the word Eternal. This section will help me clarify my high view of Scripture and how it informs my model. The Scriptures are inspired by the Word of God through the Spirit. The Scriptures are indeed invaluable in helping us understand God and His work in the lives and hearts of men and women. Their primary purpose is to reveal that God loves us and wants

to have a personal relationship with us. We were not in a state to be in right relationship with Him and needed salvation (Gen 3:1; Rom 3:23, 6:23). As a remedy, the Father sent the Son to reveal His perfect love by offering Himself as a sacrifice (John 3:16). Jesus Christ makes salvation and personal relationship with God possible (Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10). The Scriptures reveal how this personal relationship can be initiated, nurtured and sustained (1 John 1:9; James 4:7; Philippians 3:8-15) through the indwelling Word made possible by the Spirit. Through the Spirit a physical document comprised of words from Him (2 Timothy 3:14-17) can help us establish and maintain a metaphysical relationship with the Eternal Word of God who seeks to dwell within us by the same Spirit (Ezekiel 36:27; John 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:14). This experience of a metaphysical spiritual relationship is made possible by Jesus as the Word who joins with us and dwells within our soul by the Spirit (John 14:20-23; 15:4-5; 17:22-23), He gives us a new heart (Ezekiel 11:26) and begins to do battle against the flesh (Romans 8) by renewing our mind (Romans 12:2). This renewal of the mind by the Word through the Spirit is necessary for the Scriptures reveal things that can only be understood spiritually (1 Corinthians 2). Quite simply to progress and understand, we must be born again of the Spirit (John 3:5-8).

In 2 Peter 1:3, Peter specifically references the “drawing’ or “calling’ that God does. Peter uses the Greek Word *kaleo*. This Greek word implies much more than a general “calling’; it speaks of a specific calling or drawing by name.

Spiritual formation happens when people are aware of and respond to this lifelong

personal “drawing’ and “calling’ and “leading’ of the Triune God through the Eternal Word. The following Scriptures support the idea that God is very much involved in the saving and sanctifying of believers:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them” (John 6:44).

“It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

“Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.” (2 Timothy 2:25)

“Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

“May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.” (2 Peter 1:2-4)

We see the Eternal Word of God powerfully at work, calling, speaking, guiding, and leading believers in the early church (Acts 9:3-4; 10:13-15; 18:9-10; 19:20-21; 2 Peter 1:16-18 & 21 – see chapter 3). Testimonies of God leading from within continue down through the centuries to this very day. Even before Jesus’ time and the sending of the Spirit, there is good evidence that the Word was at work in people’s lives. The Old Testament includes account after account where God comes and speaks to people, teaching, blessing, revealing, providing,

empowering, guiding, correcting and loving them personally with words. He still works in and through all things to save and redeem and sanctify. Once you become aware of, encounter Him and surrender to Him, He is with you always and He will never leave you or forsake you. As a believer He is with you, working every day around you and within you although your awareness and experience of Him can be limited. In most believer's lives there are instances where God speaks to a person in their mind or heart and they hear Him, but they think it is their own voice or conscience and they respond (maybe they do something good or right or they stop doing something wrong or bad, or they forgive someone). They do not actually attribute the initial thought or prompting to God's speaking voice.

Unknowingly they take the credit (or glory) for something that God's eternal Word originated from within them through the Spirit in their heart and mind. This reveals how important inner life awareness and discernment is when journeying through life with God. It is the place that God works from, to bring about changed lives while glorifying His name. CPJ and ICR's can help you nurture your inner life safely and come to know when it is the Lord leading.

Chapter 3 revealed that in the New and Old Testament, the Word of God and Word of the Lord referred to the living, active, powerful, creative, sustaining presence of the Lord, and His personal message of grace and love spoken into the minds and hearts of those with ears to hear. The Eternal Word of God is at work through avenues of formation including; the Scriptures, creation, history, nations, cultures, communities, people, books, movies, songs, and pretty much every part

of life as we know it. These all come together uniquely in each person's life at any given point in time to form their Formation Field within which the Word can work (see figure 26).

In my journey He used my own disillusionment with life, a book I read, a movie I watched, friends, a cross in the sky, my parents, my past and so much more, to reinforce His call within me to walk away from my hedonistic life and head to the mountains to meet with Him. He, the Word, spoke through all these things. He pierced the darkness that surrounded me, spoke into my heart and called me out into His light. After this dramatic salvation experience, I turned back to my own reasoning and study and became disillusioned, something was missing. He used many formative events in my formation field to lead me back to streams of living water. My disillusionment with the church, my wife's illness, songs, a trip to Israel, a book on my shelf, my past, a bad hire, two new church plants coming to town, a failing church, a trip to New York, and a thirty-five-acre property, to once again grab hold of my heart, and speak directly into it.

For years my mind-based intellectual pursuit of the deeper life had come up short of the kind of relationship I desired with God. Letting go and moving from head to heart to find balance was a dramatic step for me that was helped and reinforced by the current events of my life listed above. In both cases disillusionment and brokenness awakened in me a willingness to drop my defenses, be vulnerable and open my heart to the awareness of His presence and trust Him. My journey on these pathways along the AESA Cycle was facilitated

through the disciplines of CPJ and ICR's which reinforce regular quiet listening to the still small voice of the Word within, and the open sharing of what the Word is communicating.

The indwelling Word's primary purpose is not to bring predictive guidance or prophecy. Through the Spirit He leads from within to renew the mind and heart and put the flesh to death so that we can come to unite with Him experientially and live to honour God in everything we do and say. Andrew Murray puts this so well;

Faith is also the ear through which the voice of God is always heard. The Father speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Word-the substance of what God says-and the Spirit is the living voice. The child of God needs this secret voice from heaven to guide him, and teach him, as it taught Jesus, what to say and what to do. An ear opened towards God is a believing heart that waits to hear what He says. (Murray (Kindle Locations 910-913).

This renewal of the mind and heart by the Word through the Spirit changes us from glory to glory into His image and naturally results in a burden for sharing God's love with others and the character, nature, and anointing of Jesus to do it with.

The AESA Formation model is based on the belief that for salvation and sanctification (spiritual growth / transformation) a person must first come to be aware of God's presence and reality and then seek to personally encounter Him. Awareness and encounter are only part of the spiritual formation process. Once a person becomes aware of the Word of God and His call toward (Salvation, Sanctification or Union) they must choose to surrender and follow to abide. Awareness of, encounters with, and surrender to God's Word (whether in

salvation or sanctification) require God's active presence in calling, leading, and enabling.

The Power of Stillness

Without stillness it is hard to come to know His voice and leading.

Stillness is such an important part of formation in the AESA Cycle. Stillness is affirmed in the Old Testament as a very important part of coming to be aware of how God speaks and who He is (Psalm 46:10; 1 Kings 19:9-13).

Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Spirit; brought a new dimension to the conversational connection we can have with God. The Eternal Word of God can now dwell within men and women through the Holy Spirit and speak from within. Jesus was quite clear that being born again of the Spirit and being "indwelt" was central to being able to follow Him and serve in ministry (John 3, John 16:12-16; Luke 11:13; Titus 3:5-6; John 15:26). In the New Testament we see Jesus often withdrawing to solitary, quiet places to pray (Matt 12:15; Luke 5:16; Mark 3:7) and commune with His Father. After His resurrection He told His followers to wait for the Spirit to come and dwell within (Pentecost - Luke 24:49; John 14:15-17; Rom 5:5; Acts 2:4; 4:31). It would be from within through the Holy Spirit that the Word would lead, guide, teach, convict, encourage, remind, bear spiritual fruit and give spiritual gifts (Romans 8 and 12, Acts 1 and 2; Galatians 5; 1 Corinthians 3; 6; 12; 13, John 14 and 16; 1 Corinthians 3).

From the Garden of Eden until today those who worship the God of Abraham have embraced the idea that to connect deeply and personally with God one should separate oneself from the busyness of everyday life and focus on Him. Things like retreats, following a daily rule for prayer, going into the outdoors or wilderness, or up a mountain are all potential pathways. The focus was to be free from distraction and quiet one's mind so as to connect with God who is Spirit.

This makes so much sense and is reinforced by the 4th commandment:

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day set it apart as holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

When people don't follow God's plan to slow down, rest and dedicate this day to Him they can become overtired, stressed, out of balance, unfocused, and maybe most importantly they can lose the ability to discern Him and His work in their lives and their place in this world. The natural outflow of this is the inability to hear and discern the Inner Voice. God viewed this day of rest as so important that disobeying was punishable by death (Exodus 31:14).

Getting Practical – Your life

It is important to differentiate between withdrawing to get quiet and listen for the still small voice (contemplation - Quietism) and becoming aware of God's presence and leading through your own reflection (meditation - Ignatian Spirituality). Both are important parts of spiritual development and growth.

Rushing into the day without centering and connecting oneself with God can hinder the ability to sense Him throughout the day. Praying the prayer of examen at the end of a busy day can help one assess and review the day's activities and consider how one responded to God's action. If the Prayer of Examen is made into a strictly intellectual meditative assessment of the day it falls short. By making this prayer contemplative and inviting God to speak into the prayer of examen during moments of stillness can be very powerful and beneficial. Simply making opportunities for God to do just this, by slowing down, centering oneself, becoming still in mind, body, heart and flesh and entering the moment to wait upon the Lord can be very helpful.

Salvation and sanctification (Spiritual Formation) happen in and through close, personal, two-way encounters with the triune God in Spirit through the Eternal Word of God. Awareness, encounter and surrender happen in mind and heart and are often opposed by the flesh. As mentioned earlier, Satan likes the AESA cycle and seeks to use awareness, encounter, surrender and abide in some very different ways and for a very different purpose. He will speak through the mind and heart to try and strengthen the position of the flesh in the soul. Prior to salvation, the flesh is free to influence the mind and heart and rule the soul. In this state a person is never at peace. They may try and hide this, but the truth is often reflected in the noisy busy life of desperation they many live. The only hope for a life of meaning comes through personal relationship with the Eternal Word of God. Whenever a person becomes aware of and experiences or encounters God,

enabling grace can flow into their life; for salvation and sanctification. An empowering is made available to put off the old nature and be changed from glory to glory. The spiritual formation stages; Pre-Salvation and Sanctification, involve an aligning of the heart, mind, soul and body under the rule of the Word who dwells within. Healthy growth in these formation stages involves the heart and mind. Head knowledge and personal heart experience of God's deep, rich, personal love for us is needed in both stages.

The challenge in this is that God has made us different. Some people excel and enjoy gaining and understanding knowledge-based information about God's love. Others excel and enjoy being in the moment and feeling the moving of God's Spirit within them. Each of these represent a different part of the body and we need each other (1 Corinthians 12). We experience the reality of this growing up, when in elementary school we see one who naturally excels at math and science. Then we peer over the shoulder of another who draws a picture without any effort, or we meet someone who seems to be able to just sense how we are feeling. We experience this throughout life meeting these people who are wired differently and although it can be challenging, we are the better for it. On one end of the spectrum some people seem born predisposed to be heart-based creative and intuitive and often become musicians, artists, writers, inventors and actors. These people also seem more emotional and sensing. On the other hand, many are born predisposed to excel at being mind-based analytical logical, rational thinkers and often become engineers, scientists, mathematicians, and accountants. This

has to be viewed as a spectrum with people having a mix of these two extremes. Personality profiles have been designed to help people understand how they are wired. There is not one right way to be wired the key is knowing where you are at and seeking healthy balance while respecting others who are different. In the church we would see this reflected in the fundamentalist versus the charismatic, the meditative versus contemplative mystic, and the prophet versus priest. Jesus as a mystic Himself shows us the importance of this heart side.

Within church history we see a tension between these groups down through history. Usually there are the objective rational analytical Scripture-based thinkers on one side and the Spirit-led mystic feelers who like living in the moment connected with God on the other. Ironically the Lord gave me two very different daughters and used them to speak into the development of this model. The first is a carefree, emphatic girl who lives in and for the moment. She is tender and breaks easy. She can feel your heart and will take on your pain or joy. She is currently studying to be a nurse. Phoebe excels in drama and has taken on the lead in several plays. She is a great at cooking things where there is freedom. Phoebe is not so good with baking which requires specific measurements and order.

Sophie is my second daughter who had a stroke in part of her brain when in utero. It affected the intuitive sensing emotive (heart) side of her brain. As we watched her grow up it seemed that the analytical and rational side of her mind compensated and became even stronger. Sophie is on time right down to the

minute, she has a photographic memory with respect to dates and place. She is organized, structured and excels at baking and Bible quizzing. She made it to internationals and was the top quizzier at a District event in an extremely competitive environment. Sophie excels at school in spite of some learning difficulties associated with her stroke.

Sophie and Phoebe are very different. Sophie is a law-abiding legalist while Phoebe is a carefree let the rules slide a bit, feel it, kind of girl. Springing a surprise on Sophie, even if it was a good one, was never a good idea. Phoebe loves a good surprise and a change of plans. Sophie needs time to process and work through something. Sophie needs the details and does not want the plans to change once they are set. Sophie and Phoebe are very different, and they often are diametrically opposed on things, but they still need each other. They have come to a beautiful place of realizing this, embracing it, and enjoying each other's differences. Getting to this place was not easy and they still have some pretty good spats, but their love runs deep, and they are far better off for having each other. It is important to note something here. Upon entering what would become Gethsemane Garden these same two girls sensed the thin place each in her own way. The same applies for these two types of people within the church. The enemy wants to tear apart churches by separating people and will use the flesh and mind and heart in any way he can. The Spirit wants to bring these two types of people together because they are better together. When Sophie and Phoebe abide, it is beautiful, there is wonderful peace and both are better for it. The same

applies to these two types of personalities regarding spiritual things. I believe that separating into different denominations that emphasize different pathways (heart/mind or Scripture/Spirit) is not beneficial to the church body. This extends on down into small groups and Inner Circle Relationships. It is important to have people who are shifted each way. Finally, as expected this same illustration applies for each person individually. We have already discussed how we are all individually shifted to gravitate toward heart or mind focused formation. We each need to seek balance and to get balance we need to have people who are strong in the side that we are weak in close to us. They are best able to help us have a full experience of God.

Concluding Thoughts

God's plan to redeem, renew and form us spiritually involves encounters with Him and with others. For spiritual formation to occur, one needs to grow in awareness of and surrender to, the triune God as He works in, through, and around us. How can one be spiritually formed in any way, without personally experiencing and encountering Him? Being born spiritually dead we are helpless to be formed spiritually on our own (Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 4:3). In the AESA Formation Cycle God gets all the glory because we are formed only as the Word works in us to shape, mold and change us (Phil. 2:12-13). The Word can work through all things in our Formation Field to form us, including; Bible study, meditation, teaching we receive, the books we read, the songs we sing and so much more. These things can grow us intellectually and

help us know and understand sound doctrine. However, God has made it so that knowing Him personally need not be reserved for those who are high level thinkers. A simple-minded person, or even a child, can know and experience the riches of God's mercy and love through the presence of the indwelling Word. Jesus affirms this when He says that to enter the Kingdom of God you must receive it like a little child (Luke 18:15-17). When one experiences the personal affirmation of the One who dwells within as He speaks from within, they are usually overwhelmed. This is a "game changer" for someone who has only intellectually received and experienced the love of God. As they continue to be aware of and surrendered to, the inner leading of His presence they grow and are empowered to do battle against the flesh from the One within. On the contrary, the inability to hear and discern God's inner voice of love will inhibit one's ability to battle the flesh and grow spiritually.

Growth along the pathways of mind and heart is nurtured when one uses the AESA cycle alongside of meditation, contemplation, practicing the Presence, listening to the still small Voice, and developing Inner Circle Relationships. It is also important to consider the impact your environment and relationships (your avenues of formation) have had, and are having, on your formation journey. The AESA Cycle helps one become aware of the battle that is occurring between flesh and Spirit in the soul and the important role that the mind and heart play regarding victory in each avenue of formation.

CHAPTER FIVE:
RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT:
THE EFFECT OF CONTEMPLATIVE
PRAYER JOURNALING AND INNER
CIRCLE RELATIONSHIPS ON SPIRITUAL
FORMATION

This chapter will include a brief overview of what happens at 3crosses and highlight the challenge that this research project was specifically designed to address. The purpose of this research project was to develop a response to this challenge in light of my Word-based Model of Spiritual Formation, test it, and in the process come up with some ideas that can be applied at 3crosses. I will introduce and review the project and relate how it is connected to the AESA Spiritual Formation Model presented in the last chapter. Key terms will be defined, and information regarding supervision and permission for the project reviewed. Nouwen makes a powerful statement about spiritual formation and the need to hear God's voice;

“Only by attending constantly to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy” (Nouwen, 6). My ministry at 3crosses involves

helping people to safely tune into the inner Voice of the Spirit through Conversational Prayer Journaling (CPJ – see 1.3) and then experience the power of vulnerability when they transparently share what they sensed God say with others. Participants are encouraged to return home and develop and nurture their own Inner Circle Relationships (ICR's - see 1.3). Many 3crosses participants express that they do head home with a new-found desire to nurture these habits, only to find that the busyness and pressures of modern-day life get in the way. Personal experience has revealed CPJ and ICR's complement each other and keep one on the rails, so to speak. It is important to experience the positive effects of the two disciplines done together over time. This research project involved developing 2 weeks of follow up material to help people experience the benefits of incorporating CPJ and IC's into their lives. Six days of mp3 guided CPJ were followed by an IC meeting and then the cycle was repeated. Data was collected in the form of: surveys, Skype-based interviews, and a group interview. The data revealed that when participants practiced these habits, they were more aware of and more surrendered to God's presence and leading during the day. The younger group was more open to new ways of doing things and openly expressed a desire to continue the disciplines. I believe my expectations for participants to adopt these new habits after only two weeks were too high.

Opportunity

Spiritually speaking, 21st century North American Christians are facing challenging times. Many are full of intellectual knowledge about spiritual things yet lack an awareness of God's indwelling "Presence" (Chaan 2009, 36). For six years people have been coming to 3crosses and giving personal testimony that they are often overwhelmed with thoughts that inhibit their ability to be still and encounter God's presence. At the beginning of the retreat during the teaching and discussion sessions participants often express that they do not know how to distinguish between the inner voices of self, Satan and/or God, which can be very dangerous for a believer (Blackaby 2002, 215). Most express openly that they have never been conscious of God speaking a Word into their heart. Participants also mention that materialism and the fast pace of life often leave them rushing around feeling that there is no time to slow down, enter the present moment, become aware of God's presence, and personally encounter Him. Upon arriving at 3crosses, the warm atmosphere of the Café causes people to breathe a sigh of relief and expressions of how much they need a reprieve from the busyness and rush of life naturally flow out. Many are brutally honest sharing that their souls are thirsty and hungry for an encounter with God. This is good but reflects a lack of day to day connection with God. Without disciplines like CPJ and ICR's that help us regularly slow down and become attentive to and aware of God's presence and moving in our lives, it is difficult to encounter Him and sense His leading. If one has no sense of God's leading, then they have nothing to which they should surrender. This is a vicious cycle; without awareness... no encounter... without

encounter there is no leading to which one should surrender and without surrender one cannot abide. Abiding and resting reinforce awareness and jump start the AESA Formation Cycle again.

Context

The AESA Model of Spiritual Formation was developed for, and will be used by, those who come to the Prayer Mountain at the 3crosses Experiential Listening Centre. The vision of 3crosses is to help unbelievers and believers recognize God's work around and within them and hear Him speak to them personally. Participants at 3crosses have included men and women from the ages of 13 and up. Groups are often mixed but have often included members who have something in common. Some examples include church staff, elders boards, Bible study groups, recovery groups, men or women's groups, and family-focused groups like brothers and sisters or fathers and sons. The Jesus Experience at 3crosses helps believers personally experience the reality that God dwells within and has become one with them through the eternal Word by His Spirit. The two pathways of encountering the Word that the AESA Cycle focuses on are heart and mind. People come to the prayer mountain in Muskoka to meet with God. There is something very special about walking along trails amid creation while listening to music, Scripture, or a teaching that bridges into times of quiet listening and journaling. Believers come to 3crosses Trails in Muskoka to slow down and learn about how to connect and commune with the One who dwells within. After two discussion-based, experiential learning sessions; participants head out for a

solitary, 3 - hour mp3 guided hike up a mountain - The Jesus Experience. Over the last 6 years from the testimonies made by participants, the sharing in the debrief sessions, anonymous feedback cards, and conversations with former participants it was clear that most had the perception that they encountered God personally, became more aware of His presence, and expressed a desire to be surrendered to His ongoing work in their lives through CPJ and ICR's. A problem arose as some would report back that when they head home to the concrete jungles of modern-day life, they find themselves swallowed back up by busyness and are not able to incorporate the discipline of CPJ or establish and nurture IC relationships. Returning home and appropriating this new-found intimacy, and awareness of God's presence moment by moment is challenging. I believe that the pathway to spiritual formation is rooted and begins with awareness and encounter in the heart and mind, so it is no wonder that this is difficult. We would expect Satan who opposes God and those who follow Him to oppose this.

Many participants have returned to do The Jesus Experience again to hone their listening skills and this inspires them to continue to develop the habit of CPJ and ICR's. When they began to listen again, it was normal to hear comments like: "I forgot just how powerful and wonderful this was." I believe that as believers "practice the presence" a wellspring of life rises from within and begins to flow out to others as "rivers of living water" (John 7:7-39). There is a spiritual enemy who opposes spiritual disciplines like CPJ and ICR. He tries to limit people's experience of intimacy with and devotion to God (2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

Secondly, he keeps them separated from transparent sharing with others thus keeping them walking alone (John 10:10; Jude 1:19; 1 Peter 5:8). From personal experience and discussions with those who have established these disciplines in their lives, I have realized just how important it is to experience how much CPJ and ICR's can impact moment by moment awareness if practiced regularly. The ultimate goal of the CPJ and ICR tools is to help believers come to a place of walking through life living connected with the Eternal Word, the One who is at work around them in them and the world.

Response

The purpose of this project was to help 3crosses participants experience how the disciplines of CPJ and IC's can help them hear and discern God's speaking voice in their daily lives upon returning home. More specifically, the aim was to help people hear or sense God's leading and affirmation during each day. Participants were also expected to realize the value and importance of sharing with others how God is leading them. To these ends, a take-home follow-up process that is reflective of what happens at 3crosses (mp3 guided CPJ coupled with the sharing of what God is saying with others) was developed and tested. The aim was to help participants continue to experience and encounter God's presence after arriving back home. Individuals came to appreciate the value of CPJ and ICR and how it helps one be more aware of God's presence. Over half of the participants expressed an interest to continue to develop these two habits. All participants gave testimony of God speaking and leading them during the project.

As expected, it was discovered that individuals would appropriate these tools in ways that worked best for them. Fifty percent of the participants found that using these tools as presented were indeed a good fit for their spiritual temperament and personality. I learned the importance of mentoring participants in ICR sharing and was encouraged and refreshed by the participants comments regarding the importance of the 3cross ministry.

Definition of Key Terms

Conversational Prayer Journaling (CPJ) This spiritual practice involves centering oneself in the present moment and becoming aware of God's presence around and within. Following that, they entered into a conversation with God by using a journal to record the dialogue. This process involves journaling a prayer to the Lord while being aware of His response and recording and interacting with what He says. Whatever is communicated needs to be reviewed and tested (with Scripture, the character and nature of God, and with others).

Inner Circle Relationships (ICR's) This spiritual practice involves an close relationship between two believers who connect regularly for accountability and to transparently share the deep things that God is saying and doing. This includes the sharing of journal entries, journaling together, and walking through life's experiences together. Jesus' had Inner Circle Relationships with Peter, James, and John. They were with Him during His highest point (the Transfiguration), lowest point (Garden of

Gethsemane), and the most challenging time of ministry (raising of the dead girl). A person's inner circle may include ICR's with other believers who do not know each other. It is best if each member brings something different to the table. For instance, in my inner circle I have: a person who is a heart-based encourager (a silver lining in every crowd kind of person), a "tell it like it is" mind-based accountability person, and a person whom I hope to be more like in 5 years.

Awareness of God's Presence – A deep sense of being connected with the Father, through Jesus, by the indwelling Spirit in the present moment usually accompanied with some sense of leading, affirmation, peace, conviction etc.

The Jesus Experience – Teaching coupled with a 3-hour, outdoor, experiential walk up a mountain. This walk is guided by a pre-recorded audio track, including: Scripture, music, teaching direction, and guided prayer journaling (CPJ).

Practicing the Presence – the discipline of maintaining an awareness of and connection with God moment by moment. Here are Brother Lawrence comments regarding this discipline;
We might accustom ourselves to a continual conversation with Him, with freedom and in simplicity. That we need only to recognize GOD intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see he requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done. That in this conversation with God, we are also employed in praising, adoring and loving Him incessantly, for His infinite goodness and perfection. (Lawrence 2002, 17)

Supervision, Permission, and Access

During project preparation, operation, follow-up and the analysis of data, I was accountable to an elder at Church Muskoka Style and to three members of the Lead Team at 3crosses. These individuals were most helpful when seeking

counsel on how best to design and run the study. There were two potential participant groups for this study and each had a respective leader. Each leader gave input as to how to protect and respect the members of their group. I sent a letter to each leader outlining the expectations for participants along with their own involvement. In seeking out leaders and participants I learned that you walk a tightrope between wanting to spell everything out and not wanting to scare them off by giving too much detail. The best principle here is to keep it simple and be very clear. I spoke to each leader personally and we decided to let the participants know about the study but wait until they had experienced CPJ and the intimate sharing that occurs during The Jesus Experience before asking them to participate. This way they knew what they were getting into. The study was explained by me to each group and a letter that outlined the study was given to them along with the consent form. The members were given the opportunity to ask questions openly or in private. They were free to choose to take the consent letter home and sign it when, and if, they decided to participate. This left them free from any pressure to “go along” with the rest of the group. Initially, 19 people from the group signed the consent forms and agreed to participate and 1 person declined, freely explaining that they had their own rhythms of quiet time that were working. After the first week, another person decided to withdraw seeking to continue his own rhythms of devotion. Shortly after this another person experienced a crisis at work and withdrew leaving 17 participants.

I admit that keeping my personal bias at a minimum was challenging. It is easy to get personally and emotionally involved. In the end I learned that I could have been clearer in describing the process and what I was seeking to discover. At one point I began to think that nothing I expected was happening and any bias I had was shattered. Then as the Skype interviews began and I was able to speak with the participants one by one, I realized that many good things had happened and still were happening.

In September 11, 2017 I received approval from the Review Ethics Board of Tyndale University and Seminary to move forward with my project.

Personal, Practical, and Theoretical Backgrounds to the Research Project

Every action research project is embedded in a context that involves the researcher, those who are participating in the research, and the theoretical research and assumptions that are brought to bear on the situation. Writing my Spiritual Autobiography and developing a Model of Spiritual Formation helped me to see that awareness of, and surrender to, God's presence and leading are fundamental parts of spiritual formation. This section will highlight how my ministry at 3crosses, writing my spiritual autobiography, developing a model of spiritual formation and engaging in other research during the Doctor of Ministry program fed into and supported this research project.

The Ministry of 3crosses

I am the pastor of the 3crosses Café and Director of the 3crosses Trails Ministry. 3crosses seeks to be a place of soul care for leaders, followers, and seekers. The best soul care happens when a person, in the Spirit, through the Son meets with the Father-face to face. His Words spoken into the depths of our soul through our minds and hearts can bring comfort, guidance, edification, encouragement, conviction, healing and restoration to our souls. I have found them to be living water to thirsty souls who live in a dry and weary land. I am at my best when I encounter Him in the morning and let Him speak into my life. This path must be walked with others who are also letting Him speak into their lives. Each believer should nurture ICR's with other believers with whom they can be transparent. The enemy opposes this close, personal relationship with the Father and these close, personal relationships with others. At 3crosses, we seek to teach, and then allow people to experience the beauty of hearing words from the One who dwells within (CPJ – Conversational Prayer Journaling). We then help them experience how open sharing can safeguard, discern, and affirm what God is saying and doing.

My passion is to help people come to encounter God and enjoy two-way communion with Him on a regular basis. My project was designed to help people take what they learn at 3crosses home and begin to experience how connecting with God and with others for transparent intimate sharing, can increase their moment by moment awareness of God's presence.

The project was conducted in my home town of Huntsville. A small town of about 18,000 people, located two hours north of Toronto in Muskoka. More specifically, phase 1 of the project began at a small, rustic, old church that has been renovated into a café-like setting (figure 35).



Figure 35. 3crosses Cafe 482 North Mary Lake Road, Huntsville, Ontario. by Jeff Roy. April 4th, 2018.

The teaching, fellowship, meals and sleeping all happened there. After 2 sessions (including listening prayer, discussion and shared experiential prayer) participants were taken across town to a 35-acre property with scenic overviews of Lake Vernon as seen on the next page in figure 36.



Figure 36. Map of 3crosses Café and Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Google map Screen Capture and labelled by Jeff Roy. May 5th, 2016.

This is the location for the 3-hour mp3 guided walk along a trail, up a mountain to various sites that are rooted in the stories of Scripture. Figures 37-39 contain pictures of 3crosses sites that participants visit.



Figure 37. Lower 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Photograph by Jeff Roy. Sept 10th, 2010.



Figure 38. Gethsemane Garden 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. Sept 10th, 2010.



Figure 39 Golgotha – Upper 3crosses, 3crosses Trails, Huntsville Ontario. Personal photograph by author. May 26th, 2013.

Participants were guided by an audio mp3 and given opportunities to pray and listen and journal. Following the walk, participants returned to the Café for a meal and a time of transparent sharing. When God speaks into a person's life through the Holy Spirit, healing and transparency often occur. Both groups (as with most 3crosses groups) experienced powerful debrief sessions with intimate sharing by participants. After the experience at 3crosses, participants returned home to various cities in Southern Ontario and the second phase of the project

began. Those who decided to be part of the second part of the project began the follow up material.

Since the beginning of 3crosses, I have recognized the need to help people develop a daily habit of meeting to dialogue with God. This flows out of my own personal experience coupled with the experiences of others who have been to 3crosses. Like most retreats, at 3crosses, many things come together that have the potential to create a mountain-peak experience. Participants, upon arriving home, (back in the valley, although excited to continue this new found discipline, get caught up in the rush and busyness and fall back into old habits. New habits (even those that are very good for you) are hard to develop and instill. I want to do more in helping participants return home and begin to practice habits that will help them be more aware of and surrender to God's presence in their life. More specifically, I want to help people develop the habit of beginning the day by entering the moment, practicing stillness, becoming aware of His Presence and engaging in CPJ through journaling. Secondly, I want them to come to experience the empowerment that sharing their awareness and encounter experiences with an inner circle member can bring .

Writing a Spiritual Autobiography

My spiritual autobiography is presented in chapter one and a turning point for me was when I began to regularly enter in and become aware of His Presence and converse with the One; the *Logos*, who dwelt within and was now one with me; through Contemplative Prayer Journaling (CPJ). This discipline of CPJ

helped me become more aware of His presence and maintain an attitude of surrender. I discovered that whenever I resisted and did not surrender, I quenched His Spirit and hindered my awareness of His presence and leading. I found that the best way for me to stay on track and have AESA formation taking place was to begin the day by having a prayer conversation with Him and recording it in my journal. His voice was calming, encouraging, positive, and changed the way I went into and through my day aware of Him. I also found that establishing Inner Circle Relationships with other believers that I could be transparent with and who would hold me accountable with grace and love was also a key part of nurturing AESA formation in my life. These needed to be people who were seeking to nurture the same close, personal, two-way connection. It was my desire to help 3cross participants head home equipped with a plan to establish and nurture these two things that have impacted me most with regard to spiritual formation with others forms the basis for my project.

Developing a Model of Spiritual Formation

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

When we receive Jesus, we no longer live as just an I. Through the Holy Spirit Christ joins with us and we become a new creation. He does not do away with us. Rather, he partners with us to bring about change. Major Ian Thomas teaches about this in his book, *The Indwelling Life of Christ*.

Instinct is indispensable to animals in the same way that the Holy Spirit is indispensable to us in our humanity. Human beings are uniquely made

with the capacity to be governed by God Himself dwelling within the human spirit in intimate identity with the human soul, so that God, within the human spirit, gains access to the human soul. There He plays that role in man's soul which instinct plays in the animal—teaching the mind, controlling the emotions, and directing the will. In this way, according to His intended design and purpose, He governs our behavior, so that He in us is the origin of His own image, source of His own activity, dynamic of His own demands, and cause of His own effect. (Thomas 2006, 25)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

This new creation is righteous and beautiful and good in the eyes of the Father because He sees us as purified through Christ. His righteousness is imputed to us. It is one thing to learn this and know it as a theological fact and yet it is an entirely different thing to hear the present, indwelling One speak of His love personally. To hear Him call you son or daughter and to tell you how beautiful you are to Him, or that He will never leave you nor forsake you. Jesus is quite clear that the Spirit within will speak to us.

There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, "The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me." (John 16:12-15 NLT)

From Adam and Eve in Genesis, to the book of Revelation, the entire Bible reveals that God loves to communicate, speak, and work in the lives of men and women (Tozer 1948, 59). He sent His Son so that a door could be opened for Him to dwell within us and partner with us in a renewal process. Studying history, I noticed that down through the ages, from the Early Church through the Reformation and Great Awakenings, there has always been a movement of people

who emphasize the importance of the Spirit-filled, deeper life. In this regard, the Early Church Fathers, Ignatian Spirituality and the Quietist and Quaker movements were relevant to this project. The impact of Quietist writers on the founder (A.B. Simpson) of my own denomination (Christian and Missionary Alliance) was eye opening for me. Charles Nienkirchen's investigation into the impact the quietist movement had on Alliance roots and the subsequent drift away from an Alliance emphasis on the deeper life provided deep insight (Nienkirchen 2016.1). A.W. Tozer writings on the speaking voice provided wonderful insights (Tozer 59). A.B. Simpson's own *Fourfold Gospel* is very relevant along with his understanding (and experience) that knowing Christ as Saviour and as Sanctifier are two distinct and separate events (Simpson 2013, Kindle Location 7269). Coming to know Jesus as Saviour involves faith and surrender, whereas knowing Him as Sanctifier involves an ongoing experience of the indwelling Spirit. This is reflected in Major Ian Thomas's books, *The Saving Life of Christ* (1961) and *The Indwelling Life of Christ* (2006) where each book focuses on one of these two distinct events mentioned above. In addition to the above books Henry and Richard Blackaby's *Hearing God's Voice* (2002), Watchman Nee's *The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit* (2014), and Dallas Willard's *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (2012) are three more excellent resources on how to move into a deeper awareness of, and communion with, the indwelling Spirit. Francis Fénelon's *A Guide to True Peace* and *100 Days in the Secret Place* (Fénelon 1905) are part of a compendium which

also includes writings from Madame Guyon and Miquel Molinos and is an excellent resource to learn more about the roots of Quietism. Standish in *Becoming a Blessed Church* very clearly presents the importance of a move back to experience and intimacy (Standish 2005, 94-95). These resources helped to provide me with a solid foundation on which to build, and practical ways to build.

The Word (or *Logos*) that dwells within and becomes one with us, needs to go beyond an abstract theological idea and be understood as a present living reality that is personally experienced day by day, moment by moment. The *Logos* (spoken, uttered words) of *Theou* (God) references in the New Testament are relevant for they are referring to something living and active beyond the written, canonized Bible (which did not exist when these references were made).

Adrian Van Kaam's model of the Formation Field (see chapter 4) was very helpful in regard to helping me crystalize my own thoughts and see things come together. Graham Standish's diagram (see Figure 26) is based on Van Kaam's model and reveals all the things that can be affecting how a person is being formed at any given moment. As I studied Formation Field theory, I realized that to become conscious of how both God works through their avenues of formation (formation field). The AESA model incorporates the need for one to be aware of these avenues. For a believer to become aware of what the Word is doing and saying requires the ability to quiet oneself to all competing voices and commune with the voice of the Spirit who dwells within. My experience is that this does not come naturally for most people. CPJ is a discipline that can help

springboard someone into a deeper awareness, but it must be learned, practiced, nurtured, and maintained. ICR's require a commitment of time, transparency, consistency and trust but they can help us see and confirm how God is moving in our lives. More than that ICR's encourage us to develop our intimacy with God as we hear another share of their intimate encounters. CPJ and ICR's can both help a person recognize changes in their formation field over time and become aware of how formative events of the past can come together to line up with a current event to have significant impact (old journals and long-time IC partners are helpful here).

Other Literature and Cases

Life is so full and busy these days that it can be difficult to practice the "Presence". People need help to be able to become present in the moment and become aware of God's presence within. Getting away for a retreat in nature can be a springboard. Understanding the difference between mind and heart-based formation and being equipped with methods to help them slow down the mind (analytical structured thinking, past and future focused), letting the heart (holistic, intuitive, emotions) be fully present and aware of the Spirit (Pink 2006, 14). This shift can help one to experience the metaphysical reality that through Christ in the Spirit, God is now one within us and He can speak into our heart and mind. This is so important for the believer because our only hope of glory is Christ in us (Col 1:20). Experiencing this reality by communing with the One who dwells within helps us to be at peace knowing that He is, in fact, there. .

Research into neuroplasticity has shown that a key part of developing and sustaining new habits involves pushing through the obstacles and experiencing the positive effect of the habit. The works of Harris (2014); *Neuroplasticity: A Complete Guide to Improving Your Brain Function, Developing New Ways of Thinking, And Creating New Approaches to Life and Relationships* and Douglas (2014); *Neuroplasticity: The Secret behind Brain Plasticity* provided good introductions and overview regarding Neuroplasticity. This is important since we are trying to have 3 crosses participants develop new habits (CPJ and ICR). A new habit is initially understood to be chemically based but as one pushes through, the brain lays down physical infrastructure (Harris 2014, 3). Oddly enough meditation and practicing the Presence (a form of mindfulness), helps the brain to stay healthy, maintain clarity of thought, while shaping and forming it in new ways (Harris 2014, 34; 39). Adrian Van Kaam believed that contemplation and soul/spirit health/peace can also impact the brain and nervous system in positive ways (Van Kaam and Muto 1980, 36). This is all relevant in developing follow up material that will help participants understand and experience how repetition is fundamental part of developing a new habit. Knowing that through repetition the brain will change physically can be motivating itself (Harris 2014, 3).

Project, Methodology, and Methods

This section outlines the field (who was involved), scope (what was explored), the methodology (basic approach of study/theory for data collection), the methods (data collection and analysis). A timetable reveals what was done, by

whom and when. The chapter closes with a section on ethics and on how participants were respected, treated well, valued, and not coerced or pressured in any way.

Field

The two groups involved were scheduled to visit 3crosses in September 2017. The project was outlined to each leader and both leaders gave permission to present participants the chance to be involved in the project. Two weeks prior to arrival, participants were emailed a welcome letter which also included some pre-reading. Both groups were informed about the possibility of being in a research project that would involve testing some follow-up devotional material. In discussion with the leaders, it was decided to hold off sharing the specifics of the project until potential participants had a chance to understand what CPJ and IC's involved. It was felt that giving too much detail could hinder the experience they were coming to have. Respecting this was very important to me since they were coming to 3crosses to have an intimate encounter with God and not to serve me and my project. After the experience, the participants would also understand what the project involved and be able to make an informed decision. Their time spent in Huntsville is a major part of the project for a foundation is laid there that makes the follow up material relevant. After Huntsville, the project location shifts to the homes and daily lives of each participant. Table 5 on the next page reveals the dates associated with data collection.

Table 5. Data collection dates for the research project

Date	Event
09/08/2017	Group 1 arrives at 3crosses for 3-day retreat
09/11/2017	Group 1 – 14-day CPJ and ICR follow up begins - participants back at home
09/15/2017	Group 2 arrive at 3crosses for 3-day retreat
09/18/2017	Group 2 – 14-day CPJ and ICR follow up begins - participants back at home
09/25/2017	Group 1 Skype Interviews begin
10/06/2017	Group 2 Skype Interviews begin
11/25/2017	Group 1 & 2 Skype interviews completed
12/07/2017	Group 1 & 2 participant observer data received
12/07/2017	Data collection completed

In Group 1, ten of the twelve participants signed the consent form. The two that declined shared freely that they had rhythms of prayer that they were committed to already. Of the ten that signed, two opted out after the first week for personal reasons. One was a male and the other a female, and they were not a couple. This resulted in each member of the group having a spouse still involved in the study. In the second group, eight of ten participants signed the form upon receiving it with one waiting until the next day. This left nine participants, but then one opted out right away due to a personal crisis leaving eight in the project.

Group 1 consisted of five mature couples with an average age of forty-three. One other individual in the group had been to 3crosses before and knew me. Another couple who joined this group attends my church when they are in Huntsville. In total, I knew five of the twelve participants prior to the project. During the weekend and the sharing times I discovered that three couples knew each other quite well, while three of the couples were not previously acquainted with the others. Three of the participants were working in a Christian organization

while three others had done so at one point in their lives. All were involved in their respective churches. One person declined to participate and the leader opted out leaving eight participants.

The members of Group 2 were connected because they were students from the Pathways Program being run by the Central Canadian District, McMaster Divinity College (graduate program), and Emmanuel Bible College (undergraduate program). The average age of Group 2 was thirty-one. The students did not have personal relationships with each other before they entered the program but had been growing in their relationships through the course. I knew the leader of this group and he was the only one who had been to 3crosses before. The previous year he brought another class up to 3crosses for The Jesus Experience.

My study involved members from two separate groups who came to 3crosses in September of 2017. These groups were a good reflection of people to whom 3crosses ministers. The first group involved couples and the second was a group of students who came to 3crosses as part of an undergraduate program. Like many groups, the couple's group was looking for a more casual, relaxed connection with God and each other, in a retreat-like setting. The second group came to 3crosses with the objectives of doing well in their course, preparing themselves for ministry and encountering God. Both groups revealed a desire to connect deeply with God and have Him speak into their lives. Each group

included a mix of people from different age groups and backgrounds and as such was typical of the people who typically come to 3crosses.

Scope

The purpose of my project was to develop, implement and test follow up materials for 3crosses that will help people become more aware of God's presence. The materials were designed specifically to help believers experience how CPJ coupled with IC relationships can increase awareness of and surrender to the Lord's presence and leading in their lives. The project did not mandate or pressure people into a long-term system of daily devotion. The project did not employ any means to enforce the fourteen days of CPJ, the two - IC meetings, the Skype meeting and the final group interview. The project and expectations were clearly laid out, communication was made at relevant points, beyond that it was up to the participants to follow through. The focus was to give people a short-term experience of how daily two-way interaction with God can change one's moment by moment experience of life. The morning CPJ quiet time-mp3 experiential encounters were limited to fifteen minutes but allowed freedom for individuals to continue journaling when the audio ended. The two Inner Circle Meetings were set at one hour. Suggestions were made for possible inner circle connections but as previously mentioned it was left up to the group and/or the participant to determine what would work best for them. Geographic proximity was important for those to have an IC in person. The alternative was online video (not preferred but was necessary in a few cases). Individuals were not told where to meet but

were given a basic format to follow for the meeting. Beyond these two things (CPJ and ICR) no other means were used to affect daily awareness of and surrender to God's presence and leading. Feedback and input from participants are helping me revise the follow up plan.

The scope of this investigation was limited to determining the effect that encountering God personally (through CPJ) at the start of the day (regularly, for two weeks) coupled with transparent sharing of journals within an IC has on the level of daily awareness of His presence and surrender to His leading. I asked for and took note of any insights the participants had regarding the modification of these tools to fit their lifestyle and personality.

Methodology

The project used some of the concepts of participatory action research, but the groups were not involved in designing, analyzing, or reporting on the research. The research was qualitative in that interviews were used to gather data and quantitative in that questionnaires were used. 3crosses is a parachurch organization and the participants were connected as 3crosses participants, but outside of a 3crosses email prayer update, they have no regular connection to 3crosses. A decision to come to 3crosses reflects the sharing of a common desire to encounter, commune with and know God. There is a strange sense of kinship among those who have walked the trails at 3crosses and for those yet to come. Past 3crosses participants seem to be very interested in always making things

better for those who will be coming. Coghlan comments on Lippett's second meaning for action research.

The second meaning of the term "action research" is connoted by a procedure of collecting data from participants in a system and providing feedback about the findings of the data as an intervention to influence, presumably in a helpful way, the ongoing action process of the system. (Coghlan Kindle Locations 976-977)

Indeed, there was spillover into what Lippett would call the purest form of Action Research where the participants take the information gathered and apply some things in their own lives to help them become more aware of God's presence. The questions and the audio recordings were designed accordingly. The questions of the first survey specifically focused the participant to reflect on their daily awareness and surrender. The audio recordings sought to help people enter a place of awareness and communion where they could hear God speaking. They also presented opportunities for surrender. In the Skype interview, I asked participants to reflect on their journaling and daily experiences by asking them to read from their journals and share a story from a day. This was instrumental in participants beginning to move beyond being someone simply involved in a research project into one who is a participant in a learning process. Participants also participated in the research when they were asked what would have made things better in terms of increasing their awareness and how they would advise someone who was asking to become more aware of God daily.

The questions that were used for the Likert-based survey and the interviews followed the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry by focusing on the positive things of coming alongside of and drawing near to God, by oneself and with

others. Questions for the questionnaire, skype interview and participant observer interviews were positively worded, looking to a positive future and focused on positive change (Sensing 2011, 169). Narrative played a significant role in bringing about positive change as participants related stories of encounter and healing to other participants, myself and to friends and family.

This project was phenomenological and focused on participants' day to day experience of awareness and encounter while using CPJ and ICR. The questions on the questionnaires and in the interviews were designed to help participants interpret the effects of using CPJ and ICR (interpretive) and then make sense of the whole experience by applying something that might work for them from that point on. (Sensing 2011,56). The project was designed to allow participants to modify and apply CPJ, ICR's, or any other discipline, to meet the ultimate objective of increasing daily awareness of God's presence and leading in their lives. It may be that the participants will modify or discover other means that bring about increased daily awareness of God's presence for them and this indeed is a hoped-for outcome.

Methods

After participating in The Jesus Experience and signing the consent form, participants from each group were emailed a link to a pre-study survey using Survey Monkey (see appendix 3). This method was used as it was simple, easy to track responses and provided data analysis in charts and graphs. Data was exported into pdf or excel formats for further analysis. The purpose of the pre-

study survey was to provide data about the current levels of daily awareness and surrender to God of the participants. Upon completion of the first survey participants were emailed a web link to 12 daily 15-minute, audio-guided, morning CPJ experiences. Each audio experience was rooted in a personal encounter an individual from the Scriptures had with God. Individuals were encouraged to do this in nature or by a window looking out into nature if possible. For the first six days of each week, participants did CPJ experience on their own. On the seventh day of each week they were to meet with their IC member and share directly from their journals. The same process was followed the second week. Four envelopes with pictures of Sacred sites along the trail during The Jesus Experience were given to participants. They were labelled as to the day they were to be opened. The audio recording for that day referenced the envelope and picture and led the participants into a time of CPJ. A large part of what makes The Jesus Experience special is that it is a slow-paced, 3-hour hike with many stops in nature. Studies have revealed that nature has a powerful effect on the brain to the extent that doctors are calling time in greenspace; vitamin G and actively prescribing it in specific doses (Selhub 2012, 210). The pictures of 3crosses sites were meant to tap into this nature effect and trigger heartfelt memories of encounter during The Jesus Experience. The purpose was to try and have the participant experience the effect that nature has with respect to encounter. After participants completed the 14 days of follow-up, guided material, the same survey was emailed out again (see appendix 4). Not all participants were able to complete

every CPJ or IC meeting. For the post-survey, participants were asked to answer based on their experience over the 14-day period. Over the next month all participants were interviewed individually via skype. After the Skype interviews, each group reconnected with the leader of each group acting as a participant/observer guiding the discussion and taking notes. The interview protocols were as follows (Sensing 2011, 108) the interview began with an introduction, questions were semi-structured with a predetermined sequence, open ended questions were used beginning with backward questions (highpoints of awareness), moving on to inward questions (meaning/learning) and finishing with forward questions (application/aspirations). All questions will be designed to draw the focus back to the projects problem and purpose statement (see appendix 6 & 7). Concluding questions and summary sheets were used. These protocols provided good data that is relevant for the future development of 3crosses follow up material. Valuable data came as a result of the sharing of journal entries which often became the focus and with their permission, I recorded what the participant read. Field notes formed part of the heuristic approach to data analysis. Throughout the study I kept a journal to capture these field notes about the participants and to record my own thoughts and times of CPJ as things progressed. I experienced the truth of Sensing's belief that the personal experience of the researcher coupled with participant feedback during the interviews can provide wonderful insights for all involved (Sensing 2011, 180). For me the best part of the project was the Skype interview that I was able to do

with all the participants. I also had the sense that they enjoyed it as well. I told them I needed 15-20 minutes (see Appendix 7). but interviews went considerably longer with the participants not wanting to stop sharing. It was like they were experiencing an inner circle meeting as they transparently shared their journal entries with me. I feel I also experienced the five basic processes of heuristic analysis that Patton outlined: “immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis” (Patton 1990, 486). Sensing outlines this heuristic process so very well:

Immersion occurs when you fully engage the life of your project and the experiences of the participants. Incubation involves deep reflection that allows the experiences of the project to take shape in thought. Illumination comes from moments of epiphany and growing awareness and clarity about the meaning of your project; themes and patterns emerge. Explication involves making understandings concrete and refining explanations. Creative synthesis brings all the pieces together in a holistic fashion (Sensing 2011, 181).

The questions for the participant observer group interview (see Appendix 8) were designed in the same way as the Skype Interview. I was not present for this interview which allowed participants more freedom to express themselves. Asking open-ended questions was the primary method used during the Skype and Group interviews. Survey #3 was sent out one month after the group interviews and was the final data gathering tool. It was used to gather some basic demographic information and inquire about whether participants had been using CPJ and whether they had established an ICR.

Triangulation of data enhanced reliability and was achieved by using three different data collection tools. Through the tools referred to above, data was

obtained from a personal perspective, a one-on-one perspective and a group perspective. During the interviews, narrative/story was sought, encouraged, and recorded. Encountering God is relational and intimate, as is the sharing of these spiritual encounters with others. As such it is necessary to acquire qualitative data. At 3crosses, part of what creates the possibility for the Spirit to work is that the experience is solitary and then transparently shared in a group setting. This design has been knit into the follow-up material and the data collection methods. Individuals shared the experience individually (questionnaires), with one other (Skype) and with a group.

Data collection occurred at 6 different points before, during, and after the study and is summarized in table 6 on the next page.

Table 6. Information for data sets regarding timing and type.

Data Set	Data Set	Date Collected	Method	Analysis
1	Survey1– Group 1 Pre-14 day follow up	09/09/2017	Questionnaire Likert with comments	Qualitative & Quantitative
	Survey1– Group 2 Pre-14 day follow up	09/15/2017	Questionnaire Likert with comments	Qualitative & Quantitative
2	Survey2 – Group 1 Post 14 day follow up	09/26/2017	Questionnaire Likert with comments	Qualitative & Quantitative
	Survey2 – Group 2 Post 14 day follow up	09/30/2017	Questionnaire Likert with comments	Qualitative & Quantitative
3	Individual Skype Interviews Group 1 and Group 2	10/31/2017- 11/25/2017	Semi-structured Interview / Observation	Qualitative & Quantitative
4	Group 1 Participant Observer Interview	11/25/2017	Semi-structured Interview / Observation	Qualitative & Quantitative
	Group 2 Participant Observer Interview	12/07/2017	Semi-structured Interview / Observation	Qualitative & Quantitative
5	Demographic Survey	01/15/2018	Questionnaire	Quantitative
6	Researcher’s Journal	09/01/2017 - 01/31/18	Observation	Qualitative

The next table (table 7) reveals the plan for the project with respect to timing, and people involved.

Table 7. Timetable for the research project.

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
Preparatory	Draft Proposal	July 15	Jeff	Web
	Design Likert Questions	July 18	Jeff	
	Design Skype Questions	July 19	Jeff	
	Design Focus Group Questions	July 20	Jeff	
	Permission Forms and Letters	July 21	Jeff	
	Reading Report	Aug 1	Jeff	Web
	REB Application	Aug 4	Jeff	

Phase	Action	Time Frame	Who	How
	Review Annotate Peer Proposals	Aug 11	Jeff	
	Revise Proposal Revise REB Application	Aug16-18	Jeff	
	Write Follow Up Material	Aug 16-18	Jeff	
	Residency	Aug 20-25	Cohort	
	Revise Follow Up Material	Aug 30-31	Jeff	
	Finalize Proposal and REB Application	Sept 4	Jeff	
	Produce Follow up mp3	Sept 4-7	Jeff	
	Submit REB Application	Sept 8	Jeff	Web
	REB Application Approval	Sept 11	Board	
Implementa-tion	Present Project Group 1	Sept 10	Jeff	Mtg
	Consent Forms & Survey & Link GR. 1	Sept 11		
	Present Project Group 2	Sept 17	Jeff	Mtg
	Consent Forms & Survey & Link GR. 2	Sept 18	Jeff	Mtg
	Post-study survey Group 1	Sep 25-	Jeff /	Web
	Skype Mtgs begin	Nov 25	GR.1	
	Post-study survey Group 2 Skype	Oct 6-	Jeff /	Web
	Mtgs begin	Nov 25	GR.2	
	Survey & Group Interview GR. 1	Dec 7	Phil	Web
			GR. 1	
	Progress Report to Dr. Chapman	Oct 15	Jeff	Web
	1-3 pages			
	Survey & Group Interview GR. 2	Nov 25	Shane	Web
			GR.2	
	Final Survey Group 1	Dec 10	GR. 1	Web
	Final Survey Group 2	Dec 10	GR. 2	Web
Data Analysis	Compile and Compare Likert Scale Info into Graphs	Dec 15 - Jan 30	Jeff	
	Review Skype Field Notes in light of Likert Graphs	Jan 1- Jan 30	Jeff	
Reporting	Draft written Report	Jan 1-30	Jeff	
	Submit Draft for Peer Review	Feb 1	Jeff	
	Review and Annotate Peer Reports	Feb 2nd	Jeff	
	Submit Report	March 1	Jeff	

Ethics in Ministry-Based Research

During the Jesus Experience sessions with each group, my participation was transparent and genuine. During the teaching I allowed for interaction. When someone expressed a different point of view it was accepted, considered and valued. As usual, in the project groups, there were a few who vocalized their struggle against being led, or with the type or amount of music, or the amount of quiet time during the walk. In these situations, I simply received and validated the point they were making; expressing that others have felt the same. I believe that this, more than anything else, gave people the sense that they could be honest and open. As I shared my testimony I allowed myself to be vulnerable at several points. When we would pray and listen and journal I would join in the sharing, reading from my own journal what I sensed the Lord was saying to me. Even if it involved revealing my own struggles, failings or the condition (good or bad) of my heart. There were very emotionally transparent points for group members and during these points there was an affirming sense of the Holy Spirit's Presence. The transparent sharing revealed that participants felt safe. It was only after all this that participants were informed about the specific details of the project.

When the project was presented, there were questions about duration, expectations and opting out. Each was answered in turn. It was clearly stated that they could withdraw anytime without prejudice. Potential participants were then presented with a letter explaining the project and the consent form (see Appendix 1). They were free to decide then or wait and think about it on the trip home. All data collection happened after participants left 3crosses and, outside of the Skype

interview I had with each participant, I was removed from the process in these ways but at times I was the teacher, interviewer, and director of the retreat. They knew I had a relationship with the leader of their group. I and the group leaders both expressed the importance of the participants expressing what they were experiencing without reservation to make the study worthwhile.

The participants were all from out of town and from different worshipping communities. All but two knew me as retreat leader and doctoral candidate. The two I did know were very good friends who often tell me as it is and have no fear of being hard and honest. In my opinion they are both confident free-thinkers who want true answers as to why people struggle with connecting or finding time to connect, with Jesus in conversation. They both informed me prior to the retreat that although they were bringing the group, they were coming here to receive from God themselves and be refreshed. They were informed of the goal of the project in terms of helping both them and future 3crosses participants regarding awareness of God presence. I reinforced that they could best help me and future participants by simply being honest when answering questions.

3crosses Trails is a ministry of Church Muskoka Style – 3crosses Café. I kept the Elders Board privy to all my plans and sought their input regularly. I adhered to the standard of Ethics set by Tyndale University & Seminary and to the standard set by the Christian & Missionary Alliance. I received approval from the Tyndale on Sept 11th, 2017.

Findings, Interpretation and Outcomes

This chapter will be progressive in nature with the first section being focused on presenting, explaining and making a few summary observations about the raw data itself. The demographic data will be presented first, then the pre-study survey, Post-study survey, the Skype Interview, and the Group Interview (graphs and tables will be used to present the data from groups 1 & 2). In the next section, Interpretations, the data will be analyzed, interpreted and coded with respect to the original ministry goals of increasing awareness and surrender to God’s presence and Leading through CPJ and ICR’s. The chapter will then close with a section on outcomes that will apply the interpretations directly to the future ministry of 3crosses.

Findings

The table that follows (table 8) presents a summary of the demographics survey and the post follow up findings as to participants who were still using CPJ and had established an ICR two months after the project.

Table 8. Summary of demographics and post CPJ / ICR findings

Data	Group 1	Group 2
Number of participants	8	8
Average Participant Age	44	31
Males	4	6
Females	4	2
Married	8	5
Married with Children	6	5
Number of years a believer	34	23
Number of years Spirit-filled	28	15
CPJ and ICR 2 months after project		
Average # of CPJ times per week	2.4	4.3
Participants with an ICR established	4	4

Group one included three couples and a man and a woman whose spouses were present for the retreat but declined to be in the study. All those in this group had children except for one couple. The average age of group one was forty-four, thirteen years older than group two. Group one on average had been believers eleven years longer and Spirit-filled thirteen years longer. From the interviews it was clear that group one participants were at a different stage of life, they were more settled in career and family. Three participants of group one did not reference a point in their life when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Six of the seven members experienced some form of suffering within the last year. Average household income was in the 50,000 to 100,000 range. At the end of the study, 3 had not established a habit of CPJ journaling while 4 had and were doing it an average of 2.4 times per week. In this group, 4 were nurturing an ICR and 4 were not.

Group two included two females and six males. Average age for this group was thirty-three. Five of the members were married and had children while three were not. None of the participants were married to each other. The average length of being a believer was twenty-three and being spirit-filled was fifteen, with one person not answering the question. At the end of the study six of the seven in the group were journaling regularly with 4.3 days per week the average. Five participants from this group only did a portion of the follow up plan.

Group two consisted of people who were in a course pursuing a spiritual education and considering ministry as a vocation (or they were already

ministering in a church). They were coming to 3crosses as part of a course but personally related that they all desired to be there regardless. Like most 3crosses participants, all were interested in learning how to hear from the Lord. Group 1 was coming for a retreat and a chance to go deeper with God. Contrary to the expectation that an older group who had been Spirit-filled believers for much longer and would be more mature and deeply connected with God; the data revealed something different. One participant commented that this kind of momentous change in how one relates to God requires new wine skins. Their point made a lot of sense for as people age, they can become set in their ways. Supporting this idea was the fact that the younger group seemed to be hungry, open and ready for something new. Balancing this somewhat, the older group was frustrated with lack of experiential encounter and so they were also hungry for something new. The real question came down to how easy it would be for the older group to establish new patterns of prayer and relating to God. Two months out after the groups were no longer connected the data revealed that on average they were journaling 2 times less per week than group one and had the same number of people (four) who had established and ICR.

Data analysis began by reading through each completed survey considering the Likert-based response for a question in light of the comments made by the participant for that question. The first time I did this was in preparation for the Skype interview and the second time, it was before coding and the tabling of data for analysis. I used the data tools available through the survey

generator to initially do some comparisons but eventually just transferred the data into Microsoft Excel. Tables were made with formulas that calculated the average response and changes for each question, person and group. Tables 9 and 10 show the participant's total score and average score changes between the pre-study survey and the post-study survey. The tables are sorted from lowest pre-study of table 9 for group one and table 10 for group two.

Table 9. Summary of Group One Likert scores for pre and post surveys including overall percentage change

Participant	Total Score Pre-Survey	Average Pre-Survey	Total Score Post-Survey	Average Post-Survey	Score Change	% Change
G18	27	2.7	33	3.3	6	22
G15	29	2.9	32	3.2	3	10
G16	31	3.1	32	3.2	1	3
G17	31	3.1	34	3.4	3	10
G11	35	3.5	37	3.7	2	6
G12	37	3.7	40	4.0	3	8
G14	37	3.7	39	3.9	2	5
G13	39	3.9	38	3.8	-1	-3
Total	266	26.6	285	28.5	19	Avg %
Avg.	33.3	3.3	35.6	3.6	0.2	7

Table 10. Summary of Group Two Likert scores for pre and post surveys including overall percentage change

Participant	Total Score Pre-Survey	Average Pre-Survey	Total Score Post-Survey	Average Post-Survey	Score Change	% Change
G28	29	3	38	4	9	31.0
G23	31	3	31	3	0	0.0
G26	34	3	35	4	1	2.9
G26	38	4	40	4	2	5.3
G25	39	4	39	4	0	0.0
G27	40	4	40	4	0	0.0
G22	42	4	44	4	2	4.8
Total	253	36	267	38	14	
Avg.	36.1	3.6	38.1	3.8	0.2	5.5

The survey questions were all designed so that higher numbers reflected that a person was ranking things that related to awareness, encounter surrender and abiding higher (see Appendix 3 & 4). Group two had overall higher total scores with three participants over 39 (39,40,42) for the pre-study survey, and three over 40 (40, 40 ,44), for the post-study survey. These changes reflect the increase in Likert ranking after the two-week follow up. Group one’s total scores also showed improvement, but were lower. For the pre-study survey the top three were all under 39 (37, 37, 39) for the post-study survey all were under 40 (38, 39, 40).

Group two’s three lowest scores pre-survey were 29, 31 and 34 and changed to 38, 31, and 35 post-study, respectively. The three lowest total scores for group one on the pre-study survey were 27, 29 and 31 and these increased to 33, 32 and 32, respectively.

The data reflects that on average, group two when compared to group one rated themselves higher, for both pre and post surveys. Group two's average Likert ranking was 3.6 to group one at 3.3 (pre-survey), these numbers changed to 3.8 to 3.6 (post-survey). respectively. These averages reflect that group one Likert ratings were up seven percent while group two was up five-point five percent.

In group one seven of the eight participants rated themselves higher after the follow-up while the remaining participant's total score dropped one point. In group two five of the eight participants total scores increased while three did not change. The data reveals that these three participants did in fact change their ranking on questions, but their total remained the same because a one-point increase on one question was paired with a one-point decrease on another. One participant from each group had an increase in total from pre to post survey that was far above the rest (G18 up twenty-two percent and G28 up thirty-one percent).

The question that arises is whether the qualitative data will also reinforce the changes that the quantitative data revealed for these two participants. The following two bar charts in figure 40 and 41 reveal how the average of each participant's score changed from pre-survey to post-survey.

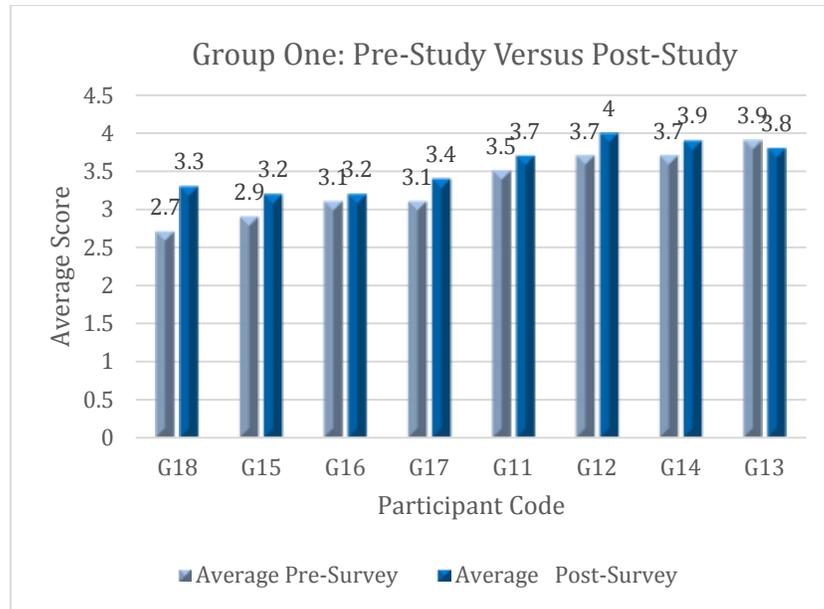


Figure 40. Participant Average Pre and Post-Study Survey

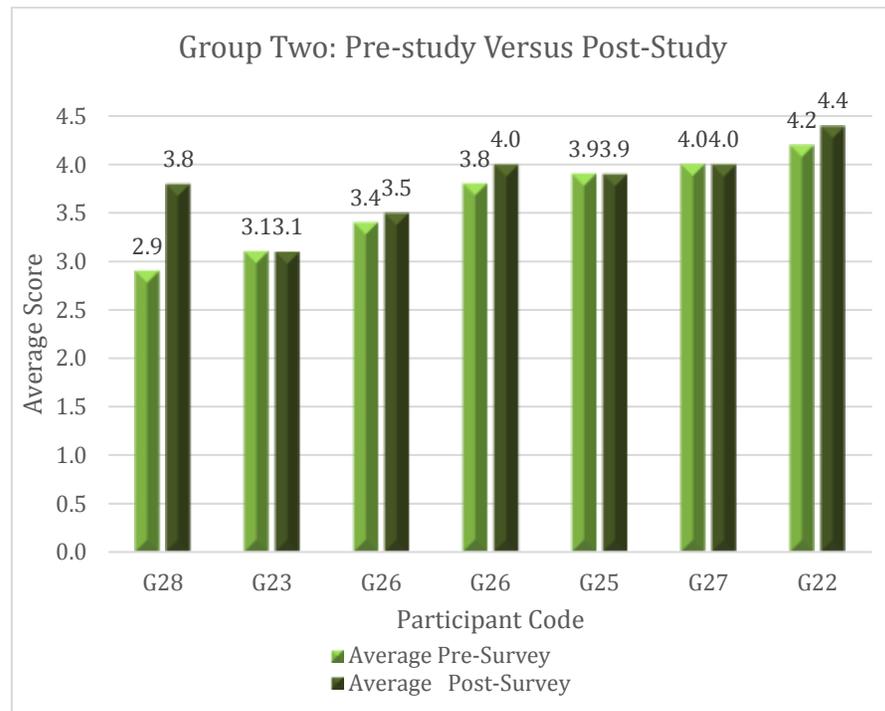


Figure 41. Group One participant Average Pre and Post-Study Survey

Incorporating these responses into bar graphs helped to see the overall flow and change from the pre-study survey to the post-study survey for each participant. Looking at figure 40 it is easy to see the improvement for all participants but G13. Looking at the specifics of the data for G13 I discovered that they rated every question the same for both pre and post surveys except for question 10. This question pertained to God speaking to the person in their mind using words and for G13 it dropped one point on the Likert scale. Figure 41 clearly reveals that for three participants there was no change between pre and post study surveys and for one participant a change of one point overall. These figures also reveal the relatively higher increase in score for participants G18 and G28. It will be interesting to investigate if the qualitative data backs up what the quantitative data revealed for these two participants. For the participants with little or no change in total score the question to be answered is whether the qualitative data will also reflect little or no impact regarding AESA formation.

Charting the quantitative data for both groups together helps to clearly expose the similarities and differences between the 2 groups, the 2 surveys, and the individual questions. The first bar chart (figure 42) contains data for the average answers to questions one through five (left to right) from each group for each survey. These questions relate more to awareness and encounter with question three focused on abiding. Higher Likert ranking indicates higher levels of awareness and encounter. In the chart (figure 42) the first column in a lighter shade of blue represents group one's data for the pre-study survey with the darker

shade of blue next to it representing the post-study survey (notice the slight improvement in follow up survey data for each group). The third and fourth columns in shades of green represent group two, light green shade for the pre-study survey and dark green for post-study survey (slight improvement as well).

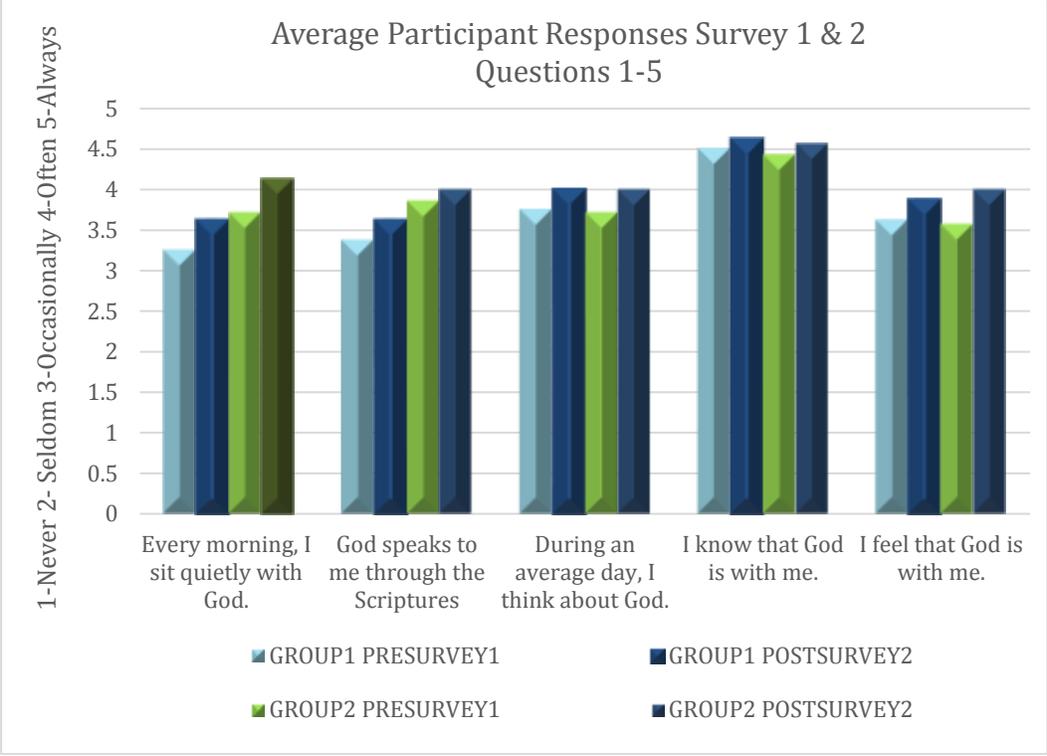


Figure 42. Summary of Data from Pre-study survey & 2 for Groups 1 & 2 for Questions 1-5

In figure 43 the data from question 6 to 10 is presented. These questions relate more to encounter and surrender with question nine relating to abiding. Once again higher ranking indicates higher levels of encounter and surrender.

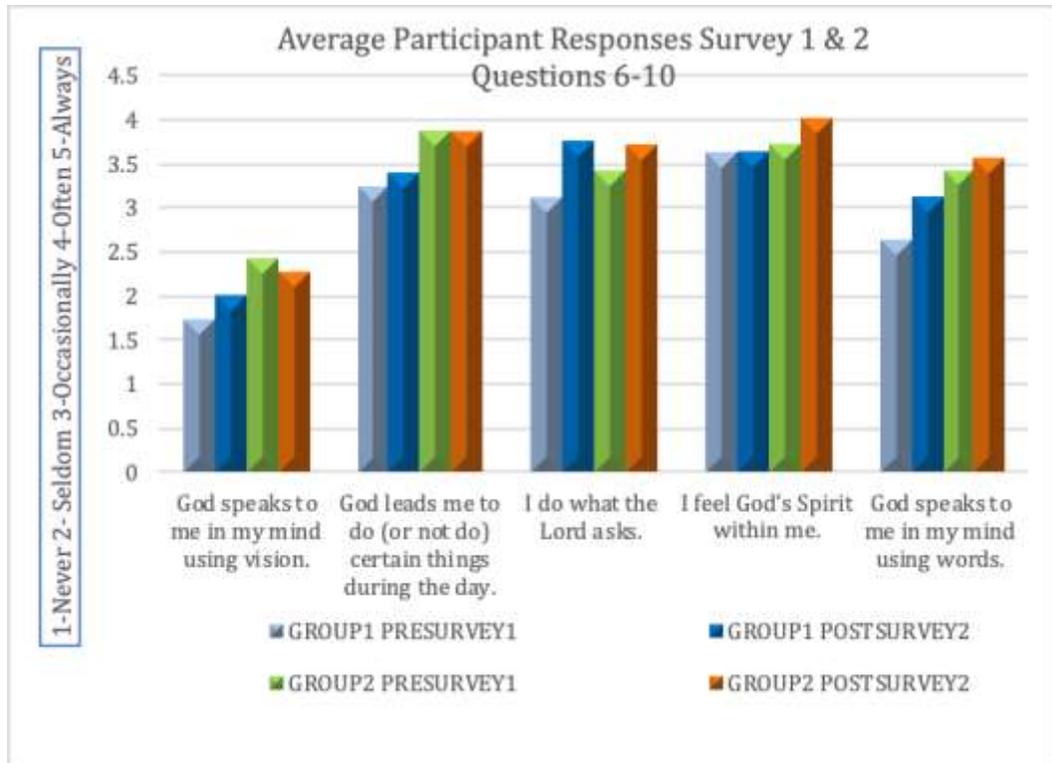


Figure 43. Summary of Data from Pre-study survey & 2 for Groups 1 & 2 for Questions 1-5

In figures 42 and 43 it is clear to see that group two ranked their awareness, encounter and surrender slightly higher than group one did. Recognizing this is one thing but determining why is another. There are many factors that may play a role in the difference in ranking. Two factors that stand out in my mind and may have had influence include that group two on average were younger and in training for ministry.

The next bar chart (figure 44) presents the average response of group one for question one through ten, before and after participating in the follow up material. The lighter shade represents the first survey and the darker shade after the 14 day follow up.

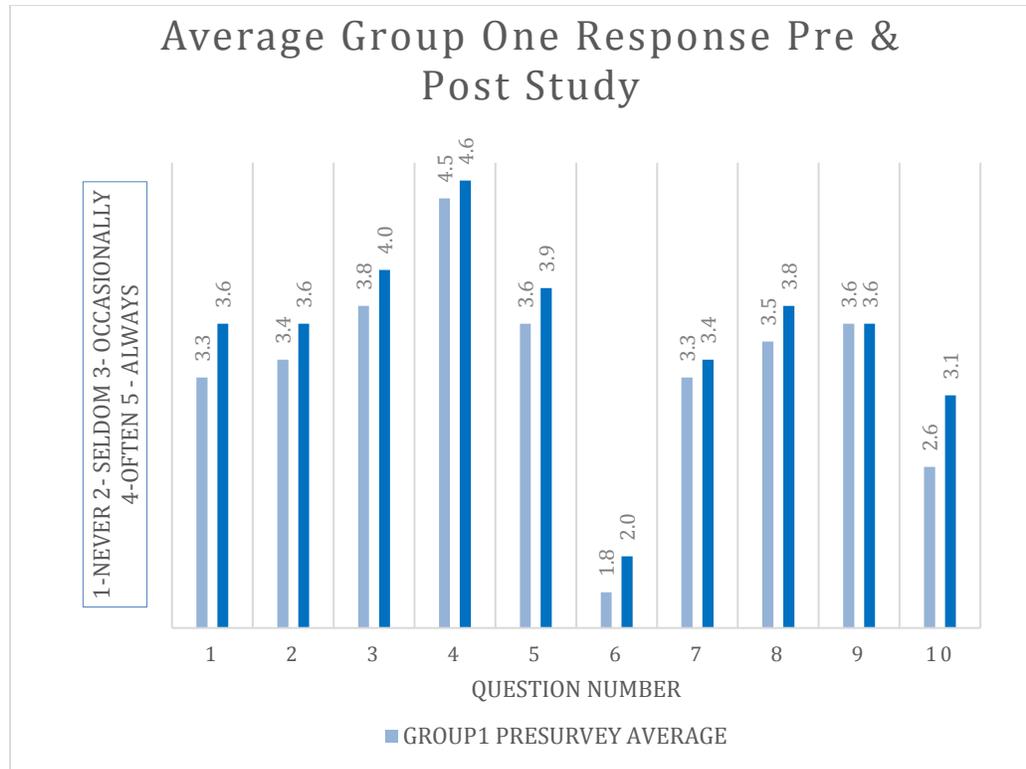


Figure 44. Average Group Response to questions for Group 1 Pre-study survey (pre-follow up) vs. Post-study survey (post-follow up)

These bar graphs reveal quite clearly that that average response went up slightly for every single statement except one; number nine (I feel God’s Spirit within me). Statement number one had the largest average improvement - Every morning I sit quietly with God. This was expected since part of the fourteen-day study involved sitting quietly with God. The following questions were ranked on average .25 higher on the Likert scale:

- 2. God speaks to me through the Scripture
- 3. During an average day, I think about God.
- 4. I know that God is with me.
- 5. I feel that God is with me.
- 8 I do what the Lord asks.

These questions all relate to greater levels of AESA formation. The higher rank is a relatively small change and the qualitative data will help assess if AESA formation was active.

The next bar chart (figure 45) is the same as the previous, but for group two data, green is pre follow up data, orange refers to post follow up data.

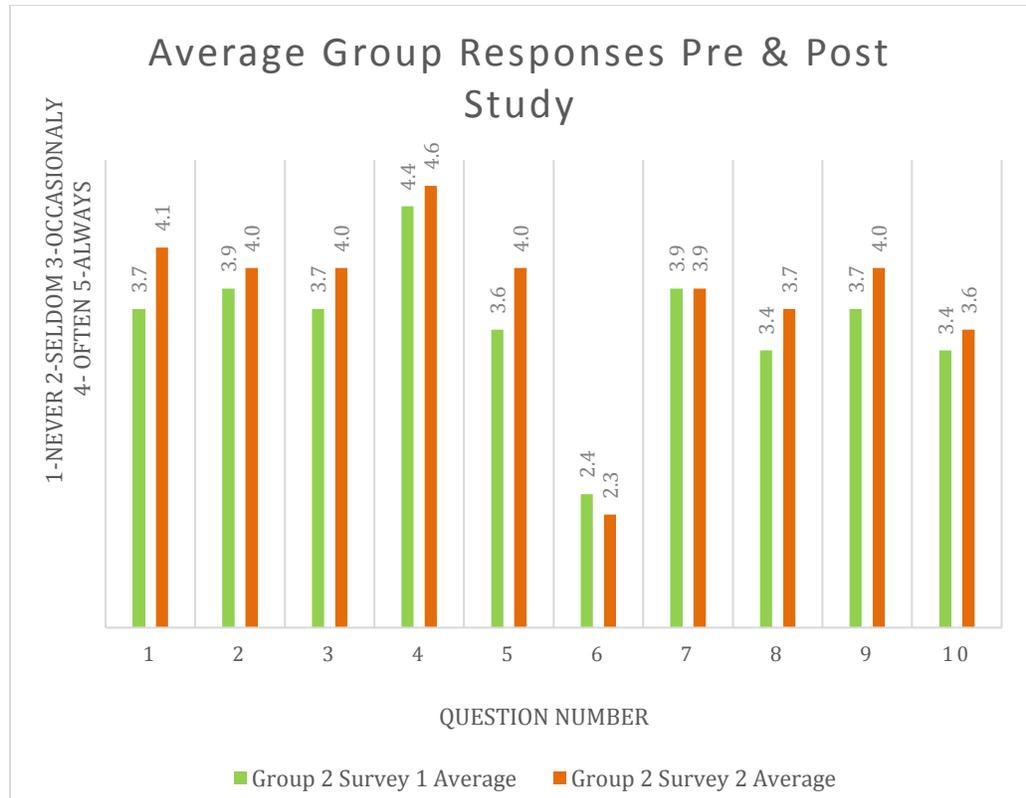


Figure 45, Group 2 - Average Group Response to questions for Group 2 Pre-study survey versus Post-study survey (post follow up)

Statements one and five were ranked highest with an average change of point four on the Likert scale. As mentioned above the positive change for statement one makes sense, the change in value for statement five (I feel that God

is with me) reflects that AESA Cycle formation in heart awareness may have been happening. Statements three, eight, and nine increased by point three.

3. During an average day, I think about God.
8. I do what the Lord asks.
9. I feel God's Spirit within me.

The increases in both groups for statements three and eight point to AESA Cycle formation in the areas of mind - awareness, surrender and abide respectively. The increase in statement nine also reflects possible AESA Cycle Formation in the areas of heart awareness.

Group two rated question six slightly lower in the post survey and I believe that this was because of the nature of the question. Question six related to God speaking through vision which may not have happened during the two-week follow up. It is interesting to note that for this question one participant went from a ranking of 1 - (never) pre-study which is quite definitive to 2 - (seldom) post-study. In group two this was the only instance that a response of 1 - (never) was given. On the other hand group one used the rank of 1 - (never) six times. Four on these never responses were the pre and post responses for statement 6 (God speaks to me using vision). One of the remaining two, was also for the question 6 pre-survey but as with the individual from group two they ranked it one higher at 2 - (seldom). The other number one ranking was for statement 10 (God speaks to me in my mind using words) and the post study response increased to a two ranking.

On the other end of the spectrum group one had nine pre-study responses of 5 - (always) and they remained at 5 for the post-study survey. The one new

post-study response of 5 increased from a pre-study response of 4. Whereas group two had six responses ranked 5 both pre and post study and on three other occasions the ranking increased from 4 to 5. Group two also had three increases of rank from 3 to 5, one was for statement one (expected) but the other two were for statement 3 (During an average day, I think about God). This further reinforces the idea that possible AESA formation was happening in mind awareness. Two participants in group two ranked statement four (I know that God is with me) - 5 (always) for the pre-study, and 4 (often) for the post-study. Although these are both overall positive responses, the decrease was not expected.

Question seven (I do what the Lord asks) related to surrender and both groups had rated themselves on average, just above occasionally, on the Likert scale for pre- and post-study surveys. Levels of increased surrender to the Lord might not be noticeable after only two weeks. Participant's comments also reflected that they were not always sure when it was the Lord or them doing the leading as they followed.

The qualitative data sets obtained from Survey comments, the notes from the Skype interview, participant observer interview and my own journals are very informative and add value. In a way they breathe life into the quantitative data. It was necessary to code the qualitative data in order to gain insight into the impact of the follow up CPJ and ICRs on AESA Cycle formation. Coding of the data involved both inductive and then deductive reasoning. I began inductively by slowly reading through the specific responses (Likert ranks and comments) one

by one. At this point I focused only on the raw data. Reading through the specific responses some overarching general patterns were noted. For example, I noted that there were many comments about how thankfulness, nature and worship helped a person to become aware of and encounter God. Following this, I put all the comments for each question into an excel file that included the Likert responses and the comments of each data set. I continued to inductively study the data by highlighting and counting words that were repeated and then creating a table with the words ranked according to occurrence. At this point the analysis shifted to incorporate deductive reasoning. While keeping in mind general aspects from my AESA Formation Model, I took note of any references to the pathways of mind and heart when participants spoke about their habits, practices and experiences regarding their spiritual formation during the study. These are the kinds of questions I kept in the back of my head as I reviewed the comments;

- Did they reference any avenues of formation that were active in their formation field?
- Did they reference a current or past formative event?
- How did they answer questions four and five that were about knowing and feeling God's Presence?
- What did they say about feeling versus knowing God?
- Were they open and transparent in the Skype interview or did they seem to be withdrawn or hiding?
- I tried to identify comments that were reflective of moments of the AESA Cycle: awareness, encounter, surrender or abide?
- Were these comments heart, mind-centered or some mix?

- What were the avenues and pathways of formation that God was working through in a participant's life?

After reading through the comments for each question I moved the content from this excel file into a word document to utilize the search, find and replace features of Word. Reviewing this Word document, I deduced that specific statements and phrases were being made again and again that reflected AESA formation in general. This included words like time, quiet, still, hear, sense, aware, presence, encounter, with me, heart, and mind. Whenever a word or phrase was repeated I would search the document using find and replace to review and count them. The most repeated words were group together as codes. Some of these turned out to be codes that related to negative AESA formation. As I tried to categorize these codes, I very quickly deduced that they related to the AESA Cycle . Using four colours I highlighted the codes into the four parts of the AESA Cycle. This allowed me to deduce that AESA Cycle formation was reflected in the data through many of these words or phrases. It was also evident that AESA formation was reflected in words that the Lord was speaking into the minds and hearts of the participants through CPJ. During the coding I paid special attention to any comments relating to their experiences with CPJ and ICR. Table 11 below summarizes the categories and codes that I developed from the Survey written comments, the Skype survey, the participant observer group interview, and my own journal. It is designed to reflect what nurtured the AESA Cycle toward positive (top of table) or negative (bottom of table) spiritual formation. The first column represents things that triggered or hindered awareness. The second

column things that resulted from encounter or lack of encounter. The third, the effects of surrender or resistance and the fourth things that were evidence of abiding or not.

Table 11. Summary of categories and codes derived from all interviews

	Aware- ness	Encounter	Surrender	Abide
Codes for Positive	Quiet Time Thankfulness Presence Worship Music Nature Stillness Present Scripture	Trust Surrender Affirmation Encouragement Edification Leading Calling Conviction	Brokenness Repentance Forgiveness Enabling Protection Growth Plans Trust	Trust Peace Transparency Transformation Passion
Codes for Negative	Unaware Busyness World Focus Anxiety Future Focus	No Encounter Resistance Unbelief Pride	No Surrender Hardening Pride	Not Abiding Distancing Separation Lukewarm

All participants expressed the importance and impact of spending uninterrupted quiet time with the Lord. They also commented on the challenge of maintaining a regular quiet time. Fifty references were made which included the word “time” with a connection to meeting with God by fourteen of the sixteen participants. Twenty-three times, references were made to the importance of getting quiet to connect and listen by ten of the participants. Heart and mind were referenced ten times each as participants described their experiences.

Thankfulness was a theme that was identified as helpful to get to the place of

awareness and encounter. Participants spoke a lot about their encounters with the Lord, even reading directly from their journals. As the codes reveal in the chart above, participant comments centered around presence, brokenness, repentance, forgiveness, affirmation, encouragement, edification, leading, enabling, plans, trust, surrender, passion, transparency, growth, and transformation. All of these fit into the AESA Cycle categories although the flow of these identified codes did not reflect a specific order, but general pathways. For instance, the data reflected that quiet time and thankfulness can lead to encounter, which may lead to brokenness and repentance which opens a pathway for restoration and growth.

The data in the table 12 helps one understand the connection with God made through CPJ. It contains samples of the data from participant sharing during the Skype interviews with identified codes/categories. It is important to mention that capitals represent what the participant sensed God speaking into their heart. You will notice that often the Lord would speak in ways that affirm the AESA formation cycle, by using many of the AESA formation codes developed. An expanded table with more samples from the data is presented in Appendix 8.

Table 12. Table of sample CPJ coding derived from journal entries

Codes	CPJ Shared During Skype Interview
<p>Awareness Presence Encounter Plans Surrender Brokenness Abide Trust</p>	<p>“Lord you set me apart from birth even from conception you knit me together in my mother’s womb. what am I set apart for?” waited for a while....</p> <p>THEN.... YOU NEED TO DESIRE TO SURRENDER TO MY PLANS FOR YOU... GIVE ME YOUR PAIN I WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN TRUST THE PLANS THAT I HAVE FOR YOU. Lord I feel like I fail over and over how much longer do I have to wait? YOUR GOING TO FIND ME WHEN YOU ARE ALONE AND QUIET WITH ME LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE OF THIS SONG... Please Lord I surrender forgive me (broken before the Lord as they shared) heard voice saying I HAVE BEEN GOD FOR A LONG TIME (it was a really cool thing) (PARTICIPANT’S NAME) I AM WITH YOU THIS PAIN IS BRIEF (brokenness) BUT IT WILL MAKE YOU GROW FAR BEYOND YOUR EXPECTATIONS REMEMBER I HAVE THE FINAL SAY NOT YOU I KNOW WHAT I AM DOING AND I LOVE YOU BE CONFIDENT IN ME (trust).</p>
<p>Awareness attuned / aware Encounter Edification Encouragement Enabling Leading Surrender Obedience Plans Protection Growth</p>	<p>What do You want to say to me Father?</p> <p>COMPARE YOUR HEART TO MY SON JESUS ONLY AND NEVER COMPARE YOUR GIFTS TO ANYONE ELSE FOR I HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL JUST FOR YOU.... (edification/encouragement) I WILL USE YOU IN MY WAYS... (plans) YOU HAVE A KIND HEART MY CHILD (encouragement) AND YOU HAVE GIFTS THAT SHOW THE FRUITS OF LOVE AND JOY AND PEACE (affirmation) BUT I LONG TO RAISE UP (growth) PATIENCE AND GENTLENESS IN YOUR WORDS AND IN YOUR WAYS. WHEN PATIENCE INCREASES AND GENTLENESS SHOWS THEN SELF CONTROL (growth) WILL BE YOURS. TRUST IN THE WORK OF MY SPIRIT. Participant’s comment - If God was going to raise up opportunities for gentleness and patience... then there was going to be opportunities presented for me to respond and so I was more attuned (awareness) to them and knew I needed to respond to obedience (surrender)... an enabling that helped me become attuned...” - “As I became more attuned and aware of God’s presence throughout the day when I do step out she I now has a sense of leading and protection and enablement for the task</p>

Participants often commented about the difference that starting the day with an openness to hear from God can make. They spoke of the other pathways that lead to “resistance and no encounter” depicted in table 11. They recognized that resistance flowed out of an unbelief that God was speaking, a proud heart or hard heart toward what God was doing. As one would expect busyness was also something that led to no encounter. Participants spoke of how rushing through the day caused them to miss or be unaware of God’s presence and what He is doing. Even this awareness of not being aware can signify AESA formation. Most of the participants found that the daily commitment to CPJ resulted in changes as to how they went through their day and how often they reflected upon or were aware of God.

Important findings

A few participants did not maintain the daily, audio-guided follow up or perform the inner circle meetings. These participants answered the survey and related a lower level of awareness and passion. One participant (G15) commented; “I have intentions to do devotions, but usually get distracted - or sleep in - or am in a rush.” Participant (G18) said this; “Over the last few years I have seldom spent time quietly with God. I have been rushing around.” This is very relevant for this was the participant who showed the highest improvement in Likert ranking for group one. G18’s response to statement 10 also supports the positive change reflected in the Likert ranking. The pre-study response for

Statement 10 (God speaks to me in my mind using words) was; “Used to be often, but not the last few years” and changed to “I often dialogue with God” post study.

The participant observer group interview (see Appendix 7) affirmed the data from the Likert comments and the Skype interviews. All participants from each group answered that they had experienced positive changes from the follow up. All participants responded positively regarding an increased awareness of God when using CPJ. Samples of comments made from these two questions are presented in Table 13 below.

Table 13. Sample responses relating to levels of awareness during the day from the Participant Observer Group Interview

-
- “taking time to speak with our creator / the amazing thing is that Christ died so that we could commune with Him in this way”
 - “working to tune-in and keep the dialogue going / more awareness”
 - “more awareness during the course of the day not just during quiet time”
 - “God crashed into my life in tangible way / greater awareness and appreciation”
 - “more awareness throughout the day / changed nature of conversation throughout the day”
 - “through the journaling I was operating out of being centered on the Lord’s presence”
 - “The recordings help provide focus to my thoughts with the Lord and gave me prolonged time with Him.”
 - “Yes, more aware of the Lord’s presence.”
 - “Yes, for sure but took me a little longer to get into a rhythm and the best time of day – for me not the morning!”
 - “The habit required me work through it but really developed results to see God speaking to me more and working with God more closely
 - “Yes, I definitely experienced a more moment by moment”
-

ICR data was limited from the inner circle sharing. Only half of each group were able to try an ICR meeting. Feedback from the Skype and Group interviews clarified that in group one no one followed the prescribed format for ICR. They did not share from their journals. They did not CPJ while together. Some met in a public place and were often interrupted. In contrast, the comments revealed that all participants felt strongly regarding how important ICR's are. At the end of the study, half the members of each group said that they had somebody who was like an inner circle member and planned to pursue the deepening of that relationship. The group interview revealed a unified voice regarding the difficulty of being in an ICR that was formed in a somewhat random manner. Participants expressed the need to find the right person to share with because of the vulnerability of sharing journal entries. Even after finding the right person they mentioned that time would be needed to ramp up to deeper sharing (see Table 13). The participants related that the meetings were hard to do online or in public and were best done face-to-face, in a private setting with someone they had chosen. The participants who did meet with an inner circle member found it to be affirming, edifying, enabling, and helpful, regarding discernment. They also had a sense of God's presence and saw each other in a new light and in one case the importance of intergenerational sharing was commented on. Table 13 gives some sample participant responses regarding ICRs from the Skype and Participant Observer Group Interviews.

Table 14. Sample Responses Relating to ICR Impact and Design from Participant Observer Group Interview

-
- “Need to think through the dynamics of a slow curve up to establishing an inner circle.”
 - “I met with others to discuss at coffee shop but got derailed with someone who wanted to know about experience...”
 - “meeting in person... would be better...”
 - “Later in the day meeting with mentor praying God just broke through in the mentor’s heart I was using some of the things I learned at 3crosses.”
 - “The Inner Circle was a positive – a recollection experience looking at it with new eyes in a different context... today was a dreadful day... so rereading the things was super powerful and emotional. God would use what He said before to speak to you again. However, there was vulnerability... and a desire to try and get out of it as much possible...”
 - When asked if they were planning on continuing to keep a prayer journal one person said: “ABSOLUTELY! I say absolutely because this the one piece that connected all the other disciplines that I am doing.”
-

Interpretations

The qualitative data supported the quantitative data. As with most things in life those who participated wholeheartedly got more out of the follow up. High Likert scores were present when people were enthusiastic about spiritual formation and were in engaged the weekly spiritual disciplines. When participants were negative about their current circumstances, spiritual state or habits, the Likert scores and participation were generally lower. Participants who missed the daily CPJ time made comments that they are aware of the importance of daily quiet time. This awareness alone was not enough to bring about the commitment to prioritize daily quiet time. The demographics revealed that the two groups were very different regarding average age and stage of life. I believe that these

differences affected how they participated in the study. Beyond these differences the data revealed that some participants were facing or had faced dark times. This could be good or bad in terms of AESA formation depending on where they were at in the process of working through the challenges. Initially it seemed that group two got much more out of the follow up. Digging deeper into the data I realized that group one although scoring lower overall had almost as much relative improvement. Two months out from the follow up group one members were using CPJ an average of 2.4 times per week and group two 4.3. Four people from each group had established an ICR.

When participants did the scheduled devotion, their comments and demeanor during the Skype interview reflected that there was impact. Yet for some reason, some participants just couldn't maintain the daily discipline and did not specify why. This is often reflected in daily life. We know that many things are very good for us, yet we are still not able to follow through and do them consistently (exercise, healthy eating, proper sleep). There also seems to be a cycle that people go through with respect to these things that is affected by what is happening in their formation field. Just as there are times when I am focused, eating well, sleeping well and working out there are times when I am focused on and impacted deeply through CPJ and ICRs. There are also times when it is just status quo, and even times when I struggle and even miss. My point here is that I could have been a participant in this study and depending on my formation field at the time, been impacted to a greater or lesser degree. The respondents that were

able to do the follow up exactly as structured talked about their daily life and how they had sensed God more than usual. Comments were made about going through the day at a slower and more peaceful pace (see table 14). It should be noted that these are the perceptions of the participants and may differ from reality.

Table 15. Skype Interview sample responses – Question 2

Question 2. From an emotional and spiritual sense were you different over the last 14 days:

- “I was more spiritually aware of what God is doing in my life.”
 - “Gave me a different mindset”
 - “Thinking about God more during the day... which isn’t normal”
 - “Yes, because I was more aware of God and His Presence throughout the day.”
 - “Yes, connected feeling peace, living and act and loving out of that... God fills me up with love and I can act out of His love. You from a better spiritual place when you connect with God on a regular basis.. through hearing His voice.”
 - “There was a background peace that wasn’t there before...”
 - “I was more aware of God’s presence... more “collected”... slow down and less rush... when I am not in a rush, I can hear God more clearly.”
-

This has been my experience as well. Part of the purpose of the follow up material was to help people experience the difference that starting the day by communing with God through CPJ can make. Just as with any other discipline one must experience the benefits over a period of time and begin to think differently to rewire the brain before something can become a habit. Caroline Leaf connects what scientists call neuroplasticity with the spiritual renewing of the mind (Leaf 2018, 56). She believes that thinking can change and reshape DNA (Leaf 2018, 13,34). Her book is very helpful to dig into the physiological effects of negative thinking and makes this bold statement; “If you realized how

powerful your thoughts are, you would never think a negative thought” (Leaf 2018, 16). This connects well with CPJ for as one connects with the Word within they find He is always very positive which can set a beautiful foundation for the rest of a day. Being a pretty good negative thinker myself this is one reason why CPJ is so beneficial to me.

While the quantitative data reflects that the follow up had positive but marginal impact for both groups, the small sample size and short time frame made it difficult to draw specific conclusions from these data alone. The qualitative data supported that when daily CPJ is practiced coupled with a weekly ICR meeting positive AESA Cycle formation occurs.

A few things are worthy to note when interpreting the data. Group two’s average age was thirteen years younger than group one placing them in a different stage of life. They were all currently enrolled in formal training for ministry. Most were facing uncertainty with respect to their future (calling, job, marriage). All but one had been through some challenging times in the last year. This group followed the program closer and based on the quantitative and qualitative data gained more from the experience. Their comments from the Skype interview revealed that they were very open and positive to new ways of doing things (new wine skins). In my life experience, challenging times, an uncertain future, and being young can be powerful factors, motivating me to seek Him and spend time with Him. On the contrary group one was older, wiser and settled and seemed to be more cautious. This is not reflective of their love for the Lord or commitment

to Him, but more a reflection of being at a different stage in life. Indeed, the participants in both groups had made decisions to come to 3crosses and be a part of this study knowing what it would require. I make these comments simply because there appeared to be a slightly higher level of openness in group two toward trying new things to grow in intimacy with God. This was observed by me during my time with the groups, reading comments, and interviewing them personally. The quantitative and qualitative data backed these observations up. On average group two ranked themselves higher on the Likert scale, had a desire to soak up, learn, and apply all they could. They participated in the follow up program as outlined, did ninety-five percent of the CPJ experiences while group one only did 66 percent. Six members of group two did some form of ICR while no one from group one managed to do an ICR.

While focusing on the fact that group one did not do the prescribed plan and ranked themselves lower I almost missed the fact that group one was impacted as much or more and by only doing some form of the follow up. Their Likert answers on average increased one point five percent more than group two relative to their initial scores. The comments made during the interviews also reinforced that they were impacted in a positive way, regarding AESA Cycle Formation. I am left wondering if less can be more. In the middle of the study I began to do the daily CPJ audio and found it to be a little much for each day.

Group two answered most of questions with a higher ranking than Group 1 for both surveys. The data lined up in an interesting way when I looked at which

questions showed the lowest and highest change between surveys. Questions one and five had the highest improvement. These questions were about spending quiet time with the Lord every morning and about feeling that God is with them. These questions relate well to the idea of awareness and encounter. Questions three and eight had the next best improvement between surveys. Question three related to how often one thinks about God each day, and eight with the personal daily leading of God. The improvements here also supported by the qualitative data are indicators that individuals were experiencing positive AESA Cycle moments.

The quantitative data was helpful, but it was the participants' comments that helped to bring things together. In the Skype interview some participants related that they did not realize they were to answer the first questionnaire considering their spiritual state before coming to 3crosses, and that the second questionnaire considering their spiritual state during the fourteen day follow up period (although this was clearly stated in each survey introduction). Initially, I thought this corrupted the pre and post study data survey data sets. In response to comments made by the course instructor I dug deeper into the data and discovered that there was relevant data there. It was clear from the written comments that the participants seemed to answer with a general sense of how they felt as they were taking the survey. I confirmed this during the Skype interviews. The first survey may have revealed greater levels of AESA formation since participants had just spent 3 days on a spiritual retreat at 3crosses. The relevant question became, did this increased awareness dissipate or increase during the follow up?

The project data revealed that positive AESA formation happened for both groups during the fourteen day follow up. Admittedly this change could relate to something as simple as being in a study and having a regimented daily routine of having a morning quiet time. The real question that I had to ask was whether CPJ and ICR's contributed to the change in a positive way. The comments made by those who were already having a daily morning quiet time, revealed that the change was due to more than just setting aside time each morning. As they shared journal entries during the Skype interview it was clear that they were impacted by the things that God said to them during the daily CPJ time. Twelve of the sixteen participants (75 percent) expressed that they planned to continue journaling on a weekly basis. Such a positive response reflects that they found the CPJ experience was powerful and edifying. Portions of the participants' journal shared in table 13 above help one understand just how powerfully present God was during these times and how it changed their day. The coding (table 11) reveals that there was a definitive pattern among the CPJ encounters. God consistently revealed aspects of His nature, character and love personally to people through the Spirit that Scripture affirms. Comments from participants regarding how God spoke to them during the follow up lined up with comments people have been making after their CPJ experiences at 3crosses for the last 6 years. Upon reflection the codes (i.e., presence, brokenness, repentance, forgiveness, affirmation, encouragement, edification, leading, enabling, plans, trust, surrender, passion, transparency, growth, and transformation) are consistent with the kinds of things 3cross

participants regularly share. My own personal times of CPJ and ICR sharing also fit within the codes. This all lends support to the project findings that there is a connection being made through CPJ with His presence living within, that supports AESA formation after heading home. Participants do not expect to personally hear words that reflect the codes as listed and are blown away by the extent of love revealed. Passion and love for God increases. Desire to be aware of and connected with Him increases. CPJ allows God to take what ones knows as truth and experience it/Him as a living reality. This is a shift from a mind-based understanding of God to a heart-based experiential and relational encounter. This comment from a participant helped to express this new relational dynamic.

Before did a devotional but it was rote, read through Scripture write some things down pray but never wait to listen to what He was going to say... and so after this I began to see that it was a very selfish relationship I had with Him. Emotional and Spiritual changes occurred because you made it 2-way and brought God into it and I began listening to what He had to say. This is pure because one really wants to know what God thinks and how He feels.... rather than just to get an answer.

Participants referenced that thankfulness, worship, nature, quietness and focus were all key to entering in and connecting with God. The take-home CPJ material incorporated some pictures of sacred spaces the participants visited during their walks. Most participants spoke about the powerful effect that nature can have on AESA formation. The visual memories of the pictures of the sacred spaces they visited at 3crosses that were included with the take-home material had impact. Nature affects people's ability to slow down, enter in and become more aware of the moment and God. Some participants had already incorporated some form of immersion in nature into their daily CPJ and experienced positive effects.

Eva Selhub's book; *Your Brain on Nature* references many studies that reveal the powerful impact that nature or even pictures of nature can have on a person's stress level, rest and digestion level, and cognitive function (Selhub 2012, 209). Selhub also references a study from 2011 in Seoul, South Korea that revealed how thirty-minute forest walks brought about things like mood elevation, higher cognitive function (Selhub 2012, 60). In 2006, Peter P. Groenewegen and colleagues began using vitamin G to refer to the medicinal influence of greenspace (Selhub, 210). The feedback received from participants reinforced the role that nature plays in helping one slow down, become aware of God's presence and connect with Him. This supports the idea that I have had to develop generic outdoor experiences that people can do in the parks and forests around where they live.

The ICR data revealed that participants found it hard to connect with someone who they hardly knew and to share deeply. This same difficulty occurs during group debrief sessions at 3crosses, but when the sharing session is led and nurtured by the leader (and the Spirit) this can be overcome. As the discussion leader, I am aware of the challenge of breaking through to a place of transparent sharing. It cannot be manufactured or forced; only nurtured, and it must happen naturally. Usually when someone opens up and shares deeply in a group, a domino effect occurs with other people sharing openly and without fear. Unfortunately, this did not happen with most of the follow-up, inner circle meetings. Most ICR's never got to the point of sharing from their journals which

is a fundamental part. Those that did share journal entries gave very positive feedback realizing the power of inner circle sharing. All participants valued the concept of ICR's but were challenged by the random grouping and difficulty connecting face to face in a quiet place. Surprisingly, the potential power of ICR's was realized for most during the Skype interview with me. I would begin each interview with a prayer. It was part of my interview outline which helped me stay on track and push through the prayer at the beginning even though it seemed a bit strange praying like that on Skype before the interview. Each time the respondents received this well and I believe it affected the interview. It was very important to start each meeting this way and this applies to ICR groups as well. In the beginning I was simply asking for highlights, moments of encounter, or a story of connection. Around the 5th interview, as someone was sharing about a journal entry, I asked if they would simply read it. As soon as the person started to read---everything changed. There was transparency, brokenness, and powerful moments of reflection and revelation. From then on, during the interviews, I encouraged participants to share from their journals. During the interview it was common for respondents to flip back and forth in their journal saying... "Oh yeah... wow... Oh... I forgot about that." Initially, they were conscious of me but that would fade and soon they would be looking through their journal and remembering things almost as if I wasn't there. They seemed to be captivated by what was there, written by them yet spoken by the Word. This is the same as my experience when I am sharing or rereading my journal. I am often blown away by

what the Lord said and don't realize how powerful it was until rereading it. When a participant would find something and then start to share, they would almost immediately be overcome with unexpected emotion. I would sense the Lord's presence affirming these beautiful moments. Through these Skype encounters, the participant and I saw the power of inner circle journal sharing released in a tangible form. From that point on the Skype interviews changed. God's presence was there and at work. People would mutter "Wow... I forgot that I need to do this more... amazing!" Here is a journal entry shared during the Skype interview:

Lord Your words to me are living bread...
IF YOU REMAIN CLOSE TO ME YOU CANNOT FAIL... I WILL NOT
LEAD YOU DOWN A PATH OF DESTRUCTION NO A PATH OF
ABUNDANT LIFE... WALK WITH ME MY SON THAT IS HOW I
INTENDED THINGS TO BE.... LOOK AT THE GARDEN... THE
CROSS RESTORED THIS... WALK WITH ME BRING ALL YOUR
QUESTIONS AND TROUBLES AND DESIRES TO ME FOR I AM
YOUR GOD THAT PROVIDES...

Not every participant shared journal entries like this, which is normal. It may be that sharing openly is difficult or that journaling is just not in someone's wheelhouse. Over the 6 years of teaching CPJ journaling, I have found that it is not going to be a regular pathway for some and often refer people who struggle with nature and contemplation to read Gary Thomas' book; Sacred Pathways where he reviews nine spiritual temperaments or pathways to connection (Thomas 2010, Kindle Location 450). Someone may enjoy journaling but not have enough discipline to do it regularly or they may connect with God through vision more than words. Individuals also experience different life circumstances and are at different places spiritually. I know that, for myself, I go through phases of where I

feel connected and other times when I seem distant. This is reflected in missed CPJ during the times I feel distant from God. During times of brokenness or struggle I have found that I am more inclined to draw near. Sin is also a factor in the ability to CPJ as well. Unconfessed, unrepentant sin stifles the desire to draw near and listen for God to speak.

My experience has been that if I press through and maintain a habit of CPJ and ICR, I end up in a better place. From the Skype interviews, it was clear that some were struggling or working through brokenness and they had a deep desire to draw near to God. They were excited to follow the program and their comments reflected deep levels of awareness and encounter that brought some form of healing or consolation. Others not facing struggle or challenges who just pushed through also reported increased levels of AESA formation.

Outcomes

The audio-guided CPJ was a success. Participants who used the material related a greater awareness of God throughout the day. The audio-based CPJ sessions were a means to an end. The end being that people would begin to enjoy a two-way relationship with God. All participants expressed a desire to continue to use CPJ in some way. In this regard, the CPJ follow-up material served its purpose. Their desire to continue to use CPJ in some way expresses that they have experienced and value a two-way relationship with God. Feedback was received on how to develop and administer audio-guided material in the future.

The plan for ICR's did not fare as well. The hope was that people would come to see and experience the value of these relationships as they shared from their journals. Two months out over half of each group expressed that they were trying to nurture a weekly ICR connect. I realized that people need to be comfortable to share, which emphasizes the importance of being able to choose the members of their inner circle. This is difficult to do since the person needs to be familiar with CPJ and practicing it in some form. People leave 3crosses and head home and find it difficult to share what God is saying with a person who has never done CPJ, even if they are close friends. People need help in breaking down walls and sharing with others, the deep personal things that God is saying to them. There is a wall here that is difficult for people to go through. I have experienced this barrier myself and often the best way through it is with someone who has already gone through it. Only then can one experience the blessing of deep transparent sharing. 3crosses needs to develop and nurture ramps to help people get over this wall to a place of open, transparent sharing. I expected some issues with this. I believe the depth of my own Inner Circle Relationships blinded me to how hard it is for people to get there. It took me years to get to the place I am at with my ICR people. I now realize it is those relationships that opened the door for me to be able to share deeply with others who are not in my inner circle. When I did the Skype follow-up interviews and asked people to read from their journals it was often in these moments that people would see and recognize that God was speaking to them and recognize how powerful it was. The more you open-up and

share transparently from your journal and receive affirmation from someone else the easier it becomes to understand that the Word lives within and around you and communicates to you in the Spirit using words. ICR's provide a safe place for the open transparent sharing of your relationship with God with another, which is an important step toward living a life connected to God moment by moment.

The project made me aware of how powerful follow up Skype interviews can be. I hope to incorporate this type of connection in the future and offer 3crosses participants a chance to experience what it is like to share journal entries transparently with another person on a regular basis. I am not exactly sure yet how this will work. I suspect that I may need to equip and develop other people to help me with these interviews. Years ago God gave me a vision to establish ICR mentoring relationships that would include up to four people, one of which would be a mentor. The mentor would be a 3crosses alumni who has adopted CPJ as a regular practice and is able to be sensitive to the Spirit and help people ramp into transparent sharing. This research project affirmed the Lord's leading in this.

Conclusions and Implications

Spiritual growth involves awareness of God's presence and leading, coupled with surrender. Awareness can lead to encounters with God's Word, bringing affirmation, encouragement, comfort, trust, conviction, repentance, enabling, a sense of protection, exhortation, leading and so on. Awareness and encounter come together to bring opportunities to surrender to God's work in our lives. 3crosses exists to help people become more aware of all that God is doing

in their lives by helping them come to a place where they can hear and discern His voice speaking from within. People who come to 3crosses go through some basic teaching and head out on a trail by themselves to be guided into journaling what they sense the Lord saying from within. People have dramatic encounters and a group debrief happens where people are encouraged to read from their journals and share what the Lord said. For most, this is a mountain peak experience, from which they then head home to the valley of the daily grind. Disciplines are hard to establish even when they are very good for you (right eating, exercise, sleep). The disciplines of CPJ and ICR sharing are no different and may be even harder. To this end, some basic follow up material including an audio- guided mp3 to assist with CPJ and a basic structure for debrief sharing of CPJ within an ICR was developed.

The project helped me understand some of the challenges that 3crosses participants head home to face. It did not solve the problem but helped me see potential pathways to move forward. The audio-guided CPJ recordings will be revised and developed based on feedback from participants and what I learned from the project to be used as a follow up for future 3crosses participants. The guided times will be much shorter (less than 5 minutes) and just lead people into a time of listening similar to what I do with them as a group. Future participants will also be encouraged to set reasonable goals with respect to CPJ and ask God to lead them toward an ICR that will help them. The plan for the guided times of CPJ is to create a 3crosses YouTube channel to post audio and video clips of CPJ

guided listening, teachings on listening prayer, orientation for visitors coming to 3crosses, and eventually on site video/audio GPS based-experiences. This would be an easy means for participants to access guided CPJ times from home. Music will continue to be a part of these recordings and nature pictures or videos will be added as appropriate. Some clips will use a static background picture (from 3crosses) and the focus will be on the audio. For others, CPJ times the pictures may change according to how the guided time is laid out.

The research confirmed something I knew and sensed from experience. There is something special about being out in nature. Even thirty minutes can be therapeutic. At 3crosses we send people from the city out into the forest for three hours of solitary time with God. Selhub lists benefit after benefit of heading out into nature even for exercise, even going so far as to say that there is a natural “Zoloft” effect occurs (Selhub 2012, 112-114). At 3crosses we couple this with spiritual encounters with the Eternal Word of God! The future development of 3crosses will be to present as many opportunities as possible for believers to come and spend time in the forest connecting with God in Sacred Spaces. This will entail a move to incorporate individual experiences and hikes where a person can come and hike freely.

The project revealed that the ICR model needs some development. At this point I am not sure of the changes that I will make. I realized that I need to help people find a safe place to mutually share their journals. This will be more of a case by case thing at the start. Everyone is at a different place and therefore needs

to follow a different pathway to deep transparent sharing. The project revealed the value in the follow up Skype meetings I had with participants. One possibility would be to offer this to participants in a package of three AESA one-hour formation sessions. The Skype sessions during the project seem to average just about an hour. That was the point when you thought you wanted more, but more time would not have added value to the session. It has always been clear to me that for inner circles to work, there needed to be some form of initial mentoring. When I started 3crosses, God gave me a vision for ICR's. It included an ICR with 2 people who were new to CPJ and one experienced person who could play the role of coach/mentor. Participants need to be reminded that their journaling has not been tested and it is easy for them to confuse the voices (self, Satan and God). Inner circle sharing is an essential part of the discernment process. One plan would be to mentor two people (who are willing) in how ICR sharing sessions work, by having them participate in three Skype-based sessions with me (or another 3crosses alumni who has developed a CPJ habit). It would involve simply sharing about life and reading from journals on both sides. Those wanting this would agree to do the CPJ audio guided session each week before the Skype session.

People are thirsty for real spirituality. They have tried and gained knowledge, but found it lacking. They are seeking to be led to the mountaintop (or into the depths of the soul). They want to meet with God personally. The wonderful thing is that this (encounter with Him), more than anything else has the

power to change their life and bring about kingdom impact. Sanctification is rooted in awareness of, and surrender to, what God is doing in one's life. To the extent that we can help people come to be aware of the One who dwells within and is one with them, changes will come. Sanctification is a means to an end. Believers need to press on straining with all their might toward Experiential Union. The quantitative and qualitative data from these two small groups that were studied for this short period of time indicated that the AESA Cycle and the practices of CPJ and ICRs can bring about formation and play a part in helping to lead people through Sanctification and into Experiential Union.

Pastors, elders, and lay leaders are seeking and need more connection from the Lord. This wonderful, personal connection has been happening at 3crosses. This project was one step in the process of the development of a good follow-up plan for those who come and connect this way for the first time. The materials developed helped put participants on a pathway to developing a habit of daily quiet time and communion with Him. Whether they continue is up to them, the grace of God, and the current place they are at in terms of formation field they face. There was very positive impact with these two groups and the impact can be even greater if the follow-up materials are revised and developed. In 2019 I hope to make one of the twelve audio based listening experiences available to all 3crosses alumni of the past six years through the web site. It will just be offered as an opportunity to have a listening based Jesus Experience at home. Alumni will also be informed that Skype reconnects can happen for spiritual direction related

to AESA Cycle formation. A sample pamphlet will be made that will outline the basic AESA Cycle and how to nurture AESA in heart and mind and this will be sent out to 3crosses alumni.

I was getting tired and worn out from the ministry. With each group that came I could see the powerful impact, but I would also end up tired and drained. With the doctoral studies I have not been able to build into the ministry or even fund raise. Financially things are tight at 3crosses. Impact is big-- but on a small scale. As I began this project I started to get a little down. The voices that were whispering were not of the Lord; but they were persuasive. A major outcome of this project for me was how digging deeper into data from participants let me see how much participants were being impacted. The feedback through the Skype and group interviews was a blessing to me. Affirmation of the ministry flowed through testimonies of encounter but also through their encouraging words to me regarding the impact of 3crosses on their lives. Over the past 6 years, I have had limited follow-up encounters with people who have come. The feedback I received through the data instruments with 3crosses participants was wonderful and empowering. At this point after the analysis, I am feeling very positive about the ability of CPJ and ICR to help people develop their personal relationship with God. The challenge of helping people carve out time for the Lord each day is ever before me. Even after agreeing to be a part of this study and committing to the material, the fact that participants did not follow through is a reflection of the time in which we live. This forced me to think about a follow-up plan that would

provide different levels for people who are at different places. I saw the value of the follow-up CPJ audio material and the need to design a better plan to help people with establishing ICR's and transparently share how they sense God leading them. I hope to reconnect with some members from the study once my portfolio is finished to share results and ask how they are doing with Inner Circle Relationships and hearing God speak. The project forced me to dig deeper into current left-right brain research which caused me to decide to not assign specific portions of the brain to specific tasks. Instead, I decided to talk in terms of the heart and mind and this flowed into the AESA model which was developed through the project.

CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will focus on how the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale University & Seminary and how the development of this portfolio influenced my ministry, shaped me, and affected my future plans for ministry, study, and my own formation.

Spiritual Autobiography

This incredible learning journey was kicked off back in year one of the program where personality profiles and the writing of my personal spiritual autobiography laid a foundation to help me see and understand how the Eternal Word of God has been at work throughout my life. Writing my spiritual autobiography was a very powerful experience. As I looked back I saw the Eternal Word of God at work in my life in many ways that I was not aware of at the time. This autobiography impacted me during the writing, the rewriting, the development of my model, and even during the final editing.

Growing up in Niagara Falls, I took the beautiful powerful Niagara River and Falls for granted. I think in a similar way I have done the same thing with the Word's incredible work in my life. Writing out my story helped me regain

perspective and see just what an amazing work God has done in my life. I am ever grateful for the Word's work in my life and I am glad that the story continues. The autobiography played a fundamental role in the development of my initial model and the subsequent revision of it into the AESA model.

The AESA Formation Model

Seeing God's work in the past made me more conscious of it in the present. The autobiography helped me to see how my formation field changed over the years which influenced the AESA model. Some avenues of formation cease to have impact while new one's rose up. The old avenues of formation still reverberate out over time and can rise up again to have influence with new avenues and bring about a transformative moment. Seeing how this happened in my life I recognized the power that an avenue of formation can have. I also saw how sometimes an avenue of formation had been used by Satan to form me in a negative way. Even more I began to see that each day was filled with opportunities to be formed for good or evil. Good Christians including myself often make the wrong choice without even reflecting on the source of the voices or thoughts in our hearts and minds . My model of formation would have to incorporate all this and more. It forced me to really think through how I would describe my experience of formation in light of what the Scriptures teach about the Word. Throughout my studies I was aware the Word was at work through the Spirit influencing my soul through the pathways of mind and heart along avenues of formation. At times I resisted His work. This all impacted the development of

the AESA spiritual formation model. In hindsight I realize that I was only able to make it through this program while nurturing and surrendering to positive AESA Cycle formation in my life. Things just seemed to come together as God patiently moved me along through moments of awareness, encounter, surrender and times of abiding. The development of AESA model has given me a new language with which to talk about and teach spiritual formation as reflected in the previous sentences. It was only as I integrated my three projects into this portfolio that it became clear to me that all along the Word was involved. This should not be a surprise since I was talking to Him and asking Him to help me throughout. From the data gathering, analysis and model development the Eternal Word was at work leading, guiding and shaping me using my avenues of formation. As a believer filled with the Spirit, I was involved mind, heart and soul, working with participants, cohort members, and professors who were also involved as the Spirit worked in their minds, hearts and souls. A great part of my journey was being involved in several cohorts and meeting and journeying with other students .

At times after a long arduous journey reading, studying, meditating, searching, sharing, contemplating, and analyzing, a light would come on and complex things would line up to be clearly seen and understood. There were many moments like this. One such moment of revelation was when I realized just how connected the historical contemplative models of spiritual formation I studied were. As I read more and more I noticed how each person was influenced to some degree by the writings of those who had gone before. The founder of my

denomination was deeply influenced by writings from the early 1700's. Reading these writings touched something deep within my soul and brought affirmation in the way the Eternal Word was leading me from within, and through the contemplatives of days gone by who walked these paths before me. It was a most wonderful experience to read someone else's accounting of their encounters with the Word and have it line up with yours so much that the Spirit testifies and your heart burns within. The fact that this happened centuries before on a different continent, in a different culture only makes it more amazing.

AESA Model - Mind and Heart Working Together

Down through the centuries two basic types of people (thinkers and feelers) experienced and understood the teachings of Jesus very differently. So differently in fact that there has been much bloodshed and division over theology and doctrine. The church has suffered greatly because of this. In times of revival these differences fall by the wayside and even today much headway is being made toward finding balance. I shudder to think of the experience I would have had as a contemplative talking about hearing God's voice a few centuries back.

I naturally just love to think, but I have learned to that I need to balance things by feeding off the contemplative heart-side of spirituality. I believe that this is something the Lord has been doing within me. It came to a point where I was really leaning toward the heart and feeling side being fundamental and more important to spiritual formation because of my own personal experience and the needs of those coming to 3crosses. This changed when during the development of

the model and the project, God revealed to me that balance between mind and heart is essential for healthy formation. God wasn't moving me entirely to the other end of the spectrum but calling me to balance.

I would describe the journey I have been on as a Spirit-sensed and led, thought and feeling-based process, where God used words to speak into my mind and heart causing positive soul formation. For me, my journey was jumpstarted when I descended from an intellectual mind-based understanding of God into heart-based experiential encounters with God. This descent did not require me to abandon the things I had learned along the way. On the contrary those things became essential for discernment and testing the leading of the Word. This change was so transformational that my ministry became all about sharing it with others. Henri Nouwen believes this descent to be fundamentally important to spiritual formation:

When only our mind “sees” and our heart remains blind, we remain spiritually ignorant. Therefore, spiritual formation calls for the ongoing discipline of descending from the mind into the heart so real knowledge and wisdom can be found. (Nouwen 2015, (Kindle Locations 178-180))

Applying the Model – The Research Project

My ministry at 3crosses seeks to help people make this descent. My project and model were designed to try and help participants take and apply this descent into the heart, in their daily lives. The audio guided CPJ helped participants to experience God speaking into their lives and be more aware of Him during the day. This was reflected in the Skype interviews during the research project. There were beautiful moments when the glory from within

would shine outward and could be felt and experienced in heart, mind and Spirit by interviewer and participant. Mind, having trouble grasping the whole experience, supports the process by surrendering and allowing the heart to enter the experience. Mind simply trusts, initially without analysis or fear, a silent observer aligned with the heart's one desire, to just be in His Presence. This is how it is with listening prayer in CPJ as well. Mind becomes still and focused, centered on the Triune God, wanting nothing, seeking nothing, wanting only to encounter the living God. Knowing the heart must be free, free to feel and encounter God as the Spirit uses words that take root in the mind and heart affecting the soul. The mind lets go of control and our shepherd speaks to us heart to heart and leads us down paths of righteousness to the Father's glory from His Spirit within through the heart. Once again Nouwen puts this so beautifully:

All through the centuries, this view of prayer has been central in the spiritual traditions. Prayer is standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart—that is, in the point of our being where there are no divisions or distinctions and where we are totally one within ourselves, with God, and with others and the whole of creation. In the heart of God the Spirit dwells, and there the great encounter takes place. There, heart speaks to heart as we stand before the face of the Lord, ever present, all seeing, within us. And there, in the place of the heart, spiritual formation takes place. (Nouwen 2015, 147-152)

Once the descent and encounter take place the mind needs to get involved and assess the experience, testing to see if inner leadings from the Word are aligned with Scripture. Participants experienced what Nouwen refers to in the above quote and this was evidenced in their comments and that two months after the follow up study, twelve of the sixteen participants were journaling at least

once a week, and nine of the sixteen participants had established some form of weekly ICR.

The participants who were interviewed and asked to share from the journal shared deeply, powerfully, emotionally and both interviewer and participant were affected. These were not just warm fuzzy feelings associated with emotional sharing. They involved a much deeper and stronger connection in the Spirit where both knew that something spiritual was happened and some form of inner healing had begun. AESA Cycle formation occurred and was reinforced, experienced and affirmed through the Skype interview!

The Lord affirmed that spiritual formation does not happen just through private personal encounters (CPJ) with God, we need others. In God's plan other people are essential to formation. The data from the Skype interviews, group sharing times, and ICR's validate this idea as well. Transparent sharing of what God has said in the depths of one's heart and mind, presents opportunities for awareness, possible encounter, and surrender for all who are present and open to the Spirit. During the times of sharing, affirmation, encouragement, edification, and exhortation occur and rivers of living water (the Spirit) would flow out to me and others as AESA formation occurred. At the end of a Skype meeting both participants left the interview wanting more, but very satisfied and in a place of abiding in peace. What happened in the Skype interview was very similar to what happens at 3crosses in the group debrief sessions or in ICR sharing sessions as people read from their journals and share what the Lord said to them .

This study reinforced the idea that Skype-based follow up sessions for spiritual formation will work. This was an unexpected result and I have plans to use this for follow-up in the future. During these Skype meetings I saw things from the vantage points of participant and interviewer. Skype works well when the interviewer is anointed and gifted for the task. The participant must be in the right place as well. This was also reinforced and affirmed during my Skype connections with my portfolio advisor, other students and professors.

Spiritual formation often involves struggle or brokenness. Some of the project participants were training for ministry, ten of the sixteen participants had been through some tough formation events and were hungry for God. Often it is right in the midst of our struggles that God meets and transforms us. I saw the truth of this through my spiritual autobiography. My portfolio advisor commented that when she sees students (including me) struggle to compile their portfolios, she is left with mixed emotions. On the one hand she wants to free the person and take away the struggle, on the other hand she knows that it is the struggle which brings about the formation. Barton refers to these moments where one is in the crucible being transformed. These moments cannot be produced or manufactured but they are what we most need (Barton 2018 Kindle Location 115). As with most people in ministry I am well aware of the power and potential for spiritual formation in the crucibles of ministry and life. God does His best sanctification work in the life of someone who has been broken. Once this work is done

experiential union is possible and the person is ready to be used powerfully by God to touch others.

As I developed the AESA model the hardest thing to define was Experiential Union in the Sanctification stage. In the beginning I just decided this must be only for anointed special people. I am not personally aware of many Christians who experience this throughout the day. I do know one or two and so I realize that it's possible. These people are powerful in helping believers go deeper and in reaching unbelievers. I have seen how outreach naturally happens when unbelievers come in contact with a person who has come to a place of experiential union. Madame Guyon believes that the only way to reach the lost is through the heart as the Spirit speaks (Edwards 2011, 55-6). The Spirit speaks through the Eternal Word into the hearts and minds of those not yet reached. This gives me great hope for I, along with many others, have been hitting brick walls when trying to share the gospel intellectually these days. Watchman Nee develops this thought, it is not just about intellect and emotion, these on their own they are not enough, God's Spirit must be at work (Nee 2014, Kindle Location 851). Conversions and sanctification occur when one shines brightly because the Spirit within reigns and is able to break out from within and touch another. It is a metaphysical thing that happens when a person has surrendered completely. Something is fundamentally different about a person like that. Fear is gone, they are positive in spite of hard times. They begin to sound like the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. One can feel or sense something different within the soul of a

person in this place. Character formation has happened and continues to happen with the Word getting all the glory. It is a beautiful thing and something I plan to nurture within our congregation. Churches should celebrate and encourage each other in this kind of growth and all the more as the day approaches. To be sanctified through experiential union and be transformed so His glory can shine brighter and brighter through me and draw other people to Him. When pride and greed are put down and gentleness prevails – celebrate the work of the indwelling Word! When the flesh is crucified – and the Spirit produces fruit – celebrate and proclaim the work of the Word from within! Honor Him. When the enemy uses an avenue of formation like shame to influence the flesh of a brother or sister we need to stand with them alongside of the Word and help them through it in grace and love.

For this kind of formation to happen we need to have a way of talking about and understanding this process and I believe AESA provides that. I shared an earlier version of AESA with the church and it seemed to stick with them. Some have referred to how AESA is helping them think about the Lord and the enemy's work in their lives. I plan to flesh out the model even more as I teach it at 3crosses. I will probably make up little round CD sized coasters with the basic model imprinted on them. I believe the key is helping people understand that they are being influenced in their souls, through their hearts and minds for good or evil, by God or the Devil. They might come to better discern the voices behind the thoughts, that become words, which become actions that in turn form character.

My Plan for Spiritual Growth

For my own personal formation, I am drawn to read more of Francis Fenelon and Madame Guyon. I discovered and downloaded many short readings that are perfect for a devotional read before my morning prayer journaling.

The Spirit has been prompting me and the Word within me confirms the need to spend time in the forest each day. My new plan is to head out after Janice leaves for work at 7:30 am to cut and split wood and be back inside by 9 am. This has many benefits; fresh air, cardio, strength, nature, provides free heat for home, and precious time to just connect with the Lord. This would take place after devotional and CPJ and be a great way to test through personal experience the positive effects of nature and exercise.

It is a normal part of one's spiritual formation to struggle to nurture moment by moment awareness. The AESA cycle seems simple enough to follow but it is very challenging. The rush of everyday life and the constant whisper of the world to acquire and prove one's worth to others can cause us to take our eyes off the inner life. This portfolio emphasizes that as a "new creation" indwelt and connected in Spirit we can think and feel the thoughts and feelings of the One who is now within, Jesus - the Eternal Word. We now have access to the mind and heart of Christ. Not just as revealed though the Scriptures but also through Christ, the Word within us. The Scriptures reveal that Christ in us is our only hope of glory (Col 1:27). In the Spirit through Christ we can be joined to and connected with God in a way that many believers do not fully understand or appropriate. We can have the mind and heart of Christ. He lives in and through us

again. The indwelling Word calls me (to stand among many others – present day and down through history – see Chapters 3 and 4) to experience Him in this deeper way and share Him with others. The two things I want to focus on are: experiencing Him personally in deeper ways and helping others experience Him.

I am intrigued by the things that I read about the brain. To this end two books I intend to read through at a slower pace are Eva Selhub's: *Your Brain on Nature: Become Smarter, Happier, and More Productive, While Protecting Your Brain Health for Life* (2012) and Caroline Leaf's *Switch Your Brain on the Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health* (2018). I believe that these books will be helpful to better understand and utilize nature, the AESA Cycle, prayer journaling and Inner Circle Relationships to help 3cross participants experience and nurture healthy formation after heading home.

Through this program, the study of Scripture, the books read, papers written, and the writing of this portfolio the Lord brought me back to the importance of seeking balance between heart and mind. He reminded of the book that in some ways started this journey for me years ago. Doug Bannister (1999), a southern Baptist wrote a book called *The Word and Power Church* highlighting how the church needs to nurture balance and how often evangelical (intellectuals) and charismatics (feelers) have separated and often fought each other when they need really each other (Bannister 1999, 26-7). It has been many years since I read that book and I think that it would be worthwhile to read through it again after this journey.

This portfolio helped me see that spiritual formation requires both heart and mind. For me, when mind-based knowledge about God failed to satisfy I turned to heart-based experience, but it wasn't long before I turned back to the mind to help me understand and even interpret my heart experience; a healthy cycle of formation involves mind and heart. With this said I still feel the need to emphasize the importance of a descent into the heart where face to face encounters with God happen. Without the heart, mind alone will always struggle to release into and experience the work of the Word through God's Spirit. I would say that I find personal heartfelt words from the Lord to be more empowering and enabling than a rational listing of rules.

Future Study

The books referenced above allude to my desire to study nature and brain plasticity. I place these two areas of study together because I believe they affect each other. Personally, I have a lot of established pathways in my mind that need to be shut down while I also need to establish new ones. During this study I came across a fair bit of current research that I believe can support this process of allowing the Word within to change/renew our hearts and minds. I would like to study the physiological effects of thinking negatively or positively on plasticity and mind renewal. Other factors that seem to affect the plasticity of the brain include sleep, eating habits, and exercise (Leaf 2018, 24,48).

Eva Selhub is a proponent of the positive effects that nature can have on one's brain and physiology (Selhub 2012, 75). She references a large number of

studies that support positive effects (Selhub, 4,9-28,50,59-90). 3crosses could be a case study supporting the positive effect of nature immersion, in and of itself. Not only do participants love the three-hour hike in the forest but the volunteers enjoy just being there working. Before 3crosses existed I would spend time up on the mountain just praying and contemplating. I would come down energized and feeling very positive. Whenever I did this and then preached the following Sunday mentioning that I was on the mountain, members of the church would encourage me to spend more time on the mountain. Most people who come from the city breathe a sigh of relief when they arrive at the Café. They are desperate for a break from the concrete jungle of modern-day life. By Sunday they seem totally refreshed despite a lot of teaching, a long hike, sleeping on camp beds, and emotional sharing. I am affirmed more than ever of the need for more places like 3crosses that emphasize the need for personal encounters with God amid nature. I am excited and affirmed to move 3crosses toward the next phase of developing Sacred Spaces on the property and beginning to open it up to believers and unbelievers. Once again Nouwen words echoed down deep into my soul through my heart and the Word affirmed:

I am afraid that in a few decades the Church will be accused of having failed at its most basic task: to offer people creative ways to communicate with the divine source of human life. (Nouwen 2015, Kindle Locations 196-197)

Another thing I was encouraged by is that my research affirmed that the indwelling Word is all about speaking and leading us into character formation. Even the mystics of the of the 17th and 18th century concur that this precious

communion is not about predictive guidance or secret knowledge but about leading us toward sanctification and outer acts of love and kindness .

Future Ministry

At 3crosses we finished building the Tabernacle in the fall of 2018. Sometime next year we hope to begin to have people participate in the Moses Experience. I plan to take the stages of the AESA Model and illustrate them through the Tabernacle in some way. I have been thinking about having the Court of the Gentiles relate to unbelievers (Pre-Salvation), the brazen altar and the laver as the sacrifice of Jesus and baptism, the Holy Place with Table of Consecrated Showbread, Menorah, and Altar of Incense representing Sanctification, and the Holy of Holies as those moments when Experiential Union occurs. It's a work in progress for sure but I believe it will be easy to develop a Tabernacle prayer experience leading people through an AESA Cycle: awareness, encounter, surrender, and abide (AESA). Figures 46 and 47 will give you an idea of what the Tabernacle at 3crosses is like. The major difference is that we hung a cross over the entrance to the Holy of Holies, representing that it/He is the only way in. You can see some of the handmade furnishings in figure 47.



Figure 46. The Full-Size Tabernacle Replica at 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspdin Road Huntsville Ont. Personal photograph by author, Jeff Roy.



Figure 47. The Tabernacle Furnishings at 3crosses Trails, 595 Aspdin Road, Huntsville, Ont. Personal photograph by author, Jeff Roy.

Final Words

What does your soul look like? If you could pull your soul gently out of your physical body (for a moment) and we could see it what does it look like? I would imagine that there is some brightness shining there. There would also be some dark black spots where the light and love of God's Word has not yet penetrated. AESA Cycle formation is all about allowing the Word of God to do His refining work in the depths of our soul replacing darkness with light and polishing up the areas that are already bright. His work within us is supercharged when we become aware of the whisper of the Word in our hearts and minds.

I believe that growth is a possibility for everyone this side of eternity at any time, thanks to the grace and mercy of God, made manifest and present in and through the *Logos*, the Eternal Word. God is in all things and He is everywhere, but encounter happens when His Presence is made manifest and a person becomes aware. Sometimes it can be recognized by a strange warming of the heart that comes. When the eternal Word is made manifest and speaks into our hearts (whether through a sermon, a situation, a feeling, a Word from above, or a Scripture) something reverberates deep within the soul. A person tears up (not necessarily sadness), the throat constricts, the heart flutters or is overwhelmed with God's love and breaks, powerful emotions flow out. Deep calls unto deep and there may be an "aha" moment of revelation that comes (sometimes this is mistakenly attributed to one's own brilliance). Yet deep down, one knows the revelation came from the Eternal Word. Soul formation happens in these moments and they come to be cherished, hungered and thirsted for. Deep down every

person yearns for soul encounter with the One (Jesus –who created all, is in all, and holds everything together). Many are not even aware that they are yearning for this and try to appease it through the created order by acquiring, accomplishing and experiencing things. They do this unaware that the Lord will feed and revive their dry and thirsty soul (many never know what it is like to have their soul nourished). Augustine said... “...Still he desires to praise thee, this man who is only a small part of thy creation. Thou hast prompted him, that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee” (Oulter 1955, 11). Augustine is not talking about a knowledge-based understanding that brings a heart to rest. He is referring to an encounter with the living, enduring Word of God in the depths of the soul. For many years I knew about my Lord and Saviour and my mind was at rest (objectively – I had knowledge of salvation). I was focussed mostly on one formation pathway (mind) and was neglecting or discounting the other (heart). My soul did not find rest until I came into a personal relationship by having a heart to heart experiential encounter in the depths of my soul with the Living Eternal Word. Jesus (the Word) spoke personally to me from within my soul. First, I became aware that He was with me, then in faith I sought encounters with Him, which led to opportunities to surrender to His love and abiding with His Presence. This caused me to believe, as Nouwen alludes to in the quotes above, that the heart was crucial to encountering God and that the rational mind can at times limit our experience of God. At the close of my research I stumbled across

this quote by Andrew Murray which reverberates in heart and reflects my experience, model, teaching, and heart.

Faith is also the ear through which the voice of God is always heard. The Father speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. The Son is the Word-the substance of what God says-and the Spirit is the living voice. The child of God needs this secret voice from heaven to guide him, and teach him, as it taught Jesus, what to say and what to do. An ear opened towards God is a believing heart that waits to hear what He says. (Murray 1953, Kindle Locations 910-913)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to Perspective Participants

Hello, my name is Jeff Roy. I am the Pastor of 3crosses Café and the Director of 3crosses Trails. I am writing this letter to see if you would be interested in participating in a research project that I am doing to fulfill part of the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree that I am doing at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto Ontario and to further develop the ministry of 3crosses. Participating is entirely up to you and you can withdraw at any time without consequence. I would like to take this chance to give you some specifics about the project and how you may participate. The project is titled: *Cultivating Moment by Moment Awareness of and Surrender to God's Presence through Prayer Journaling and Inner Circle Sharing.*

For 5 years, participants have been coming to 3crosses to learn the basics of how to connect with God through listening prayer. They then apply what they learned during a 3-hour, solitary, mp3- guided hike up a small mountain. A saying we have around here is... "God is batting 1000 at 3crosses." People experience and encounter God personally in powerful ways. They become aware that He is with them and most participants express a desire to nurture this newfound awareness of His Personal Presence. The challenge comes after they come down

from the mountain peak and head home. The busyness of daily life hits, making it difficult to find time to “be still” and sense God during the day. I am hoping that you would help me test 2 pathways that may help people cultivate their sense of God’s presence throughout the day in the midst of busy lifestyles.

Action Research involves coming up with an idea to address a problem and then trying it out with the intention of revising it based on what you discover. In a Participatory Action Research project, there is collaboration between researcher and participants. Basically, we go on a journey of discovery together. The focus of the project is to test whether two pathways mentioned above can help people become more aware of, and surrendered to, the leading of God’s Presence throughout each day. Let me outline the basics of the project which will help you understand how you would be involved and what it will require. The project involves testing 2 weeks of follow up material. After participating in The Jesus Experience, you will have an opportunity to sign a consent form and fill out a brief survey (this survey will be repeated at several points during the study). Each participant will be given access to 12 – 15 minute - mp3 Scripture-based solitary listening experiences. One for each morning – 6 per week for 2 weeks. You will also be placed in Inner Circles of 3 (IC3’s – same gender) that will meet on the 7th day and 14th day of the study for a debrief. At the end of the 14 days each participant will be able to give feedback during their own private 20-minute Skype interview with the researcher (me). One month after the project began there

will be a debrief session with your whole group. It will be 1.5 hours long and be led by your group leader (I will not be present).

All the data from the surveys and interviews will be compiled and analyzed as to patterns, trends and significant shared insights. This feedback will be summarized into a report and sent out to you before December. No individual people will be identified in the report. At that point, it would be appreciated if you would once again speak into the process by emailing back any thoughts or comments you might have. All data will be kept locked away or password protected if on the computer I am available and interested in any questions you might have. (Jeff@3crosses.ca / 7053498655)

Thank you for your consideration and potential participation.

Jeff W. Roy J.W.R.

**Appendix 2:
Research Study Consent Form**

Research Project: Cultivating moment by moment awareness of, and surrender to, God's Presence through Conversational Prayer Journaling and Inner Circle sharing.

Name (please print): _____

1. I have read the above Letter of Information outlining the purpose and details of this research project and have had an opportunity to ask any relative questions.
2. I understand that I will be participating in a study that involves sharing personal information about how I connect with God and what I sense Him sharing. I will be asked to share information about my daily quiet time habits for the duration of the study.
3. I will participate in a Skype interview with the researcher and a focus group with the coordinator of my group. The things I share will be used as data but my confidentiality will be preserved.
4. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without consequence. I am not waiving any legal rights by participating in this study. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future. The data may also be published in journals or presented at conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality. Should I be interested, I am entitled to a copy of the findings.
5. I understand that due to the small scale of the study and the close connections within my group that complete anonymity may not be possible, but confidences will always be respected.
6. I am aware that if I have any questions about study participation they may be directed to Jeff Roy at jeff@3crosses.ca or 705-349-8655. Any concerns about this project can be directed to the Elders Board of Church Muskoka Style via Dan Vanderveer; dan.vanderveer@gmail.com.

I have read the above statements and freely consent to participate in this study through my involvement. YES ___ NO ___

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Preferred Email: _____

Appendix 3: Pre-Follow-Up Questionnaire

Survey Introduction

When using scale-based surveys it is easy to misinterpret how a person ranks something. Often it is simply because they understand a word differently. To help eliminate this I am also seeking for a brief description relating to why you picked your response for each statement. Please use the space provided after the question. Use words to help explain why you answered the question as you did. What is your experience or practice pertaining to the current statement? If a statement troubles you or is difficult to rank explain why you think that might be. If you are confused as to what is being asked, explain what you are confused about. The “right” answer for this survey is the one that accurately reflects your experience. Please make comments for each question this will generate needed data and make things clear.

Thank you for your valuable participation.

Jeff Roy

JWR

Pre-Follow-Up Questionnaire

1. Every morning, I sit quietly with God.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
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Please Explain:

2. God speaks to me through the Scriptures

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

3. During an average day, I think about God.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

4. I know that God is with me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

5. I feel that God is with me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

6. God speaks to me in my mind using vision.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

7. God leads me to do (or not do) certain things during the day.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
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Please Explain:

8. I do what the Lord asks.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

9. I feel God's Spirit within me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

10. God speaks to me in my mind using words.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

**Appendix 4:
Post Follow-up Questionnaire**

1. Every morning, I sit quietly with God.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

2. God speaks to me through the Scriptures

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

3. During an average day, I think about God.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

4. I know that God is with me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
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Please Explain:

5. I feel that God is with me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2		OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	A 5
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Please Explain:

6. God speaks to me in my mind using vision.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
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Please Explain:

7. God leads me to do (or not do) certain things during the day.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
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Please Explain:

8. I do what the Lord asks.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

9. I feel God's Spirit within me.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

10. God speaks to me in my mind using words.

NEVER 1	SELDOM 2	OCCASIONALLY 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
------------	-------------	-------------------	------------	-------------

Please Explain:

11. In the last 14 days please estimate the number of times you practiced listening prayer with your journal? _____

12. In the last 14 days how many times did you share from your journal with someone? _____

**Appendix 5:
Demographics Survey**

How old are you? _____

Male or Female

Female Male

Are you married?

Yes No

Do you have children?

Yes No

How many years have you been a believer? _____

Have you experienced suffering in the last 12 months?

Yes No

In what year did you receive the Holy Spirit? (Skip if you haven't)

What is your current household (include spouse) salary?

- 0-25,000
- 25,000-50,000
- 50,000-100,000
- over 100,000

How many times a week do you do two-way prayer journaling? _____

Do you have an Inner Circle person that you are regularly sharing the things that God is saying to you with? (not including spouse) _____

Appendix 6: Skype Interview Questions & Discussion Guide

Guide for Skype interview with the researcher after they have gone through the follow up material and completed the 10-question survey.

Review Confidentiality Statement – Things said during this interview may be recorded in writing as data for the study. The source of statements will be recorded and filed with anonymity according to the participant's pseudonym.

Set time for interview 15-20 minutes & set timer at 15 minutes

Open with a prayer centering in on the present moment and an awareness of God's Presence - be still - ask Him to lead.

Make copious clarifying notes and review and edit notes right after. The session will not be recorded to help participants feel free to be themselves and read from their prayer journals.

Oral Questions:

1. Share a spiritual highlight with me from the last two weeks?
2. (Encourage narrative or actual journal sharing)
3. From an emotional and spiritual sense were you different over the last 4 days?
4. If so, HOW and WHY do you think it was different?
5. How would you advise someone as to the most important thing they could do to be more aware of God's Presence throughout the day?
6. With respect to the last 2 weeks can you think of anything that would have made your awareness of God's Presence even greater?
7. Could you share one positive and one negative thing about the Inner Circle Meetings?
8. Going forward will you try and maintain a Conversational Prayer Journal? How often would you hope to pray and journal?
9. Do you plan to maintain an Inner Circle?

Appendix 7: Question Guide for Group Interviews

Before the debrief make sure all participants have filled out the 10-question survey; if not have them do it.

Review Confidentiality Statement – Things said during this session may be recorded in writing as data for the study. The source of statements will be recorded and filed with confidentiality using the participant's pseudonym name.

Ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to speak. Even those who didn't participate their experience is very valuable as well.

Set time meeting will finish – 1.5 hour & start timer.

Pray and become aware of God's Presence - be silent - ask Him to lead.
(5 min.)

Questions are only a guideline as are the times – let it be a conversation but record any new questions and all responses.

If possible, hand this out to a participant observer to make a few notes and record your notes as well. I am looking for things like when emotion was high or overflowed, passion, story or narrative, note every time a person reads from a journal, high points low points, frustration. Appreciative Inquiry is the focus which emphasizes what was good and worked over what didn't work. Knowing what didn't work is good but better to know what would've have worked rather than spend a whole bunch of time belabouring a problem.

1. Let's talk openly about this whole experience. From the teaching times, discussion, trail walk, follow up process. Name the things that you found to be most beneficial.

(12 min – just name it - minimal detail average 1 min per)

2. In a minute or 2 share one spiritual highlight or story from the whole experience.

Try a record one from each person.
(18 min – 1.5 minute per average)

3. Do you think people noticed any changes in you? Yes or No around the room (record each). Ask for several to elaborate. Were the changes positive?

(6 min – 30 second average)

4. Did you notice any changes in yourself? Yes or No. (record each)

Positive changes or negative changes - ask a few to comment.

(6 min – 30 second average)

5. Would you say that you were more aware of God's Presence during the 14 day follow up? If so, Yes or No. (record each) Why? (6 min)

6. If being aware of God's Presence a good thing? Yes or No (record each) – ask a few to elaborate. (6 min)

7. How important do you think it is to meet with another person(s) to share what you sense God is saying - or how you sense He is leading? Scale of 1 to 10 round the room record responses. If you think this is important how will or do you maintain it.

(12 min)

8. Would you want to increase your moment by moment awareness of His Presence in the future? If so, how would you go about this? 12 min.

Wind things down and pray (7min.)

**Appendix 8:
Table of Sample CPJ Coding Derived from
Journal Entries**

Codes	CPJ Shared During Skype Interview
Awareness Encounter Surrender Trust Plans Brokenness Presence	<p>“Lord you set me apart from birth even from conception you knit me together in my mother’s womb. what am I set apart for? waited for a while.... THEN.... YOU NEED TO DESIRE TO SURRENDER TO MY PLANS FOR YOU... GIVE ME YOUR PAIN I WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN TRUST THE PLANS THAT I HAVE FOR YOU. Lord I feel like I fail over and over how much longer do I have to wait? YOUR GOING TO FIND ME WHEN YOU ARE ALONE AND QUIET WITH ME LISTEN TO THE MESSAGE OF THIS SONG... Please Lord I surrender forgive me (broken before the Lord as they shared) heard voice saying I HAVE BEEN GOD FOR A LONG TIME (it was a really cool thing) (PARTICIPANT’S NAME) I AM WITH YOU THIS PAIN IS BRIEF (brokenness) BUT IT WILL MAKE YOU GROW FAR BEYOND YOUR EXPECTATIONS REMEMBER I HAVE THE FINAL SAY NOT YOU I KNOW WHAT I AM DOING AND I LOVE YOU BE CONFIDENT IN ME (trust).</p>
Edification Encouragement Plans Growth Trust Awareness Enabling Protection Leading Affirmation	<p>What is it that you want to share with me Father? COMPARE YOUR HEART TO MY SON JESUS ONLY AND NEVER COMPARE YOUR GIFTS TO ANYONE ELSE FOR I HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL JUST FOR YOU.... (edification/encouragement) I WILL USE YOU IN MY WAYS... (plans) YOU HAVE A KIND HEART MY CHILD (encouragement) AND YOU HAVE GIFTS THAT SHOW THE FRUITS OF LOVE AND JOY AND PEACE (affirmation) BUT I LONG TO RAISE UP (growth) PATIENCE AND GENTLENESS IN YOUR WORDS AND IN YOUR WAYS. WHEN PATIENCE INCREASES AND GENTLENESS SHOWS THEN SELF CONTROL (growth) WILL BE YOURS. TRUST IN THE WORK OF MY SPIRIT.</p> <p>Participant’s comment - If God was going to raise up opportunities for gentleness and patience... then there was going to be opportunities presented for me to respond and so I was more attuned (awareness) to them and knew I needed to respond to obedience... an enabling that helped me become attuned...” - “As I became more attuned and</p>

	<p>aware of God’s presence throughout the day when I do step out she I now has a sense of leading and protection and enablement for the task</p>
<p>Surrender Trust Protection</p>	<p>- “Lord you set me apart from birth even from conception this is too wonderful for me to fathom Lord what have you set me apart for me. I DID NOT MAKE YOU TO BE PERFECT THAT IS NOT WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU MY CHILD. Lord why do I expect that from myself? LOOK TO ME (surrender) FOR GOODNESS IN ME LOVE FLOWS AND CASTS OUT FEAR (trust). Oh Lord may I focus on You and Your goodness instead of all the ways I fall short. Lord I’m thinking about meeting ##### what would you have me do. I pray for #####’s heart to be open too. I WILL OVERWHELM THE THING THAT OVERWHELMS YOU... (protection) I WILL OVERWHELM IT WITH LOVE.. LET YOUR CONFIDENCE RISE (trust) IN ME I AM GOOD AND WILL BE GOOD TO YOU</p>
<p>Plans Surrender Trust Enabling Leading</p>	<p>- “Lord what good thing are you doing in my life...? I AM PREPARING YOU (plans) (RESPONDENT’S NAME) FOR NEXT STEPS IN YOUR LIFE... THIS IS WHAT I HAVE ALWAYS DONE (RESPONDENT’S NAME) ...ARE YOU GONNA FIGHT THE PROCESS OR EMBRACE IT... (surrender) ARE YOU GONNA LOVE RIGHT NOW OR HATE IT..... DON’T FEAR I HAVE GOOD THINGS (trust and enabling) WAITING FOR YOU IN THE NEXT CHAPTER.... Lord I want to be used by You what can I do I am willing... (surrender) I PUT YOU AT #####’S... I BROUGHT (leading) YOU THERE TO BE A LIGHT (leading) TO THOSE PEOPLE YOU NEED TO LOVE THEM AND LOVE THEM WELL.... What about the cabin? I LED YOU TO HUNTSVILLE TOO... (leading) What do you want for me today... FIND PEACE IN ME TODAY. (trust)”</p>
<p>Plans Affirmation Transformation Leading Surrender Enabling</p>	<p>- “(RESPONDENT’S NAME) MY CHILD, YOU WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO LIVE THIS WAY WHEN YOU COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND WHO I AM AND WHO YOU ARE AS MY CHILD. YOU WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO LIVE THIS WAY WHEN YOU HAVE FULLY GRASPED THE FULLNESS OF WHO I HAVE CREATED YOU TO BE (plans). YOU HAVE BEEN GROWING IN THIS AREA OF YOUR LIFE BUT (RESPONDENT’S NAME) YOU HAVE SO FAR TO GO. DON’T BELIEVE THAT THOSE AROUND YOU HAVE</p>

	<p>COME TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THIS. (RESPONDENT’S NAME), TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS MEANS YOU WILL REQUIRE MORE THAN JUST A FRONT OF -- “LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS, YOU WILL REQUIRE A FULLY RENEWED HEART AND MIND AND SOUL AND ONLY I CAN DO THIS. I HAVE YOU IN THIS PLACE, SET APART (plans) AND TAKING TIME TO REFLECT AND TO CONSIDER IN ORDER THAT I CAN DO THIS WORK (transformation) IN YOUR HEART AND MIND. (I HAVE TAKEN THIS TIME TO PULL YOU AWAY (leading) SO YOU CAN BE MY CHILD, FULLY AND COMPLETELY MINE). YOU SAID THIS IS WHAT YOU WANTED YOUR LIFE TO BE (RESPONDENT’S NAME), YOU SAID YOU WANTED YOUR LIFE TO BE ONE OF FOLLOWING ME (surrender) AND ONE OF LOVING ME AND ONE OF LOVING OTHERS AND ONE OF BEING ALL THAT I HAVE CREATED YOU TO BE THAN THIS WHAT THAT LIFE WILL LOOK LIKE. IT WILL LOOK LIKE ONE WHO LOVES THEIR ENEMIES, ONE WHO KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONG, ONE WHO CARES FOR OTHERS IN A WAY THAT CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD (transformation). (RESPONDENT’S NAME), TAKE HOLD OF ME (surrender) AND YOU WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED (enabling).</p>
<p>Trust Affirmation Protection Affirmation Enabling Brokenness Growth Forgiveness</p>	<p>- “God, I having trouble quieting (quiet) my mind to hear you.... “MY CHILD YOU ONLY TO TRUST AND BELIEVE THAT I AM WITH YOU, THROUGH THIS ALL ALLOW MY TIMING AND DO NOT LOSE HOPE HEAR THE WORDS SPOKEN OVER YOU.... YOU ARE MINE ... (affirmation) I AM YOUR HOME... YOU ARE SAFE WITH ME... (protection) I LOVE YOU (affirmation). Jesus I’m sorry that I continue in persistent sin that I choose self-gratification instead of You. Abba Father in heaven Your name is Holy Holy Holy your kingdom come Lord please provide for my family’s basic needs... Lord I did not pray yesterday, and selfish nature reigned. (PARTICIPANT’S NAME) MY SON... IT IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD THAT YOU STRUGGLE PUT ON THE ARMOUR THAT I HAVE PROVIDED (enabling) GROWTH MAY BE PAINFUL YET THE COST OF NOT GROWING IS FAR</p>

	<p>GREATER... (brokenness and growth) LORD I love you thank you for the courage to worship you publicly I LOVE YOU AND I FORGIVE YOU REALLY, I FORGIVE YOU.... (forgiveness) DON'T THINK YOU ARE FORGIVEN KNOW YOU FORGIVEN BY FAITH RECEIVE MY FORGIVNESS.... REMEMBER TO PRAY WHEN YOU FACE TEMPTATION... REMEMBER TO USE MY WORD... TO REPEL THE ENEMY, YOU KNOW THIS (enabling).”</p>
<p>Leading Surrender Growth Transparency</p>	<p>- “Many times, I get a deep sense that there is a right next thing to do and that I believe is God leading me (leading). Sometimes when I journal I am aware that there are distinct words that God is laying on my heart and I will share these with people close to me (surrender / growth / transparency).”</p>

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