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Tyndale University

Developing a Method for Growing in Intimacy with the Triune God Through  
Knowing, Being and Doing

A Research Portfolio

submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Tyndale University

by

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Toronto, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

In this Research Portfolio, the author develops a method for growing in intimacy with God, through faith in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Spirit using the metaphor of a fruit bearing tree. The method is developed in three parts. The first part is a spiritual autobiography where the author describes his life in Christ: Seed (Life before Christ), Death (New Life in Christ), Rooted (Learning from Christ), Pruning (Suffering with Christ). The second part is a spiritual formation model exploring how we grow in maturity in Christ: we discover our true identity in relation to Christ (know), as we abide in Christ (be) by intentionally practicing spiritual disciplines, and over time, we bear the fruit of the Spirit in Christ (do). The third part is a research project that reproduces the knowing-being-doing model in the context of a spiritual direction relationship, where the participants are led to use their imagination in prayer. As the participants connect with God using their imagination, their experience of God deepens, and the fruit is a positive change in their relationship with God.

## DEDICATION

To the Triune God of Grace:  
Thank you for calling me out of darkness, inviting me to be with you, and  
teaching me how to live

To John, my dad:  
Thank you for being generous and encouraging life-long learning

To Carolyn, my wife:  
Thank you for being a listening, loving, wise friend

To Hannah, Noah, Gabriel and Joshua, my children:  
Thank you for being playful, curious, and inspiring joy

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## EPIGRAPH

Isaiah 61:3

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor

Mark 8:23-24

Jesus asked “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around”

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Colossians 2:6-7

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACC</b>	Anglican Church of Canada
<b>ANiC</b>	Anglican Network in Canada
<b>CAMH</b>	Center for Addictions and Mental Health
<b>CBOQ</b>	Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
<b>DMin</b>	Doctor of Ministry
<b>FBC</b>	First Baptist Church
<b>GAFCON</b>	Global Anglican Fellowship of Confessing Anglican
<b>LBC</b>	Lakefield Baptist Church
<b>MAiD</b>	Medical Assistance in Dying
<b>MDiv</b>	Master of Divinity
<b>REB</b>	Research Ethics Board
<b>SPP</b>	St. Peter and St. Paul’s Anglican Church Ottawa
<b>TVA</b>	Trent Valley Association of Baptist Churches

**PART 1 – SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: LIKE A FRUIT BEARING  
TREE**

## INTRODUCTION ~ A TIME TO SOW

*Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ~ Galatians 6:8*

It was desperation that led me into the Doctor of Ministry program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale University. After completing a Master's of Divinity at Regent College in Vancouver (2012), I took a position pastoring a small rural church in central Ontario and quickly realized that being a pastor was much different than what I expected. When I interviewed for the position, I was led to believe that the congregation wanted a pastor who could help them grow spiritually and equip them to reach out to the community, but after the first year it was clear that they wanted a pastor who would maintain the status quo. The disappointment coupled with the demands and stress of ministry and family life compounded, and in 2015, I experienced burnout. I was exhausted and depressed, lonely, and unaware of how to process what I was feeling. This led to me trying to cope in unhealthy ways. I went through a period of "sowing to the flesh" where I struggled with sin, wrestled with negative thoughts, and considered leaving ministry altogether. During this dark time, the Spirit of God began to work in me, inviting me to trust in God's love and grace one day at a time. With the Spirit's help, I started to do things that oriented me towards relational intimacy with the

Father, by contemplating how Jesus lived his overall lifestyle. The Spirit was teaching me how to cultivate space where I could receive be in the Father's loving presence and I gradually began to experience new life and energy for ministry.

In 2018, I decided to start the DMin program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale for three reasons. First, I recognized how necessary spiritual formation was for my development as a disciple of Jesus. As I meditated on scripture, I was captivated at how the first disciples were formed, and I found it interesting how they never asked Jesus how to preach, or teach, or heal, or cast out demons. The only thing they asked Him to teach them to do was how to pray (Luke 11:1). I wondered, could it be that the disciples saw how Jesus' teaching, preaching, healing and casting out demons flowed out of his prayer life? I wanted to grow in the life of prayer in an environment with other disciples interested in growing. As I reflected on my life and the lives of the people in my congregation, I realized how busy we were. There was a lot of activity. The church was motivated and committed to serve. But I was overwhelmed and felt a strong need to return to my first love (Revelation 2:2,4). I was longing to live an overall life of knowing Jesus more intimately, being with him, and living out of my relationship with him.

Second, I also realized how crucial spiritual formation was for the health of the Church. I reflected on how Jesus is building his Church and has called me to participate. When I first entered full time ministry in 2012, I knew I was signing up to be a "generalist" with the task of "preparing God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ would be built up" (Ephesians 4:12). After serving in this way for six years, the task was the same, but through my study of scripture and reading theological works on spiritual formation by Dallas Willard,

Richard Foster, and Eugene Peterson, I began to see how central spiritual formation is to what God is doing in the world by his Spirit. I started to see spiritual formation as the reason why the Father sent His Son, and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit. His intention is to be with us now and through faith and our cooperation, change every dimension of our humanity, until we reflect his character and participate fully in his life and mission. I began paying attention to how people are formed, and I wanted to discover ways that I could help others grow more effectively.

Third, I also saw how crucial spiritual formation is for the salvation of the world. I have developed a strong conviction that people need to see Jesus in the church before they will listen to our message. When Jesus prayed for the church in John 17, he made the comment: “I am not praying for the world.” (John 17:9). Why? Because Jesus is cultivating a people who will show the world who he is, so that those who do not know him yet would be drawn to him, see him for who he really is - God in the flesh, our Lord and Saviour - and enter into the new life he has made available for all. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom that is eternal. Jesus, the king, is bringing the world (human society organized around itself without God) to an end by creating a new society organized around himself that will last forever. The world has no future apart from Christ. If the church is not being formed properly, the world will not see Jesus. Therefore, I see the spiritual formation of God’s people, on both a personal and communal level, as a critical part of God’s salvation plan.

Now that I have completed the DMin program in Spiritual Formation at Tyndale University, my final task is to gather together the three main projects: my

spiritual autobiography (DMSF 0941), my spiritual formation model (DMSF 0942) and the research project (DMSF 0943), into an integrated whole. Dr. Narry Santos, my supervisor for the integrated portfolio (DMSF 0947), recommended I use a metaphor that could bring together the different projects into a cohesive whole. We both agreed that the most common metaphor I use throughout all three projects is that of a fruit-bearing tree. I have organized the chapters of my integrated portfolio around six stages of growth: seed, death, rooted, pruning, maturing, abiding, bearing fruit, and reproducing.



## **CHAPTER 1: SEED (LIFE BEFORE CHRIST)**

A seed is the chosen metaphor Jesus used when speaking about the Word of God (Mark 4:1-20); the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:32), and the dying-rising pattern of spiritual growth which he incarnated (John 12:24). St. Paul uses the metaphor of a seed when speaking about those who believe in the God of Abraham (Galatians 3: 29) and how money can be used to support Gospel ministry (1 Corinthians 9:11). St. Peter uses the metaphor of a seed to describe the experience of spiritual rebirth: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 2: 23).

The image of a seed is a powerful metaphor used to describe spiritual life because a seed has potential. A seed is a plant or tree in its embryonic state. Growth will depend on the quality of the soil, the amount of rain and sunlight, and there will be threats: inclement weather, pestilence, forest fires, chainsaws. Those trees that grow, flourish, and then reproduce fulfill their purpose for being. But before the great adventure of maturation can begin a seed must be buried in the soil. If I were to compare my life to that of a fruit-bearing tree, my childhood and adolescent years would be like a seed fallen on the soil. What follows is a description of the ‘soil’ I was planted in.

## **Early Childhood**

If I had to choose a feeling word to describe the soil in which I was planted, it would be ‘anxious’. My parents were in their early twenties when they got married and struggled to work together as a team. My mother was born into a blended family in North Bay, Ontario, in the mid-fifties. Her mom and dad brought two children each into the marriage. My mother was the oldest of three from their union. Growing up, I heard stories of how broken her family was, but the Lord brought her to faith at a Billy Graham crusade, where she accepted Christ as her Saviour. She began attending a local Anglican church close to her house. After high school, she worked for the city and met my father through a Christian young adult’s group.

My father was born in the Netherlands, also in the mid-fifties. He and his family moved to North Bay when he was five. My Opa worked at the North Bay Civic Hospital as a porter. My Oma stayed at home and managed the house. They had lived through World War II and would often share stories about God’s divine intervention through the help of “angels.” They were strong evangelical Christians committed to the local church. They spent their remaining years at a Dutch Christian residence in Brampton Ontario. My father rebelled against my Oma and Opa’s conservatism, but developed a personal faith in Jesus. After high school, he became an eccentric young leader in the Jesus People movement, preaching the gospel in public and baptising new believers in Lake Nipissing. People called him “John the Baptist”. He also had a deep appreciation for music, literature, and art. He went to Nipissing University and studied history and then to Western University to complete a teaching degree.

My parents married in 1976 and moved to Cochrane, Ontario, because my dad was offered a teaching position. I was born January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1978. The following year, my dad accepted a position as the first principal of a new Christian school in Lindsay Ontario, that met in the basement of a fellowship Baptist church. My sister was born the following year. When I was four, my mom took my sister and I away from my dad. I was supposed to sing in the church choir and was very confused as to why we were leaving.

When we left my dad, the feeling of anxiety intensified. We stayed in Foymount from December 1982 – August 1983. I finished the school year at the public school in Eganville and would often get in trouble for my behaviour. I spent a lot of time with my head down on my desk as punishment. I stole another kid's show-and-tell book and lied about it. I swore at a girl on the playground. I had a hard time paying attention in class. I had butterflies in my stomach and felt like it was my fault for my parent's separation. I remember two of my aunts sitting me down, telling me how bad I was and how I was going to turn out just like my dad.

In the fall of 1983, we moved in with my mom's parents in North Bay. My grandmother was cold and sarcastic. She was often irritated because I would get into her things and had lots of energy. My grandfather was into woodcarving and making furniture. He was quiet and spent most of his time in his workshop by himself. My mom started dating a man named Alex and after about three months he moved in with us. My parents went through a custody battle that lasted three years. During this time my sister and I would see my dad for supervised visits, then unsupervised visits. I remember how awkward these visits were. My dad

would try so hard to enjoy our time together, but he would express how much he missed us and how he wanted us to come back and live with him. My mom was convinced that my dad was evil and that he was abusing us. I went to a school in North Bay for grade one. I remember my dad coming to the school expecting to see us and the principal calling the police. He thought my mom was mentally unfit to be our mother and he had a court ordered psychological assessment.

Living with Alex was a nightmare. We moved out of my grandparent's house and into a rented place in Callander, just south of North Bay. He was cruel to my sister and me. He had a short fuse and would often lash out for the smallest things. When I did something wrong, there would be no explanation or teaching moment, his only response was a physical punishment, and he would remind me that I was just like my father. My mom was content letting Alex take the lead. She was consumed with trying to figure out how to prevent my dad from seeing us.

It is hard to see the good as I look back over the first six years of my life. I don't remember being read a bed-time story, or being cuddled, no movie nights, or extracurricular sports, no help with homework or learning how to read. When Alex came along things got even worse for me. I did not want to be at home. I did not look forward to weekends or holidays. I went through a period of a few months, during which I would wake up in the night and get sick to my stomach because I was constantly feeling nervous.

### **Later Childhood**

We never went to church. No grace before dinner. No conversations about anything spiritual. Alex was an atheist, and he became the center of my mother's world. When I was eight, she became pregnant with my little sister. They were

married at the local Anglican Church in Callander when I was nine. My mom cried through the whole service. I asked my Grandma why she was crying and she said “because she is finally happy.” I remember thinking to myself “My mom is never happy...how can Alex make her feel happy when he makes me feel so miserable”. I was conflicted. I wanted my mom to be happy, but I loathed the source of her happiness. I kept these feelings inside because I knew how easily my mom’s feelings could get hurt and I wanted her to be happy.

After school and on weekends, I played outside a lot either by myself or with my sister. I did not have friends outside of school because I did not want to bring them over to my house. My sister and I had to help out with our little sister, but when we had free time, we would spend hours outside in the forest behind our house pretending we were He-man and She-ra fighting bad guys, catching minnows in the pond, and going for long walks. I became intrigued by the natural world. I would borrow books about birds, insects, plants, and mammals from the library and do ‘research’ on my own, which involved copying information down in a booklet then trying to find real life samples. I also enjoyed running and jumping over things. I figured out how to build a high jump structure using flowerpots for the stands and a rack for the bar. I practiced in our yard and by the time I was nine I could hurdle my height. I did very well in track and field jumping events and enjoyed distance running.

In Grade 4, my mom could see that I did not have many friends, so she signed me up for the Big Brothers program. The girl I was assigned to did not know what to do with me. Her idea of spending time with me was getting together with another girl in my class, whom I did not get along with, and playing board

games in her basement. I remember thinking how much I would prefer hanging out with a guy, so we could play sports. The thought of telling my mom did not cross my mind. I remember going to a Big Brothers camp, sitting around a campfire and the people started singing Kumbaya. I overheard one of the camp counselors crying and she said “These are tears of joy.” I did not understand what she was experiencing but it caught my attention.

In Grade 6, I made a friend named Brian. He was the first person I played with outside of school. I am not sure if his family had faith, but they sure loved one another. At dinner, they each spoke to one another and seemed genuinely interested in each other’s lives. Brian and his sister were involved in soccer, baseball and hockey, and his parents attended all their games. I was surprised by the fact that they were not in ‘crisis mode.’ What impressed me the most was how Brian’s parents took an interest in every area of his life. Brian’s dad was the president of the Ontario Fur Trappers Association. He invited our class on a tour of the facilities. Brian’s mom was a supply teacher and once she became emotional in class when she started to talk about the environment and how things were changing for the worse. Brian was embarrassed, but I admired her passion and knowledge of the natural world. I don’t ever remember my mother even attending a parent teacher interview. Brian’s family gave me a glimpse of hope. But it was short lived.

The winter of Grade 6, we moved into a trailer on a 100-acre property just outside Callander. Alex and my mom said it would be temporary until they built a new house on the property. The trailer was small. My sisters shared a room, and I slept on the couch. Alex thought it would be a good idea to have a hobby farm, so

he bought a dog, chickens, and rabbits, but then he expected me to take care of them all, without showing me what to do. If I asked questions, he would get annoyed. Many of the chickens and rabbits died. I had to pick up the carcasses and throw them into the bush. Alex blamed me whenever things went wrong. I had to make coffee for him and my mom and bring it to them in bed every morning. There was no furnace, only a wood stove, so much of the winter was spent chopping firewood and stacking it in the basement. We had no running water, which meant no showers. We had to go to my aunt's house in town and sometimes I went for weeks without feeling clean. Not cool for a grade seven boy.

Living in the trailer was the most embarrassing situation I've ever been in. All my friends from Grade 6 went to a school south of Callander, I went to a different school in North Bay. I was bussed in. Every morning the bus would roll up to our house and I would melt with embarrassment.

One day, Alex came home with another dog, a puppy. It slept with me, and I took care of it. After a few weeks it ate a battery and died. I was devastated. I was upset with Alex and my mom for not doing anything to help it and I was angry at my sister for leaving her watch out for the dog to eat. I stood in the bathroom, crying uncontrollably for a long time. Losing my dog opened up a watershed of emotions – I was sad, lonely, trapped, confused, unable to get away.

In Grade 7, I signed up for cross country running and track and field. The gym teacher, Mr. S, took me under his wing and trained me during lunch hours. He told me that if I trained and did well in High School then I might be able to get a university scholarship. He was the first person to see something in me that I did not see in myself. I had a practice once after school near the end of the year. Alex

picked me up, but I did not see where he had parked. Eventually I found him, he was angry and he said, “You won’t be doing this again.” Mr. S told me to keep training over the summer and recommended that I ask “my dad” to help me, by driving behind me to measure my speed and distance along the highway. But I did not ask Alex and I did not practice all summer. When the new school year came around, I tried out for the cross-country team, but did not do well. Mr. S asked me if I had practiced over the summer. I lied and said “Yes”. But he knew I lied and I felt like I had disappointed him.

By the fall of 1990, Grade 8, the relationship between my mom and Alex started to deteriorate. They had an argument on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1990. The next day, we woke up and my mom told my sister and I not to get on the bus because we were going to Ottawa. She dropped Alex off at work, loaded up our van, and we were off. We moved into the basement of a house that belonged to my uncle. His daughter and her husband lived in the top part of the house. I went to the school where my uncle’s wife taught. She was my Grade 8 home room Teacher. The other students hated her and made fun of me because I was related. My mom was busy with my sisters, especially my younger sister. She did not know how to connect with me. Living below relatives was stressful. They moved out, angry with my uncle for letting us move in, and I felt guilty for being there and ashamed of myself. My uncle would say things to me like, “You are the man of the house now. You need to take care of your mom and your sisters.” He treated me like I was a bad kid. My sister and I had an argument once and I broke the lock on her bedroom door trying to get something of mine that she had taken. My uncle sat me down and scolded me in front of my mom. He told me, “You’re going to turn



out just like your father” and my mom sat there and did nothing but cry, which I thought was affirmation that she felt the same way. The darkness and confusion continued to intensify, yet there was relief in that I was no longer living under the tyranny of my stepfather.

### **Adolescence**

In the summer of 1991, we moved out of my uncle’s house into a three-bedroom apartment next to Merivale High School. A guy from my grade 8 class lived in the building next to us named Tim. He went to a different high school, but we had a lot in common. We both had divorced parents. We both liked the same sports: Tennis, Squash, Basketball, Biking. We spent a lot of time together. Going into grade 9, Tim became my closest friend.

High School was not fun. In Grade 9 and 10, I was living in a cloud of confusion. I did not want to get close to anyone except Tim. I would go to school then come home straight away. I even came home for lunch because I couldn’t handle being in the cafeteria with other students. I felt ashamed living in an apartment. I started working at McDonalds so I could buy myself clothes because we could not afford it.

In the Summer of Grade 11, I reconnected with my dad. It had been eight years since I had seen him. My sister and I went to stay with him and his girlfriend and her family. They were renting a farm north of Lindsay Ontario. It was a time of seeking and discovery. My sister and I had a lot of questions. We learned that our dad was a hard worker. He was very social and well-liked in the community, and he had many friends. It was a picture of him that we did not expect. He was generous, kind, and funny. I discovered that my dad was a lot like

me. We had a similar voice, we had similar mannerisms, we were both tall and liked similar things. Reconnecting with him was like filling in missing pieces to my identity. I received much encouragement simply being near him. We discovered that our dad was artistic. He painted. He loved music. He had a massive library. He grew plants. He seemed to enjoy life deeply and this impacted us in significant ways. What I took from that summer was a rekindling of hope, a sense of adventure, and the possibility that I could do anything if I applied myself. That summer, I had a reoccurring dream that I was running on the side of the road with my dad driving behind me and the sun on my face. The longer I ran the more strength I received and the more joy I experienced.

In grade 12, I started working at a camera store. The manager, Thomas, and I became good friends. We hung out outside work. Thomas loved music and we would see live shows together. Thomas had a strong work ethic and expected his employees to dress well and act in a professional way. I worked with Thomas for six years and learned how to problem solve, manage my time, and “the customer is always right”.

In Grade 13, I switched to Tim’s high school because I wanted to graduate with Tim. Tim’s high school was a smaller school and the students and teachers were welcoming and open to me as a newcomer. I quickly made friends with Tim’s friends, and we hung out all the time. I made the volleyball team, the basketball team, and the track team. The problem is that all the attention went to my head and I became arrogant and self-centered. I did not focus on academics, instead I focused on fun. I wanted people to like me and to think I was funny, so I would say things and do things for shock value to get people laughing. During

this time, my mom had a spiritual awakening. She started attending the local Anglican church and would invite my sisters and I on occasion, but at this time I had no interest in spiritual things.

The only other Christian I knew was a guy in my home room named David. I remember driving him home after a study session and he told me that he and his girlfriend were going to wait until marriage before having sex. I couldn't understand why. No one else I knew had that kind of desire. It caught my attention. Also, Thomas' little brother died of a brain aneurysm. A group of friends and I went to the funeral. We were amazed at how composed and strong Thomas was. The fruit of God's Spirit was evident in Thomas' life. Being around him made me realize that I was missing something, that there was more to life than what I had been experiencing, but I did not know what that something was. I wasn't ready to receive from God yet. I needed to die to myself before I could come to life in Christ.

## **CHAPTER 2: DEATH (NEW LIFE IN CHRIST)**

*Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ~ John 12:24*

As I reflect on my coming to life in Christ, using the metaphor of a fruit-bearing tree, I was like a seed buried in the soil that needed to die in order for new life to emerge.

### **University Life**

After graduating from high school, I did what most of my classmates did and enrolled in university. I had no sense of direction, low self-esteem, and yet I was completely self-absorbed. My marks were low, but I managed to get into the general arts program at Carleton University. As I got to know some of the other students, I felt like everyone else knew who they were and seemed to have a clear sense of where they were going. Instead of rising to the challenge of academic life, I took the easy route, and partied, hanging out with other first year students who just wanted to get wasted and have fun. I registered for courses that I thought would be easy. I did poorly in all of them except psychology. So, in second year I majored in psychology, and took most of my electives in biology and chemistry. I think on some level, I studied psychology hoping to understand myself and other people better. I was searching for a more secure sense of identity and purpose, but the more I studied, the more disoriented I became. I wanted to transcend my

reality and become someone else, but I wasn't sure who. I was stuck, lonely and longing for true love and friendship.

In second year, I also started dating a girl named Alison because she liked me, and I liked the feeling of being liked. She was keen on getting married and would talk about it openly, which made me anxious and fearful. My instinct was to shut off emotionally and this made her highly critical and emotionally needy. She was looking for affirmation of our relationship that I could not provide. My friends and family warned me not to pursue a relationship with her, but I did not listen until we came close to graduation. With Alison, I felt like I was always under pressure to be someone that she wanted me to be. I could see my whole life laid out before me with her and I felt depressed. I could see that Alison was expecting me to fulfill a void in her and provide for her, but I had nothing to give. I was empty. I ended the relationship, which was a great relief, even though I knew I had hurt her deeply.

One of the first times I can remember praying was in university. I bought a mountain bike from a guy with whom I played volleyball, and I was excited to test it out in the Gatineau hills just north of Ottawa. I went for a ride on a cool November morning. It took me about an hour to get from my door to the start of the bike trail, and by the time I entered the forest I was already quite tired, but I kept going because I wanted to see what the bike could do on more rugged terrain. Instead of sticking to the main path I went off on a side trail and got caught up in the adventure. After about two hours, I realized that I had no idea where I was but by this time, I was exhausted. Then it started to rain, and the temperature dropped significantly. I eventually found my way back to the main trail but had to walk. I

was far from the road and dreaded the idea of needing to bike home. Every muscle in my body was aching. Finally, I came to the main road and by this time I was desperate for help, but no one was around because it was the middle of the week. With every step I took, I became weaker and weaker, and as I plodded along pushing my bike, I came to a giant hill and I confess, I started to cry. I had no idea what to do and so I did what most desperate people do, I prayed. I remember saying out loud “God, please help me” and as soon as I prayed, a van pulled up from behind me and a man got out and asked if I was ok. It turned out the man was a doctor from out of town. He was out for an afternoon drive, trying to put his infant daughter to sleep, while his wife, who was also a doctor, interviewed for a position at the Children’s Hospital. He took me to the store and bought me a drink and a chocolate bar, and then insisted on driving me all the way home.

My experience at Carleton was secular from start to finish. Meanwhile, my mom’s faith continued to grow. She started attending a downtown Evangelical Anglican Church called St. Georges. She would go on Cursillo and Alpha retreats and come home glowing. On one hand, I thought she had joined a cult and had been brainwashed. On the other hand, I could see that her character was changing. She was becoming more joyful. This caught my attention, but not enough to further investigate what she believed.

### **Searching**

My eldest sister became very influential near the end of my time at Carleton. We spent a lot of time together enjoying the downtown scene in Ottawa. She knew all my friends and I got to know hers. One of them was looking for a

roommate, who lived in an apartment about a 15-minute walk from Parliament Hill. We moved in together when I graduated from Carleton. I started working at a homeless shelter and continued to work at the camera store. I would also work with my dad, in Lindsay, for a few months at a time, to make some extra money. During this time, I surrounded myself with people who were rebelling against the status quo and seeking transcendence through artistic expression and spiritual experiences. I also got a Jack Russell Terrier and named her Badu. Most of my time was spent walking Badu, hanging out in coffee shops, pubs, restaurants, museums, contemplating the meaning and purpose of life. I found through many, often drug induced, conversations with friends that I was developing a strong opinion about God. It was obvious to me that there must be an intelligent designer who brought everything into being and held everything together, but I did not know that it was possible to have a personal relationship with him. Whenever my mom suggested I look into Christianity, I would point to all the other religions, and I assumed they were all saying the same thing.

I remember talking to one of my dad's Christian friends about the meaning of life and he challenged me with the philosophical idea that we can conceptualize infinity from a macro and micro perspective. It was the first time I remember thinking about the incredible gift of the imagination. We have the ability to transcend our experience through the mind. I set out on an epistemological pursuit for understanding God and the meaning of my life. Most evenings, I would find a quiet field and talk to God, whom I understood to be the Ultimate Being and the source of my life. After a year and a half of living with my sister's friend I decided to travel.

My first trip was to Peru to hike the Machu Picchu trail. I left Badu with my dad. It was my first trip alone outside the country. It was amazing to see the ancient ruins, meet other travelers from around the world and experience Peruvian culture, but I was restless. I intended on staying for at least a year teaching English, but I had no staying power, and did not want to put in the effort learning a new language or searching for a job, so I came home after two weeks.

I decided to try teaching English in South Korea. Before I left, I had a big talk with my mom about faith. She gave me a pocket bible and encouraged me to pray and read it regularly. I went through a recruiting agency in Ottawa to find a one-year position working at a private school in a mid-sized city on the east coast called Ulsan. When I got off the plane, I experienced instant culture shock. The language, the behaviour, the food, everything was so different from Canadian culture. I lived in a three-bedroom apartment with a girl from New Zealand and a boy from England. They helped me enter into the foreign teacher world. There were hundreds of us in Ulsan. The director of the school filled our teaching schedule from morning until late at night. The Korean students had their regular school during the day and then went to 'hogwoons' (private schools) in the evenings: martial arts, mathematics, music. The philosophy of Korean parents was to provide as many learning opportunities as possible for their kids to help them get an edge on the competition. Korea has roughly the same population as Canada crammed into the size of southern Ontario. English is the language of commerce and so most families enrol their kids not only in private school lessons but in private lessons. I was approached by parents to tutor their children on weeknights and on Saturdays. This frenetic pace was exciting. I grew to love the



culture and the people and even took Korean lessons to better connect with my students. Much of my free time was spent with other foreign teachers, hiking mountains, visiting temples, travelling around the country, and enjoying Korean cuisine. We frequented a bar that was mainly for foreigners where we talked about work and life in general. As I got to know people, I would swing the conversation around to the spiritual and want to talk about God and the meaning of life. Another English teacher gave me a book by a Hindu Mystic Rajneesh (Osho) who rejected all categories of good and evil and focused on the practice of meditation. This book got me into all kinds of trouble, and I crossed many moral boundaries. One night, sitting on my bed, I read the Parable of the Sower in Mark's Gospel, realizing that I was not living the life I was meant to. I was the person with the hard heart (rocky soil). Whenever I heard the Word of God, it could not sink in, and crows would come along to eat it up. While I was in South Korea, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 happened. The combination of being far from home in the midst of a terrorist threat and trying to find myself was too much for me to handle. I left Korea early, breaking my contract, and hurting all my new friends. I arrived back in Ottawa, feeling ashamed and defeated.

My eldest sister and I came up with the idea of working and going to school in the Netherlands, but we needed to find a copy of our dad's birth certificate, so we could get Dutch passports. We learned that we could get a copy through the city hall in the Hague, where my dad was born. I went in person to get it, spent a few weeks travelling around western Europe, then came home. When I returned to Ottawa, my sister and I came up with a different plan. We went to South Korea to save some money, so we could move to Holland. We only

stayed for two months because my sister did not like it. We moved back with our dad. My sister convinced him to pay for her to attend an art school in Enschede, a town on the east side of Holland. Badu and I joined her a few weeks later. She showed me around her school and introduced me to her friends. The first few weeks I experimented with art, hung out in Dutch cafes, ate lots of Gouda cheese and fresh bread, and smoked a lot of cannabis. I found a job working at a Restaurant in Utrecht and would travel back and forth each day on the train. After a few months I hit rock bottom. I was strung out on drugs, lonely and depressed. One night I went for a walk with Badu in the park and I abandoned her. I thought, “If I can’t take care of myself, how can I take care of my dog.” I threw her ball as hard as I could, and as she ran for it, I turned and walked away. It was the cruellest thing I have ever done. It was the lowest point of my life. I wasn’t even ashamed that I did it. My heart was so hard and calloused. When I returned from the walk, I lied to my sister and her flatmates. I told them I had given Badu away to a family who begged me for her. What I did to my dog was a snapshot of how impulsive and desperate I had become. I believe it was this event that finally brought me to the place where I knew I needed help.

### **Coming Home**

I remember sitting in Schipol airport on New Year’s Eve 2002 on my way back to my dad. It was reading Ernest Hemmingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* that gave me the idea of returning to my father. I saw virtue in how Manolin looked to Santiago wanting to learn. I was returning to my father wanting to learn. There was a connection between returning to my earthly father and turning to my heavenly Father.

On February 7th 2003, I came to the end of myself. I felt like I had been spinning in circles, making the same mistakes over and over again, unable to break free from a number of addictions (alcohol, cannabis, porn) and feeling helpless and lost. So I did what so many people do when they have nowhere else to turn, I prayed. I told God how frustrated I was, I acknowledged my brokenness, and begged him for help. At one point, I prayed, “If you are real, show me who you are.” As soon as the words left my mouth, I became aware of a presence filling my room that I had never experienced before. All of the darkness and emptiness within me was replaced with light and new life. I felt like a young child being embraced by a loving parent, and I heard a voice whispering, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard what marvellous things God has in store for those who love him” and “Let go and I will show you who you are.”

The next day, I woke up wondering if the experience I had the night before was real. When my dad woke up, I did not tell him about the experience because I wasn't sure how he would respond. Instead, he suggested I go back to Ottawa. I think he saw that I was depressed and needed to hang out with friends. I took it as a divine command, got in my car and prayed the whole way home. When I arrived, I told my mom about the experience, and she was elated. I was the prodigal son coming home. That Sunday, my mom and I went to St. George's Anglican. The same presence I experienced in my room the previous Friday, was the same presence filling the sanctuary, and the same voice speaking through the music, the readings, the prayers, the sermon, and the people. It was pure joy! It was as though the entire service was customized just for me. I had been to church the odd time with my mom before, and complained about how I had nothing in

common with Christians. Suddenly, these people were my family. I did not know any of the songs, but they all spoke of my experience of God's love, my desire to know him, and my newfound identity in him. I hung on every word the preacher said and afterwards thanked him with tears in my eyes.

That first Sunday, I met Carolyn and a group of young Christians, who had all recently come to faith as well. The first few months as a new Christian in Ottawa, I lived on my mom's living room floor, read the Bible constantly, and every Christian book I could get my hands on. The rector of St. George's, David Crawley, and the vicar, Jennifer Wickham were also particularly helpful. They met with me and encouraged me to keep learning and serving. I signed up for the Alpha course and it was there that I really started to understand the dynamic relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The love of God I was experiencing through the indwelling Spirit was so intimate and sweet, the thought of being in a romantic relationship did not enter my mind. In fact, I entertained the possibility of becoming a monk. Perhaps it was the influence of an Anglican monk at St. George's named Father Frere Kennedy. We would meet once a month either in person or over the phone for spiritual direction. Frere was a thoroughbred Anglo-Catholic. When he prayed, he would use prayers that he had memorized from the prayer book, he was careful to acknowledge saint days, and he celebrated Holy Communion daily. When we met, he would hear my confession, offer spiritual council, and we would talk about different spiritual practices.

Frere was influenced by a Benedictine monk named John Main who developed a method of meditation called "Holy Word" meditation. Main recommends using the Aramaic word "ma-ra-na-tha" (Come, Lord Jesus), the last

prayer in the Scriptures, repeating the word interiorly, stressing the syllables in four equal lengths, and continuing like this for a set amount of time, morning and evening. John Main, in his book *Word Into Silence*, describes the goal of Christian meditation as follows: “The all-important aim in Christian meditation is to allow God’s mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality in our lives; to let it become that reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are” (Main 2006, Kindle Locations 258-262). Frere also encouraged me to use my imagination when I read Scripture, using a form of Ignatius meditation. Frere’s ongoing counsel, over our seven-year relationship, never changed: “Holy Word” meditation for twenty minutes, twice a day, to combat sins of commission and Ignatius meditation once a day to combat sins of omission. He said if I only had time for one type of meditation make sure to keep up with “Holy Word.” As I think back to my time with Frere, I realize how beneficial “Holy Word” meditation was in creating space for me to simply “be” with God and it has helped me become more aware of God’s presence throughout the day. Frere was also significant in helping guide me in the direction of full time Christian ministry. I went for prayer one Sunday after the service, specifically asking God for direction and as I came out of the prayer room Frere walked up to me and said, “I believe the Lord is calling you to become an Anglican Priest.” Frere was a simple man who lived a simple life of discipline. His love for Christ was reflected in his gentle character and the way he listened to others and prayed for them. Near the end of his life, he could not walk but he would sit in his chair in his room and pray for the people who passed by on the street. All those who served at his

nursing home said they enjoyed being near him because they felt safe. He was a man who brought the presence of God with him everywhere he went, and he helped others become more aware of God's presence within themselves. I am so grateful for his life and his friendship.

In those early days of being a new believer, I got involved in leading Alpha, helping out with the youth group, and participating in worship. I told my sisters, my dad, and all my old friends about what had happened to me. I invited them to Alpha and to Church. I told them about books I was reading. Some friends cut me out of their lives completely. Others thought I was just going through a phase and that I would quickly get over it. The biggest struggle was with my eldest sister. When she came back from Holland, I had changed, and she could not understand why Jesus was so important to me. However, my dad came back to faith shortly after I did. I was praying for him from a distance and read, "He will go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children..." (Luke 1:17) Somehow I knew in my spirit that he had returned to the Lord. This was the beginning of a new chapter in our relationship that has been blossoming ever since.

After a year and a half of being a follower of Jesus, I had a longing to go back to South Korea for a third time. I struggled with knowing whether it was ok with God. I wanted to go because I had failed in the past and wanted to try it with Jesus. I wanted to purge from the cultural trappings that I knew were problems in my relationship with God. I needed to pay off student debt, but mainly I went to discern the call to either go to Teacher's College or to pursue full-time ministry.

South Korea with Jesus was a much different experience. Even though I was alone, I never felt lonely. I worked at an English School in Daejeon, right in the middle of the country. The days were long, but I loved being with the kids and I was happy to be back with a fresh pair of eyes and a new heart. The owner of the school was a Christian and a Professor at the local university. We would have lunch together every weekday and he shared his story of how he had escaped from North Korea when he was a boy and how God had brought about a spiritual awakening among the Korean people. One of the Korean teachers was also a Christian. She introduced me to her husband, Jiho, who was the worship leader at a large Presbyterian church. He taught me how to play guitar in exchange for English lessons for his worship team. I lived on my own in a small bachelor apartment. Every evening I'd have a simple dinner, and instead of watching television I'd pray and study. On Sundays, I worshipped with an International Christian Church in the morning and then two friends and I would go to an English Korean University Fellowship service in the evenings. It was in these two communities that I was first given the chance to preach and lead worship.

The highlight of my time in Korea was Saturday mornings. Every Saturday, regardless of the weather, I would go hiking up a particular mountain to a spot in a valley that was surrounded by trees with a large rock in the middle. This space became my outdoor sanctuary where I found solace and rest in the Lord's presence. Even today, I still return to this place in my imagination to meet with the Lord and listen to what he is saying to me.

It was in Korea that I started to actively pray for a wife. I was experiencing life alone and it was good to be with Jesus, but I realized that it would be better

for me to be married. Once I had made this decision before the Lord, I started to connect with Carolyn. She was in Lesotho South Africa working for a humanitarian group that focused on AIDS education, orphan sponsorship, and leadership development.

A few months before the end of my year in Korea, I went to a retreat centre (Holy Mountain) for three days of fasting and prayer and silence, to help me draw close to Jesus and further discern how he was calling me. I was drawn to all the gospel references to the healing miracles of Jesus. On the last day, I felt the Lord tell me to pray for Jiho's mother, who was dying of cancer, and anoint her with oil. He liked the idea. She was very sick, but I fully believed that God would heal her. My very last day in Korea, Jiho called me to say goodbye, and to tell me that his mom had died the night before. I was devastated when he told me this. I was certain God was going to heal her. Jiho described the way in which she died. As she was fading, she was talking with her family. She described how she saw herself walking in a field of flowers into the arms of Jesus. When Jiho shared this with me, I felt the Lord saying, "Death is the final healing." When I returned to Ottawa, I attended a healing conference with the prayer team from St. George's. The first thing the keynote speaker said was "Death is the final healing" and proceeded to talk about how all healing is temporary but when we die, we enter into eternal life and a glorious resurrected future.

I am so grateful God rescued me from death and brought me to life in Christ. The soil that was saturated with anxiety, keeping me closed in on myself, God fertilized with his grace, providing me with everything I needed to begin growing, rooted in God's love.



### **CHAPTER 3: ROOTED (LEARNING FROM CHRIST)**

*Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ~ Colossians 2: 6-7*

When I was in South Korea, I recognized that I needed to grow deeper in my relationship with God and discover my identity in Christ. I was approached by the rector of St. Alban's Anglican Church in Ottawa, George Sinclair, to enroll in a two-year full time internship program called Artizo.

#### **Artizo**

The program was designed to equip young adults who were discerning a call to full-time ministry and learn how to preach, teach, and lead. This was the first step in becoming more rooted in Christ. George modeled the values of Artizo well. He and I met once a week to discuss the ministries I was involved with and the different elements to running a church. When I first moved into this role, I struggled with reverse culture shock. The Korean friends I had made and the church experiences I had were so different from the Anglican tradition. Korean Christians worship with passion and excitement. They have a strong sense of community. And when the pastor said, "We are going to meet at 5am each weekday morning for two weeks to pray for our missionaries in the middle east" – the entire church showed up to pray. I missed Korea and I went through a period of spiritual dryness, unable to connect with God. It took me about four months to

feel comfortable worshipping at St. Albans. What helped me was actually the very thing that I was initially bothered by: the liturgy. The liturgy gave me an objective focus that helped me pray. When I don't feel like praying or can't seem to focus, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer keeps me on track and rekindles my love for God.

When I arrived at St. Alban's I learned of a theological battle raging within the Anglican Church of Canada around issues of human sexuality, how to interpret scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. I found the conversation distracting from the mission of making disciples and worshipping God, but also realized how important it was to be clear in articulating what we believe and why. It was through these theological debates that I decided to take a Master of Divinity. I considered Wycliffe and Tyndale, but I was drawn to Regent College in Vancouver through some Christian friends, the professors and the thrill of being around mountains, ocean, and glorious forests.

When Carolyn and I started dating, she left St. Georges and joined me at St. Albans so we could worship together. She continued to work for Help Lesotho and travelled extensively. I was introduced to her world of fundraising and advocacy work. The more time we spent together, the more I wanted to be with her all the time.

After my first year with Artizo, I hit another wall. I was doing too much and I wasn't connecting with God well. I was not confident in my ability to discern what the Lord was saying to me, I was easily swayed by other people's arguments, and I felt like I was always under spiritual attack. This was another reason why I wanted to pursue theological education - I wanted to grow more

confident and joyful as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I wanted to know him more intimately. I wanted to be more sanctified. At St. Albans, I felt like I couldn't expose my brokenness or acknowledge my sin, so most of the time I covered it up and this pushed me away from people. At the time, I was still meeting with my spiritual director, but Frere was struggling with his health and was unable to guide me through this period. When I went on holiday that summer, I was rejuvenated enough to return somewhat refreshed. Just having the break and being separated from my context of ministry for four weeks helped my spirit calm down.

In my second year of Artizo, I developed a campus club at the University of Ottawa called "Yoked" with another parishioner from St. Alban's, Steve. Steve had a clear vision of what this ministry would look like, and it included me being the spokesperson/pastor. His gifts were in planning and promoting the ministry. Together we spent many hours connecting with students, facilitating conversations about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him. We met at pubs, coffee shops and various places on campus. It was an exciting time of building relationships and dreaming of what could be. We even made a video showcasing what the ministry is about. When it came time to officially launch the ministry, we gathered a group of twenty students and my job was to present to them what Yoked was all about, but I blundered the whole thing. I was not clear in my mind what the purpose was, even though we had been planning and talking things through for months. It was critical that I engage with the students in an informal way to find out from them what they wanted to see happen in this kind of group. I was supposed to ask questions and dialogue. Instead, I preached to them and lost them all. Steve was deeply disappointed.

As Carolyn and I dated. We talked and prayed about how the Lord was calling us. We agreed that the next step should be for me to continue studying. Carolyn was fully on board with moving to Vancouver. We were married on June 30th, 2007, at St. Georges. It was a wonderful celebration. We brought our two worshipping communities together, and all our friends and family. The theme of our wedding was the fruit of the Spirit. After the wedding, we moved into a two-bedroom apartment for one year, Carolyn continued to work for Help Lesotho; I continued to serve at St. Alban's and I started taking correspondence courses through Regent College.

### **Vancouver**

We moved to Vancouver in August, 2008. Carolyn was four months pregnant. We put a lot of things in storage and only took what we could carry in our little red Volkswagen. The Artizo Institute headquarters was run out of St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church. The director of the program offered me an assistant position when I first arrived. I accepted and quickly got plugged into the life at St. John's working with Artizo trainees and young adults. St. John's was going through a legal battle with the diocese of New Westminster concerning the building. The bishop had stripped many of the evangelical clergy of their ministry licenses, including J.I. Packer. These churches and clergy left the Anglican Church of Canada and formed the Anglican Network in Canada with a new bishop in good standing with the primates of the global south.

I entered the Regent community and fully immersed myself in student life. Regent was a unique place to study theology. There was a strong sense of community. Students from all over the world along with staff shared meals

together, worshipped every Tuesday at Chapel, played sports, and went to the pub. The professors were tethered together under an evangelical banner, yet each one explored a different area of theology: earth care, human sexuality, marketplace ministry, missiology, etc. Studying theology was exciting and engaging, yet my worldview was slowly deconstructed. I had cultivated a vision of God and salvation and the church, and I was experiencing passionate worship and deep conversations, but it was not like this in the local church. I found myself becoming aggravated and critical towards St. John's, especially towards other Christian leaders.

Our first child Hannah came along on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. I was in awe at the fact that God used us to create another human being. Our whole world changed. Hannah became the center of our attention. Carolyn went on maternity leave while I continued to study. I hit another wall, struggling to figure out what it meant to be a father. I kept thinking I did not have what it took to do well in loving Hannah and helping her grow. My father was not a part of my life for eight years and I often heard my step-father's voice in my head, accusing and belittling me. I went to a counsellor who helped me come to a deeper understanding of my identity in Christ. He compared the negative things that happened to me when I was young as 'arrows' that wounded my heart. Connected to these 'arrows' were messages that I heard about myself. As I internalized these false messages, they became beliefs. Every new arrow reinforced the lie I was believing about myself, and I saw myself in a way that was not true. My counselor then walked me through a process of looking for "anchors", things from my past experience that reinforced who I truly am in Christ. As I worked on identifying my arrows and

anchors it helped me see that I have everything I need in Christ and through Him I can do all things.

When Hannah was around a year old, Carolyn started working at First Baptist Church Vancouver as the assistant to the senior pastor – Darrell Johnson. Darrell had the most impact of all my professors from Regent. His biblical teaching and pastoral heart inspired me to want to become a pastor.

Our second child Noah was born on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Carolyn took a nine-month maternity leave. When she went back to working at First Baptist Church, I stayed at home with Hannah and Noah full time, studied at night and worked part time as a parking lot attendant at the University of British Columbia campus. It was a blast hanging out with Hannah and Noah. Vancouver was a great city to explore with young kids. We spent a lot of time hiking, swimming at our local pool, playing at parks, exploring gardens and forests, hanging out at Granville Island Market, visiting a fun farm, reading stories at the library, participating in a parenting group at the church, baking cookies, making dinners, doing arts and crafts. So many good memories!

### **Discerning the Call to Ministry**

I went to Regent College expecting to become an Anglican Priest. I was in conversation with my home church in Ottawa (St. Georges) about a possible curacy position that they were going to begin the same year of my graduation. I had romanticized this church. This was where I first experienced Christian fellowship. It was the church where I was baptized, where I met Carolyn, and where we were married. We even flew to Ottawa to have Hannah and Noah baptized at St. George's. My mom and my parents-in-law and my sister-in-law

and her family were all part of this church. The pastoral team encouraged me to apply for the position telling me I would be a perfect candidate. We prayed together about it regularly for two years. They treated me like I was already part of the team. My wife and I started dreaming about what life would be like living back among friends and family. A few weeks before graduation, I flew to Ottawa to interview for the position, and I did not get it. The pastor told me that it was a close decision between the successful candidate and myself. Later, I heard from a friend that they used a business model scoring system in the interviewing process, and I lost by two points. My wife and I were devastated. I felt betrayed. I felt like I had let my wife and my family down.

The experience caused me to doubt my ability to discern God's voice and I entertained the idea that I had mistaken the call to ministry. But instead of giving up, I sought the Lord and looked back to see how I had been discerning over the past few years. I realized that the Lord had been prompting me all along in a number of ways. First, before we moved to Vancouver, I felt the urge to explore other traditions and to take time to rest, learn and grow in the faith. Instead, I jumped into ministry, working part-time at St. John's. Second, through my studies at Regent, I realized that being Anglican was not as important to me as it was for the other postulants. I appreciated the liturgy and the tradition, but I sensed God showing me that the Kingdom of God is bigger than Anglicanism or any other denomination or organization. In my courses and spiritual practice, I started to open up more to God, intentionally asking him to guide me through my relationships into a space where my wife and I could be refreshed and hear his voice without all the religious baggage that we felt was getting in our way. Third,

Carolyn and I had struggled at St. John's to connect relationally with the community. We left after my second year at Regent and started attending First Baptist Church regularly and immediately felt released from the pressure to perform and able to be ourselves.

We never imagined being in a Baptist church. We were surprised by the warm welcome, the passion and zeal in worship and the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. It was only after I received the news from Ottawa that I was able to look back and see more clearly how the Lord had been leading all along. I needed the Ottawa door to close before I could knock on a different door. I started looking for positions in the Baptist world. Carolyn and I both felt called back to Ontario where we could be closer to our extended families. We were looking for a place where we could take all the good that we had learned at Regent (community building, theological reflection, and spiritual formation) and share it with those people the Lord was preparing us to be with. We were also mindful that we had a lot to learn, and we were hoping to find a spiritually mature community who could mentor us and help us further develop our own sense of calling and gifting. I applied for a position as the youth pastor to a large family-oriented church in southern Ontario. I had experience working in youth and young adults' ministry and I felt confident that I could do a good job. I was only looking at other youth pastor and associate pastor positions. But Carolyn came across a position in Lakefield that she thought might be a good fit, although it was past the application deadline and the idea of being a solo pastor never entered my mind because I did think I was qualified. I applied for the Lakefield position anyway, thinking I'd have nothing to lose if they said, "No". I interviewed with both



churches, they both offered me the position on the same Friday, and they both wanted to have an answer by Monday, so I had to make a decision that particular weekend. I met with pastor Darrell and shared my dilemma with him. After listening to me speak, he asked me a question: “Which position do you think would most help you rely on God?” I took the question home to Carolyn, and we prayed about it. When we prayed, I knew that being a solo pastor would be the courageous thing to do and I would need God’s help more than if I was a youth pastor. Carolyn and I both felt that Lakefield was the place where God was calling us to serve and raise our family, so I said ‘Yes’. After I accepted the call, one of the members on the pastoral search committee from Lakefield told to me that they had been searching for a pastor for three years, all those who applied would have continued to maintain the status quo of the church culture, but they were looking for someone who could help the church become more family-oriented and missionally minded. She said, “Hiring you was the courageous thing to do.” When she said this, I knew that the Lord had been preparing us for each other and it affirmed our decision.

The strength and durability of a tree is connected to the depth of its roots. If the roots are shallow, the tree can easily topple over by strong winds or heavy precipitation. But if the roots are deep, the tree will be more likely to grow to maturity. It is like this in our relationship with Christ. When our roots are deep in the soil of God’s grace, we grow, eventually bearing the fruit of Christ. I was blessed to be in such graceful environments during my young adult years. God has allowed me to see my life before Christ as a seed influenced by the soil around me (Chapter 1), has enabled me to experience the benefits of dying and

rising with Christ (Chapter 2), and has rooted me in the love of Christ (Chapter 3).  
But strong roots are not enough, pruning is needed, which we will now explore in  
chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRUNING (SUFFERING WITH CHRIST)**

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ~ John 15:1-2*

### **Life in Lakefield**

My time serving in Lakefield was a time of pruning and learning to participate in the suffering of Christ. As a pastor, I was called to love people that I found very difficult to get along with in my own strength and I found myself in situations where I did not know what to do. The evening before my first day, the interim pastor called me and asked to come to the church at 9:00 am the next day to meet with him and two of the deacons. They proceeded to tell me that one of the members of the congregation was going to be charged for sexually assaulting his granddaughter. My first thought was “What have I signed up for?” Regent did not prepare me for this. This pastoral situation was all encompassing for the first few months, meeting with the accused and his wife, meeting with the deacons, talking with lawyers. In the end, the accused was found guilty in court, but he would not acknowledge that he did anything wrong, and so the leadership team of the church told him that he would not be able to worship with us until he repented. It was a very difficult decision to make, but one good thing that came from it is that the conflict brought the leadership team and I together quickly and they could see that I was committed to protecting the flock.

The first year as a pastor was spent getting to know the congregation and finding a healthy rhythm of serving the church, family life and recreation time. In my second year, a new moderator was elected to lead the church council. When he started, he and his wife were very supportive. They told me I could confide in them and rely on their help. I was encouraged by them and thankful for their willingness to commit to the mission of the church and to see me succeed in my new role. As the relationship progressed, we began to share our theological views and it became obvious that we had different ways of interpreting scripture. For them, secondary and tertiary issues became primary issues, and after about six months they started to turn against me, criticizing every sermon, challenging my perspective on creation, end times, and women in leadership. During this time, I was completing the ordination process within the Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec. Part of the process was to have a more mature pastor supervise me, so I chose a pastor from a CBOQ church in Peterborough, who became a spiritual friend, gave me solid advice on how to relate in a healthy way to my moderator, while supporting me in prayer. Eventually, the moderator and his wife left the church, and I confess I was deeply relieved.

Lakefield was a great place to raise children. Gabriel John Vanderheide was born on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013, and Joshua Emmanuel Vanderheide was born on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. All four children attended Lakefield District Public School. We developed strong friendships with other families outside the church, and some of them came to faith in Jesus Christ and started attending church services regularly. Carolyn was hired by Lakefield Baptist Church as an outreach worker in 2018, thanks to a grant from the CBOQ. Carolyn cultivated teams to run

multiple outreach programs and events. We saw significant changes in our life together at LBC over a period of nine years. When we first arrived in 2012, there were two families with young children, including ours. By 2019, we had twelve families who called LBC their home. We developed a strong seniors' ministry, men's ministry, and women's ministry. We had two youth groups (senior and junior) that met every Friday night. We partnered with other local organizations in ministry (Youth for Christ, the schools, businesses, Lakefield Soccer League, Canadian Tire's JumpStart Program). In 2015, we changed our governance structure, freeing us up to make decisions faster. Our board learned to get things done. One of the criticisms I heard coming on staff was that 'we keep spinning our wheels'. We elected women deacons, which had never been done in LBC's 152-year history. We also created a young adult deacon position to represent the youth. At one point we had six deacons and only one over the age of 60. We also experienced financial stability, which allowed us to transform the front entrance, install a lift, add a universal wheel-chair accessible washroom and renovate the kitchen.

My time as pastor was spent visiting the sick, the elderly, and meeting with those who are going through tough times. I preached most Sundays, taught a Bible study course every Thursday, and led the youth group. I also sat on the Congregational Care Committee, the Men's Committee, the Christian Education Committee, and the Leadership Team. I mentored some of the younger men. I ran a number of spiritual retreats (days apart or full weekends) during which I created space for people to connect with God through a variety of spiritual practices. I served on the Trent Valley Association of Baptist Church's (TVA) Mission and

Ministry Committee for four years, vice moderator for one year and moderator in 2017. In 2018, the TVA hosted an Indigenous Conference to help educate our family of churches on the Indigenous history in Canada, the truth and reconciliation commission, and how we might walk together in Christ.

In 2015, I started to experience burnout. Even though many things were going well in ministry and my family was content, I was struggling internally with feelings of unworthiness, and I was deeply insecure in my role as pastor. I felt overwhelmed most of the time. When I was out with the kids, I'd run into people from the church who wanted to talk, or they'd call me on my day off, or stop by the house. I found it difficult to shut off and be available to my family, always thinking about work, especially when someone was in crisis or there was a conflict. Also, I kept being triggered by different people and their stories, reminding me of my own brokenness. During this time, I questioned whether I should leave ministry altogether and do something that was less demanding.

In the fall of 2016, a woman from the church got cancer, applied for Medical Assistance in Dying, and was approved. Her only family was a brother who lived in a different city in Ontario. She asked me what I thought, and I told her that I did not agree, then pointed to Jesus as our model for how to live and die well. She said she respected my opinion, but it was her choice and she was going through with it anyway. She then asked me if I would be there with her when it happened. I wrestled in prayer, pleading with God to change her heart. I spoke with other pastors and the deacons from our church. MAID was so new, no one had thought through how to respond. I asked other pastor's for their advice on how to proceed. They told me to speak with my deacons. My deacons said that I

should be present with her when she died, otherwise she would be alone. I spoke with her brother, who was upset with her decision, and he refused to be a part of it. I felt I had no choice. I prayed with her and read scripture until the doctor came over. The whole thing took about 30 minutes from start to finish. When it was over, the doctor said to me, “Isn’t this a great way to die!” He seemed so proud of himself for helping alleviate her suffering. I was in shock and felt guilty for months. I was too ashamed to tell anyone what I had participated in, and I was deeply concerned that if certain people from LBC found out how she died they might want to do the same thing. And this is exactly what happened the following year. Another member of LBC misheard that I was in support of MAID and asked me to be with her. She had developed a debilitating disease and did not want to live anymore. Again, I told her what I thought, but she would not change her mind. All the guilt and shame came rushing back and I was an emotional wreck during the procedure. It is so easy to end life. I felt like I had become the pastor of death.

During this season, my only prayer was “Help!” Help came through books on spiritual formation and conversations with friends who told me about the doctorate program at Tyndale in Spiritual Formation. I thought about it for a couple of years, and eventually applied. I was accepted in May, 2018. My first residency was a breath of fresh air. Connecting with other students and professors who were eager to grow in their relationship with Christ was exactly what I needed to help sustain me in ministry. I was exposed to a whole new way of being with Christ that started to transform the way I felt about myself, heal from past

wounds, process the trauma of ministry, and engage with people in a healthier way.

In 2018, the issue of human sexuality became one of the predominant topics of discussion with the CBOQ family of churches. Division lines were drawn, and a theological battle began. Because CBOQ is not a governing body, they told individual churches that they would need to decide what to do. The Baptist 'distinctives' promote church autonomy, which places the weight of responsibility of each local church to decide what they believe and how they will execute ministry. This means each congregation can believe and do what they want without being accountable to other churches. Within the convention, there were a number of motions that came forward at our annual gathering that tried to modify this posture by asking each congregation to vote on where they stood on the issue of human sexuality, and whether or not we should raise the bar of accountability. LBC developed a human sexuality committee, of which I was the chair. Our task was to create a statement of faith that would be voted on by the congregation. We met for a year and a half to work on it. We developed teaching material for the congregation. I preached a sermon series on the topic. And we offered multiple opportunities to discuss the issues.

During this time, March 2020, Covid hit, and everything shut down. We did all our services online. I had to figure out how to continue building community and doing ministry online. It was the most stressful experience I have experienced so far in ministry. I was ready to quit every day. Again, division lines were drawn around Covid protocol. Many people from the church did not think it was a big deal and that the government was overextending its control. They



refused to wear masks and socially distance themselves. Everyone else was careful to follow the rules and were worried about getting sick and spreading it to others. I was surprised at how much judgment there was from both sides. People were quick to criticize one another. Old friendships disintegrated. Families were divided. All the while, the leadership team tried to accommodate everyone, and continue to maintain a posture of non-judgment. To keep us united, and when we were permitted, we came up with a way of meeting in person on Sunday mornings, while Zooming others in from their homes. It worked well, but it was a lot of work.

### **A New Start in Ottawa**

Through my studies at Tyndale, I began questioning the Baptist tradition and whether or not it was helping me and my family grow spiritually, what more I could do as the pastor at LBC, and I started wondering if God might be calling us into a new context of ministry. At the beginning of 2021, I was contemplating the question Jesus asked the disciples and Bartimaeus in Mark's Gospel: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10: 36, 51) One Friday in February, in prayer, I was able to articulate an answer. I told Jesus that I wanted to be in a community where I was supported in my role as a pastor and that held together the three streams that I had grown to love: charismatic, evangelical, and sacramental. The next day, Carolyn told me that she had been looking online to see what kinds of positions were out there for her. She started a MDiv at Tyndale in 2019, focused on children and family ministry. She saw a children and family director position available at St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church Ottawa (formerly St. Georges), where the two of us met, and she noticed that they were also looking

for a new curate. I read the job description and they described themselves as a community holding together the three streams found within the Anglican tradition: charismatic, evangelical, sacramental. I sensed this was a direct lead by the Spirit, wrote up a cover letter, and sent my resume with it in less than an hour. The following day, I got a call from the rector, Brent Stiller, and our conversation led to a series of interviews with various leaders from the parish and eventually the bishop. In March, I was offered the position and joyfully accepted it. Carolyn and I told our kids, and they were shocked that we were going to be leaving Lakefield, but excited at the new adventure. The first Sunday of Easter, I announced that we were leaving to the congregation. It was a very difficult thing to do. Even though things were not perfect, I had grown to love the people of LBC and the village, but it was time to go. For the next two weeks, I spent my time handing over my ministry to the deacons, saying goodbye to our friends, and blessing each person from the church.

At my final congregation meeting, there was a vote on whether to adopt the statement of faith that the Human Sexuality Committee had developed, and whether CBOQ should be given permission to hold individual congregations accountable. Both motions were voted down. I was grateful that the Lord had called us out before they voted.

I started my new role as curate at SPP on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. I lived with my parents-in-law, while Carolyn and her father prepared to sell our house in Lakefield. From May to August, I would drive back to Lakefield on Thursday morning, spend time with my family and help renovate the house, then drive back to Ottawa Saturday evening and prepare for Sunday morning. It was a stressful

experience for my family, especially Carolyn who was on her own, trying to run the house in the middle of a construction zone. All our hard work paid off though. We ended up selling our home in Lakefield and buying a new one in the neighbourhood we wanted in Ottawa. Even though it was stressful, moving and starting a new job during a global pandemic, the Lord was gracious and blessed my children with friends, good schools, and extracurricular activities.

In the fall of 2021, Carolyn and I continued to study at Tyndale. I ran a research project with a small group of people from SPP, looking at the connection between the use of imagination in prayer and our relationship with God,

As the curate, my role has been to oversee the youth, young adult's ministry, and Alpha ministries, transitioning from online to in person. Carolyn was hired as the Children's Director in the winter of 2022 and the church is excited by how God is using her to help families re-integrate into the community.

### **Spiritual Direction**

In the fall of 2021, I began the Spiritual Direction Internship at Tyndale University. The Internship was an enriching experience. I learned alongside an amazing group of students and professors. We were given practical tools for ministry, and an extensive amount of information about spiritual formation that I can refer to in years to come. The Internship gave me space to put into practice what I had been learning through the DMin program. Much of what was, primarily in my head, the Spirit impressed upon my heart, and showed me how to develop a rhythm of life incorporating spiritual practices that help me abide in Christ. The experience of receiving and giving spiritual direction has also helped

me become more aware of how people connect with God, in similar and different ways.

The Internship was also challenging. I became aware of how much of my dysfunctional thinking, feeling, and acting, is the result of not trusting God. When I don't trust God, I start trusting other things that pull me toward the darkness. Another challenge I experienced during the Internship, and continue to experience through the practice of spiritual direction, is sorrow and suffering. My natural instinct is to avoid sorrow and suffering. Sorrow and suffering can push us away from Jesus, or they can be effective ways of encouraging us to call out for help. Like we see in Hannah Hurnard's *Hinds' Feet On High Places*. Much-Afraid must take the hand of 'Sorrow' and 'Suffering' and allow them to lead her to the Kingdom of Love. When Much-Afraid let's go of 'Sorrow' and 'Suffering', she wanders into trouble, and before long she is crying out to the Good Shepherd, who always comes to her aid, and he reminds her that the only way to the Kingdom of Love is to let 'Sorrow' and 'Suffering' guide her. As they ascend the mountains, Much-Afraid grows stronger, her heart is transformed, until she is filled with God's love. The experience of God's love compels her to return to her village of fear, where her relatives live in the bondage. The Good Shepherd gives Much-Afraid a new name: 'Grace and Glory.' The name reveals the key to understanding how spiritual formation works: grace and glory. We are transformed by God's grace and glory, and as we share God's grace and glory with others, through our words and deeds, they are encouraged to follow the Good Shepherd. There is a connection between spiritual direction, spiritual formation and mission that I would like to further explore.

What excites me about spiritual direction is that Jesus draws close when we turn to him in our sorrow and suffering. I have seen how the love of Jesus Christ is strong enough to reach down into the depths of our pain. Jesus has the power to save us from everything that would try to keep us bound, if we would call out to him, and trust him. There is a battle taking place within the human heart over what we love. Human behaviour is motivated by love. We find meaning and purpose in what we love. Jesus says, “Where your treasure [your love] is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:17), and out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Hence the need to “guard your heart, above all else, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23). The human predicament is that we settle for lesser loves than the love of God, and we find ourselves moving towards darkness, confusion, disorder, chaos, giving into sin, and death. Spiritual direction happens when a person is directed toward Jesus, who leads us in the way of faith, truth, beauty, and all the fruits of the Spirit. A director and directee are seeking to be with Jesus together. Jesus told his disciples, “seek, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7). What Jesus said happens. When we seek him we find him, and when we find him, we experience his grace, his glory and his love. This is how we are changed (2 Corinthians 3:18).

In Part 1, I reflected on how I have seen the Lord at work throughout my life. The Triune God has formed me into who I am today. As I look back, I see how God planted me in the environment in which I was raised. He used sorrow and suffering to draw me to himself. When I called out to him, he answered me, and brought me to life. He led me out of the anxiety, the chaos and the confusion of my childhood and adolescent years, into the way of peace, order, and truth.

Jesus Christ is my healer, teacher, friend, Lord, Saviour, and the lover of my soul. He is the source and sustainer of my life. He is gently pruning away those dead branches that have been preventing me from bearing the fruit of the Spirit. He is guiding me into spiritual practices that help me 'be' with him. As I learn to be with him: resting, receiving and responding to his presence and his word, I find strength to overcome the darkness, both within and without, and to help others who are struggling to find freedom, wholeness and peace in knowing Jesus Christ.

In part 2, I develop a spiritual formation model that emerges from my theological reflection and experience: as I come to know the Father, through the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, I come to know my true self (know). As I abide in Christ (be) by practicing spiritual disciplines, I find myself participating in the life and ministry of Christ (do).

**PART 2 – SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL: GROWING IN  
INTIMACY WITH THE TRIUNE GOD – KNOW, BE, DO**

## **CHAPTER 5: MATURING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND SELF**

*They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. ~ Isaiah 61:3*

If we want to know who we are, why we are here, how best to live, and where we are going, we need to know who the Living God is, as he has revealed himself to us through his son, Jesus Christ. A Christian is someone who has responded to the call of Christ, “follow me” (Matthew 4:19.) A Christian is someone who follows Jesus into the waters of baptism, which are a symbol of the washing away of the old (false) self. We are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), which is a way of saying immersed in the life of the Triune God. Through faith in Jesus, we are invited to share in his intimate relationship with his Father, by the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed so his disciples could hear, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Knowing God the Father, through faith in Jesus Christ, is possible by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:17). It is the kind of ‘knowing’ that includes every dimension of our being: head, heart, body. From my observations as a pastor and spiritual director, everyone has a unique way of knowing and experiencing God. Some people gravitate to knowing God through their thoughts, others through their emotions, and others through their actions.



The incredible thing is that God, who knows us perfectly well (Psalm 139), desires that we know him, regardless of our age, gender, race, intellectual capacity, physical capability, or emotional sensitivity.

What does knowing God look like? It is the kind of ‘knowing’ that we see in a healthy marriage. A husband and wife live together, they share everything in common, they express their love for one another through physical affection, how they speak to one another, through their actions, and a commitment to go on faithfully caring for one another, so long as they both shall live. Within this relational intimacy, a husband and wife not only know information about one another, they know what the other person is thinking and feeling. They know how the other person will respond in certain situations. They are connected to each other’s hearts in an exclusive, intimate way. St. Paul used the analogy of marriage to speak about the kind of ‘knowing’ that we are invited into in our relationship with Jesus (Ephesians 5:25-32), and it is the kind of ‘knowing’ that we see modeled in Jesus’ relationship with his Father.

In this chapter, we will explore the theological foundations that make knowing God possible. These theological foundations include: Being created in the image of God, the problem of the false self, and God’s response to the false self. It is important that we understand what God has done for us, so that we can respond to his grace, and know ourselves as participating in the life of the Trinity.

### **Created in the Image of God**

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? It means that we have the ability to think and reason (Chandler 2014, 33). We have the ability to create. We have a free will and can make decisions. We have the desire for

transcendence, “Self-transcendence is our ability to move beyond the present, to achieve the “more” that we seek, to keep getting closer to the “there” as in “getting there” in terms of our dreams and aspirations” (Au 2000, 3). We have a conscience:

To be human is to live in a world of form at the border of the world of the formless. It is to experience the power of thought but sense the possibilities of awareness. It is to exist within the realm of appearance and yet have occasional glimpses of presence. It is to know the effort of doing and long for the existence of simply being. As far as we can tell, no other form of being involves the complications and tensions that humans experience as a result of living in these borderland places (Benner 2016, 1).

But the primary way that we reflect the image of God is in our being relational creatures. We were created to be in four relationships. First, we were created to be in a relationship with God. “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). We are physical and spiritual creatures. A mixture of earth and heaven. God formed our bodies from the dust and then breathed his breath, his Spirit into us, and we came alive. God shares his life with us. This means that we cannot live without God. We were created by him, for him. The implication is that human beings are dependent on God. God created us, he knows us, and he alone knows how life works.

Second, we were created to be in a relationship with the earth. God formed *adam* from *adamah*. It is a play on words. Adam, the Earth Man was formed from the earth and therefore is intimately connected to the earth. What are we to do? God said, "Let them rule...over all that I have made" (Genesis 1:26). Our purpose is to care for creation as God's representatives. We are stewards. A steward is

someone who looks after other people's things. We are to take care of what God has made. God said, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). We were designed to flourish and grow. God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant and tree...for food" (Genesis 1:29). In the beginning, the earth freely gave forth its produce and we enjoyed the bounty of God's provision without having to struggle. God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them (Genesis 2:19). It is a picture of man and nature living together in Harmony.

Third, we were created to be in a relationship with others. God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). It is interesting to note that God refers to himself in the plural tense "us". What it tells us is that God is a relational being. He exists within a community of persons who are distinct from one another and yet share in the same life and essence, to the degree that they cannot be separated from one another, and it is out of this relationship that we were created. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). God did not create one gender, he created two genders, and together, men and women, in relationship to God, reflect God's image. God said "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). The only thing in creation that was not good was loneliness. We were created to be known and to know other people in the context of friendship, marriage, family, and in larger communities.

Fourth, we were created to be in a relationship with ourselves - "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." (Genesis 2:25) They were not wearing masks, they had nothing to hide from, they did not feel guilt, because

they had not yet sinned, and they were fully conscious of God's loving presence  
"Naked and feeling no shame" is another way of saying being your true self.

The four-way relational intimacy revealed through Genesis 1-2 is a picture of shalom. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. describes Shalom as:

Universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as God opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be (Plantinga 1995, 10).

This description of shalom is the way things were in the beginning, it is the way things will be in the future, when Jesus returns and makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). Next, we will explore why things are not the way they ought to be at the moment.

### **The False Self**

Things are not the way they ought to be, because humanity was separated from God, in whose image we were created. When God created humanity, he gave us one command: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). Daniel Fuller describes the knowledge of good and evil like this:

To know good and evil signifies the possession of the kind of maturity which frees one from being dependent on someone else for how to act wisely. The command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would thus mean, that Adam and Eve were not to aspire to that maturity possessed by God himself, whereby they might consider themselves to be free from dependence upon him and able to achieve the harmony they now enjoyed by taking matter entirely into their own hands (Johnson 2009, 72).

In Genesis 3, the serpent approached Eve and started asking questions that were designed to confuse her and get her to doubt God's goodness. The more Eve engaged, the more she believed the lie "you will not surely die...for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). By eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve rejected God as God. They were convinced that God was holding back something good from them, and they thought they could judge good and evil on their own. The result was that they became, not more like God, but less than who they were created to be. By giving into temptation to the evil one, the image of God was marred, and the four-fold relational harmony that we were created to live in started to break down. The relationship with God broke down. Adam and Eve heard God walking in the cool of the day and they tried to hide (Genesis 3:8). The relationship with the earth was cursed. The man struggled to get food, "through painful toil you will eat of it, it will produce thorns and thistles...and you will return to the ground since from it you were taken" (Genesis 3:18). The relationship with others started to disintegrate. The man blamed the woman (Genesis 3:12) and a hierarchy was created with the man ruling over the woman (Genesis 3:16). The relationship with self broke down. Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they became conscious of themselves, and they felt ashamed. They tried to hide from God by making clothes out of fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). This is the predicament we are living in today. Without God at the centre of the human heart, indwelling our spirit by his spirit, things don't happen the way they ought. We are broken, and we need healing.

Terry Wardle describes our brokenness in terms of unfulfilled longings. He explains how we were created with core longings that need to be met, in order for us to develop into healthy, mature human beings. Wardle says, we all have a longing for safety, for constant reinforcement of personal worth, a longing to know that we are valued as unique and special, loved and accepted unconditionally, a longing to be cared for and nurtured, a longing to grow and develop our personal gifts and talents, and a longing for fellowship with God (Wardle 2001, 43). James K. Smith links our longings with identity. “Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow. Our wants reverberate from our heart, the epicenter of the human person” (Smith 2016, 2). The problem is that we try to fulfill our core longings in ways that are unhealthy, and this is really the essence of all sinful behaviour. Sin affects how we experience ourselves in relation to God, the earth, others, and ourselves. This state of being is often described throughout scripture as being blind (John 9:39), lost (Luke 19:10), and spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). Robert Mulholland Jr. calls this state of brokenness “the false self.” He says, “When we seek to root our being in something other than God, we are a false self” (Mulholland 2016, 45). He goes on to describe what the false self looks like: fearful, protective, possessive, manipulative, destructive, self-promoting, indulgent, and distinction-making (Mulholland 2016, 30-42). Mulholland’s description of the false self sounds similar to the attributes of living according to the sinful nature we see in places like 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-21. The fruit of living according to the sinful nature is death (Romans 8:6,13) and death in the Bible has to do with separation. Physical death is separation from the

body and the spirit. Spiritual death is separation between the human spirit and the Spirit of God.

### **God's Response to the False Self**

The Good News is that God loves the world, full of broken people, so much so that he sent his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is the true image bearer. The New Testament authors describe him as existing before the creation of the world as “the Word” (John 1:14), he was with God in the beginning, involved in bringing creation into being, (John 1:1-14) and in him all things hold together and are sustained (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3); He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), the fullness of God (Colossians 1:19), the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is also our representative before God. He is described as becoming like us in every way, he is the new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), our high priest able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses and tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he was without sin (Hebrews 5:14-15).

Now, as soon as we start investigating who Jesus is, we are introduced to the one he called Father.

- “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” (Luke 2:48);
- “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27);
- “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28);

- “The Son can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19);
- “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Essentially, when we listen to Jesus and watch what he is doing, we are hearing the Living God speak and seeing the Living God act.

What the Father is and does, Jesus is and does. And what Jesus is and does, the Father is and does. There is in fact no God behind the back of Jesus, no act of God other than the act of Jesus, no God but the God we see and meet in him (Dawson 2010, 8).

In Revelation, the apostle John describes Jesus as the *arche* – the archetype of the new humanity, and the *telos* – the inherent destiny to which humanity is becoming (Revelation 1:8). Jesus is fully God and the whole purpose of him becoming fully human is that humanity would become fully God, like himself. He willingly laid down his life, dying in our place, rescuing us from sin, evil and death. And through faith, we are united to him, and invited to participate in the life of the Trinity now and forever, discovering our true selves as we grow in our relationship with him.

This is where the Holy Spirit comes into the picture. We learn four things about who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does from Jesus in John 14-16. First, The Holy Spirit is a person. Jesus refers to the Spirit as “he” not “it” not to say the Spirit is male, but the Spirit is not a force, the Spirit is personal, just as personal as the Father and the Son and he is referred to in personal terms: He teaches (1 Corinthians 2:13; John 14:26); He speaks (Acts 8:29; 13:2); He convicts of sin (John 16:8); He guides (John 14:6); He makes decisions (Acts 15:28); He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); He can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4); He



searches all things and knows the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11); He gives gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11); He intercedes and teaches us how to pray (Romans 8:26-27); He bears witness that we are adopted children of God (Romans 8:16); He bears witness to Jesus (John 15:26); and He glorifies and magnifies Jesus (John 16:14-15).

Second, Jesus describes the Spirit as “another counsellor” *allon paracleton* (John 14:16) – *allon* means another of the same kind and *paracleton* means someone to come alongside – Jesus is saying that he is the first *paracleton* and the Spirit has come to take his place, to continue his ministry, which is what the book of Acts is all about. And by calling the Holy Spirit another of the same kind, Jesus is implying that the Holy Spirit is distinct from himself. The Spirit is not Jesus and Jesus is not the Spirit, but Jesus and the Spirit cannot be separated from our experience. To receive Jesus is to receive the Spirit. To receive the Spirit is to receive Jesus. All through the New Testament, the person and work of the Spirit are synonymous with the person and work of Jesus. Not only can we not separate the person and work of the Holy Spirit from the person and work of Jesus, we cannot separate him from the person and work of the Father. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are distinct persons, yet they are united together in one being, they are different, yet they share the same purpose, mission and life.

Third, Jesus tells us that the Spirit will be with us forever (John 14:16). As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus could only be in one place at a time, but now, in and through the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ presence is made available to everyone, everywhere, all the time. Michael Green said:

It is the task of the Paraclete to universalize the presence of Jesus. In the days of his flesh Jesus was limited by space and time. His physical departure made possible the coming of the Spirit as Paraclete and there would be no barriers of space and time to prevent disciples being in intimate contact with him (Green 2004, 51).

Fourth, Jesus said “I will ask the Father, and he will give you [*allon paracleton*] to be with you forever...on that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:16, 20). The primary role of the Holy Spirit is to be “in you” (Galatians 2:20, 4:19; Ephesians 1:13-14, 18, 3:14-21; Colossians 1:27) sharing the life of the Father and the Son with us.

Thomas F. Torrance summarizes the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity:

The doctrine of the Trinity is the central dogma of Christian theology, the fundamental grammar of our knowledge of God...the doctrine of the Trinity gives expression to the fact that God has opened himself to us in such a way that we may know him in the inner relations of his Divine Being, and have communion with him in his divine life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit...through Christ...God has established an intimate two-way relation between himself and us and us and himself, making himself accessible to us and giving us entry into the inner fellowship of God’s life...God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself (Torrance 1994, 1).

Jesus Christ rescues us from living a life of separation from God. He is fully God and fully man, the true human, who died on the cross, rose to new life and gave us the Holy Spirit who includes us in the life of God. This is what Paul explains in Romans 6-8. Humanity has died with Christ and been raised to new life with him, “now, by dying to what once bound us [the sinful nature], we have been released from the law [which reveals sin] so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit” (Romans 7:6). Without Christ, we are slaves to sin and the evil one, without hope, cut off from the life of God and living out of the false self. But in

Christ, God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself. David Benner put it like this: “Jesus is the True Self who shows us by his life how to find our self in relation to God. The self we find hidden in Christ is our true self, because Christ is the source of our being and ground of our true identity” (Benner 2004, 84).

We have seen how knowledge of self and knowledge of God are connected. We have been created in God’s image for the purpose of being in an intimate relationship with God. The problem is, without an understanding of who God is and who we are, we develop a false sense of self, this leads to spiritual darkness, despair and death. God the Father rescues us from our predicament , through his Son, Jesus Christ, and invites us to participate in his life, in and through the indwelling presence of the Spirit. We mature in the knowledge of self as we get to know the Triune God, and this double-knowing happens as we abide in Christ.

## **CHAPTER 6: ABIDING IN CHRIST**

*Abide in me and I will abide in you, for apart from me, you can do nothing. ~  
John 15:5*

We have explored how when a person believes in Christ, the Holy Spirit enters their spirit, they become alive to the reality of God's presence (Romans 8:13) and begin participating in the life of the Trinity. In this chapter, we will explain what a life of participating in the Trinity looks like, by defining what spiritual formation is, the experience of abiding in Christ, our role in the spiritual formation process, stages of development, and how we must be intentional in strengthening our faith in Christ through spiritual practices. Spiritual practices help us go on abiding in Christ and growing the knowledge of self and God. I highlight eight spiritual practices. In each one I share some of my insights from my reading and research in the area of spiritual formation, but also from my experience as a pastor and spiritual director.

### **Spiritual Formation**

Spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Let's take a look at each part of this definition.

- *Holy Spirit led* - Jesus explained to his disciples that after he returned to the Father, he would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit, who would: “guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14).
- *Process cf forming* - a process is a series of steps that must be taken in order to achieve a particular goal. The Spirit knows what steps must be taken in order to form us according to the goal God has in mind.
- *Every dimension cf the human self* - When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our human spirit. The human spirit is referred to in the Bible as ‘the heart’, which is the centre of our being. It is out of the overflow of our heart that directs our emotions, affections, thoughts, desires, will and action. As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, every part of our humanity is open to change: emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health, resource stewardship (Chandler 2014, 19).
- *The likeness cf Jesus Christ* is the goal. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). In essence, spiritual formation is learning to live into the reality of our identity as adopted, beloved children of God.

My spiritual formation model is a description of what happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who reforms our entire way of life: the way we

think (know), the way we feel (be), and the way we act (do), until we resemble our older brother Jesus. What follows is an exploration of how we live into this reality.

### **The Experience of Abiding in Christ**

The Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into the likeness of Jesus Christ is an experience of tension between “being” and “becoming”. When I first said “Yes” to Jesus, I expected the kind of immediate results I read about in the New Testament - instant healing, a continuous flow of conversions, inexhaustible energy to serve - but this was not my experience. I thought God was going to use me to change the world, but over time I realized that God was more interested in changing me. God’s ways and his timing are different from ours. I used to think the focus of being a Christian was to get into heaven, now I’m realizing it is more about getting heaven into us. Robert Mulholland Jr. put it like this: we tend to focus on “being in the world for God” but the call is “being in God for the world” (Mulholland 2016, Kindle Location 435). In Christ, we are invited to ‘be’ with the Father, by the indwelling presence of the Spirit, and as we are with him, the rest of life flows out of our relationship with him, like streams of living water (John 7:38).

The analogy Jesus uses to describe this process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ our true selves in him, is that of branches abiding in a vine. He says “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1-3). “True vine” implies that there are other vines, false vines. When we attach ourselves to these false vines, they feed the false self.

When we are connected to the “True vine”, we become our true selves. Jesus is the “True vine”, those who believe in him are like branches. The role of a branch is to abide in the vine, if the branch is not in the vine, the nutrients from the vine cannot be shared, and the branch will eventually wither and die. Jesus describes his Father as the gardener, “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit” (John 15:2). I used to be terrified of this verse, until I realized that the verb “cut off” can also mean “take up”, and after reading a book by Bruce Wilkinson, where he interviewed a vinedresser about how to run a vineyard. The vinedresser told Bruce,

New branches have a tendency to trail down and grow along the ground...But they don't bear fruit down there. When branches grow along the ground, the leaves get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless.” So Bruce asked, “What do you do? Cut it off and throw it away?” The vinedresser replied, “Oh no! The branch is much too valuable for that [the branch is much too valuable to be cut off]. We go through the vineyard with a bucket of water looking for those branches, we lift them up and wash them off...Then we wrap them around the trellis and tie them up. Pretty soon they're thriving (Wilkinson 2001, 34-35).

I believe this is the heart of the Father. He is actively looking for branches in the vine, in the mud, and when he finds them, he lifts them up, washes them off and ties them up so that they would have a chance to bear fruit. And the Father prunes branches that are already bearing fruit so that they will be “even more fruitful.” Pruning is painful. Jesus underwent pruning, “although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”

(Matthew 16:24). Being in Christ is a struggle. It was a struggle for Israel (the name Israel means ‘he who struggles with God’), it was a struggle for the disciples, it has been a struggle for the church over the past two-thousand years, and it is a struggle for believers today. As I look back on my journey with Christ, it was a struggle coming to faith and it has been a struggle ever since. The New Testament authors use the Greek word *thlipsis* to describe this experience: “I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering [*thlipsis*] and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus...” (Revelation 1:9). *Thlipsis* literally means compression or crushing pressure. *Thlipsis* is what Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane as he struggled to accept His Father’s will and then just before he went to the cross, he told his disciples: “in this world you will have trouble [*thlipsis*], but take heart, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Wilkie Au explains that in order for us to grow, we need to accept that *thlipsis* is all part of the package:

Christian faith does not deny the reality of pain and death. Instead, it offers images of hope to help us cope with these harsh realities of life: a crushed grain of wheat bearing rich fruit (John 12:24), the restored life of a Lazarus stepping forth from the tomb after days of waiting on the faithfulness of a friend (John 11:1-44), and a risen Jesus having breakfast with his friends in a lakeside reunion and reconciliation (John 21:9-14) (Au 2000, 16).

The Father wants to see fruitless branches bearing fruit and fruitful branches bearing even more fruit and the way we grow happens by pruning (*thlipsis*). Jesus says “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a person abides in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”



(John 15:5). This is how Jesus describes the experience of the Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into this likeness.

### **Our Role in the Spiritual Formation Process**

The question is what part do we play in the process? Dallas Willard explains “we must have and must implement the appropriate vision [V], intention [I] and means [M]. Not just any path we take will do. If this VIM pattern is not put in place properly and held there, Christ simply will not be formed in us” (Willard 2002, 85).

**Vision:** The vision Willard has in mind is a vision of the kingdom of God. Jesus came announcing the gospel of the Kingdom: “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Then Jesus taught what living in the kingdom looked like in Matthew 5-7. The Kingdom of God happens whenever someone comes to believe in King Jesus and puts into practice what he says.

**Intention:** Willard refers to our being intentional in doing what Jesus says.

“The problem of spiritual transformation among those who identify themselves as Christians today is not that it is impossible or that effectual means to it are not available. The problem is that it is not intended. People do not see it and its value and decide to carry through with it. They did not decide to do the things Jesus did and said” (Willard 2002, 91).

**Means:** The means for doing what Jesus said is grace and effort.

Willard says,

We have been taught that grace means “you can do nothing to be saved.” Such thinking has been extended to “you can do nothing to have spiritual growth.” So spiritual transformation occurs, according to this thinking, in one of two ways – inspiration or information.

Inspiration means that in one golden moment, one great experience, you will be transformed. I don't want to criticize experience. I have had many wonderful experiences with God, but they don't transform you. The other view, information, is the means whereby you pour truth into your head and suddenly you are transformed. Inspiration isn't going to do it and information isn't going to do it. The only way human character is transformed with grace is by discipline and activity (Willard 1993).

Willard also makes an important observation about growing in grace,

To "grow in grace" means to utilize more and more grace to live by, until everything we do is assisted by grace. Then, whatever we do in word or deed will all be done in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). The greatest saints are not those who need less grace, but those who consume the most grace, who indeed are most in need of grace – those who are saturated by grace in every dimension of their being (Willard 2002, 93-94).

I agree with Willard, our role in the spiritual formation process is to hold within our hearts and minds the vision of God's kingdom: Jesus is Lord and he is recreating us by his powerful word. We must be intentional in putting into practice what Jesus says, and we must rely on God's grace to empower us.

### **Stages of Development**

Evelyn Underhill, in her book *Mysticism*, organized the traditional Christian understanding of spiritual formation into five stages: awakening, purgation, illumination, the dark night of the soul and union (Underhill 2020).

Commenting on these five stages, Mulholland says,

God calls us out of that unlikeness (awakening) and moves us to an increasing relinquishment of that unlikeness (purgation); this leads to a new structure of being and doing (illumination) and eventually culminates in Christlikeness of spirit and behaviour at that particular point of our life (union) (Mulholland 1993, 80).

Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich have organized the process of becoming like Christ into six stages that have been popularized in the

contemporary writing of Peter Scazzero's *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* curriculum. Here is how Scazzero summarizes Hagberg and Guelich's work:

**Stage 1** – Life Changing Awareness of God – this is the beginning of our journey with Christ as we become aware of who he is.

**Stage 2** – Discipleship Learning – about God and what it means to be a follower of Christ. We become a part of a Christian community and begin to get rooted in the disciplines of the faith

**Stage 3** – The Active Life – serving – the doing stage – we get involved, actively working for God, serving him and his people. We take responsibility by bringing our unique talents and gifts to serve Christ and others.

**Stage 4** – The Wall and the Journey Inward – the wall and the inward journey are connected. The wall compels us to journey inward. Sometimes the inner journey leads us to the wall.

**Stage 5** – Journey outward (from my inner life) – having passed through the crisis of faith and the intense inner journey necessary to go through the wall, we begin once again to move outward to 'do' for God, but now we give out of a new, grounded center of ourselves in God. We have rediscovered God's profound, deep, accepting love for us. A deep inner stillness now begins to characterize our life and work for God.

**Stage 6** – Transformed into love – God continually sends events, circumstances, people, and even books into our lives to keep us moving forward on our journey. He is determined to complete the work he began in us, whether we like it or not. His goal is to perfect us in love, that

Christ's love becomes our love both toward God and others (Scazzero 2006, 118-120).

What is the wall? It is what St. John of the Cross described as “the dark night of the soul”, the purgative way, or what Ignatius of Loyola calls “desolations” – the feeling that God is absent. Hagberg and Guelich describe the wall as representing:

The place where another layer of transformation occurs and a renewed life of faith begins for those who feel called and have the courage to move into it. The Wall represents our will meeting God's will face to face. We decide anew whether we are willing to surrender and let God direct our lives (Hagberg and Guelich 2005, 114).

Scazzero explains it as an experience

That turns our world upside down... We question ourselves, God, the church. We discover for the first time that our faith does not appear to “work.” We have more questions than answers as the very foundation of our faith feels like it is on the line. We don't know where God is, what he is doing, where he is going, how he is getting us there, or when this will be over (Scazzero 2006, 121).

The purpose of the wall is to purge our affections and passions that we might delight in God and enter into a richer, fuller communion with him (Scazzero 2006, 123). It is important to note that the wall is crucial for our spiritual growth. At some point along the spiritual journey a person will get stuck. How we respond to the wall will affect our progress in the spiritual life. Gordon T. Smith explains the reason why God allows us to experience the wall is to wean us off our desire for self-gratification (Smith 2003, 172); to purify our faith and our love for God and neighbour (Smith 2003, 173); and to teach us how to distinguish between God (the Giver) and his gifts (Smith 2003, 175). Smith then explains how we should respond to the experience of the wall: First, keep to a regular routine of prayer and

meditation without the same expectations or longing for emotional gratification (Smith 2003, 180). Second, expect to lose interest in holy spaces (prayer closet, sanctuary, etc.) and images that help you pray (Smith 2003, 180). Third, learn to just “be”, “when our minds are tranquil and our attention is lovingly focused on Christ, what is happening is that incrementally we are drawn up into the love of Christ and increasingly transformed into his image. It is not something over which we have control; it is, rather, something to which we graciously submit” (Smith 2003, 181).

### **Spiritual Practices that Help Us Abide**

Spiritual practices are the things we do to create space for the Triune God to work in us. Richard Foster describes the purpose of the spiritual practice like this:

A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the grain to grow. He puts the seed in the ground where the natural forces take over and up comes the grain. That is the way of the Spiritual Disciplines – they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. The Disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where He can work transforming us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done (Foster 1998, 7).

There are different ways of organizing the spiritual disciplines. Foster organizes them into three movements: Inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), Outward (simplicity, solitude, submission, service) and Corporate (confession, worship, guidance, celebration) (Foster 1998). In Ahlberg Calhoun’s comprehensive work, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, she organizes the disciplines into seven areas of the spiritual life: Worship, Open Myself To God, Relinquish The False Self, Share My Life With

Others, Hear God's Word, Incarnate The Love Of Christ, Pray (Ahlberg Calhoun 2015). In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard organizes them into disciplines of abstinence (silence, solitude, fasting, etc.) and disciplines of engagement (worship, study, service, etc.) He says:

“The disciplines of abstinence must be counterbalanced and supplemented by disciplines of engagement. Abstinence and engagement are the outbreathing and inbreathing of our spiritual lives, and we require disciplines for both movements” (Willard 1991, 175).

The question is how do we choose which disciplines to exercise? There are a number of factors that come into play. First, we need to be aware of how we are tempted. Willard says “roughly speaking the disciplines of abstinence counteract tendencies to sin of commission, and the disciplines of engagement counteract tendencies to sins of omission” (Willard 1991, 175-176). Second, we need to be aware of how we connect with God. Gary Thomas created an assessment tool that helps us discover our unique pathways to God. He identifies nine common pathways: Naturalist, Sensate, Traditionalist, Ascetic, Activist, Caregiver, Enthusiast, Intellectual, Contemplative (Thomas, 1996). Enneagram and Myers-Briggs are also helpful personality assessment tools for getting to know oneself. Third, we need to be aware of our own unique situation in life. The way a mother of infant children exercises her spirituality is going to look a lot different when she is an empty nester or newly retired or a grandmother. Eugene Peterson explains:

Any attempt to cultivate a spirituality copied from something grown on someone else's soil is as misguided as planting orange groves in Minnesota. Careful and detailed attention must be given to the conditions, inner and outer, historical and current, in which I, not you, exist. Nothing comes to grief more swiftly than an imitative

spiritual that disregards conditions. Spirituality cannot not be imposed, it must be grown (Peterson 1992, 109).

The spiritual disciplines are ‘tools’ that should only be used “according to what the plant and soil need” (Peterson 1992, 109) but, Peterson adds, there are three disciplines that we need to be doing regularly in order for the seeds (the Word of God) to be planted in good soil (hearts open to God) and they are: Common Worship, Daily Psalms and Recollected Prayer.

Common Worship anchors our spirituality in revelation, community and service...Recollected Prayer extends and disseminates our praying life into all the details of our dailiness...The Psalms, centered between Worship and Recollection, are the set place where we habitually go over the ground and vocabulary and rhythms of prayer, immersing ourselves in the centuries-layered praying community, becoming companions with these friends who prayed and pray. Worship and Recollection need the replenishment of regular feeding and the Psalms provide it (Peterson 1992, 106).

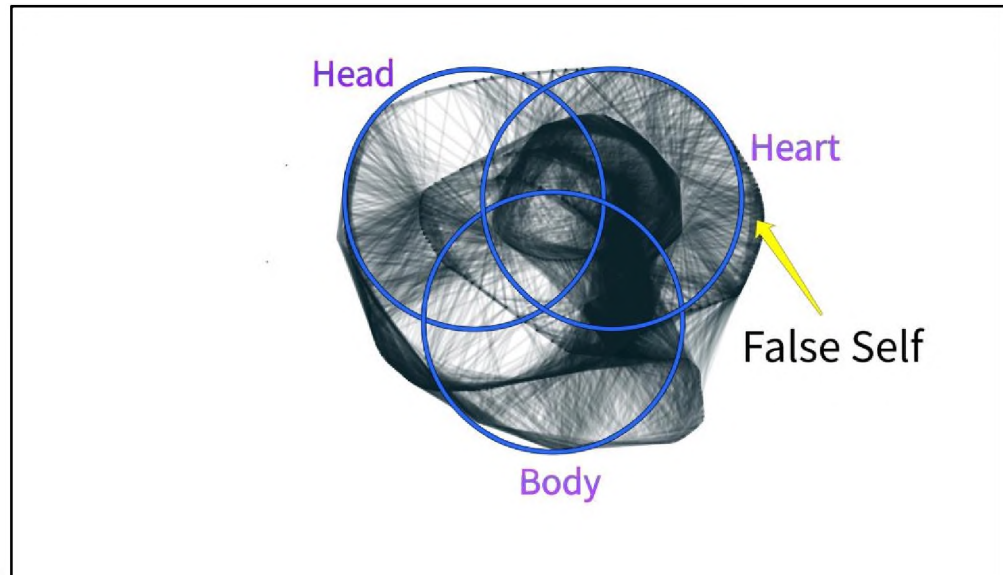
Another important element to Spiritual Formation is exploration.

Psychologist James Marcia applied Erik Erikson’s theory of personality development to the study of identity formation in American college students. He found that a major factor in identity development is the freedom to explore by actively questioning and testing alternative beliefs and lifestyles (Marcia 1966). This is true for us psychologically and spiritually. In order to grow in our true identity in Christ, we need to have the freedom to explore various ways of connecting with God.

Below are three diagrams to help illustrate the purpose of spiritual practices in the spiritual formation process. In Figure 1, the three blue rings represent the three main dimensions to our being: head, heart and body. All three dimensions are united together and interact with each other. The dark scribble

lines represent the false self. The false self is our default way of being in the world, in which we orient our lives around ourselves and created things, rather than the Creator. When we live independent of God, we are in a state of spiritual darkness that distorts how we feel, the way we think, and what we do.

*Figure 1. The False Self*



In Figure 2, the straight line running through the page represents faith in Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, who gives us access to the Father. I use a straight, continuous, unbroken line to reflect the way of the Lord, which is depreciated throughout scripture as: straight (Proverbs 3:6, Isaiah 40:3), narrow (Matthew 7:14), perfect (Psalm 18:30), eternal (Jeremiah 6:16), and indestructible (Romans 8:38-39). Spiritual practices allow us space to exercise our faith, so we can “be” with the Triune God. As we are with him, he works in us according to his will, and brings our inner and outer worlds into alignment with his kingdom.



Figure 2. How Spiritual Practices Impact Spiritual Formation

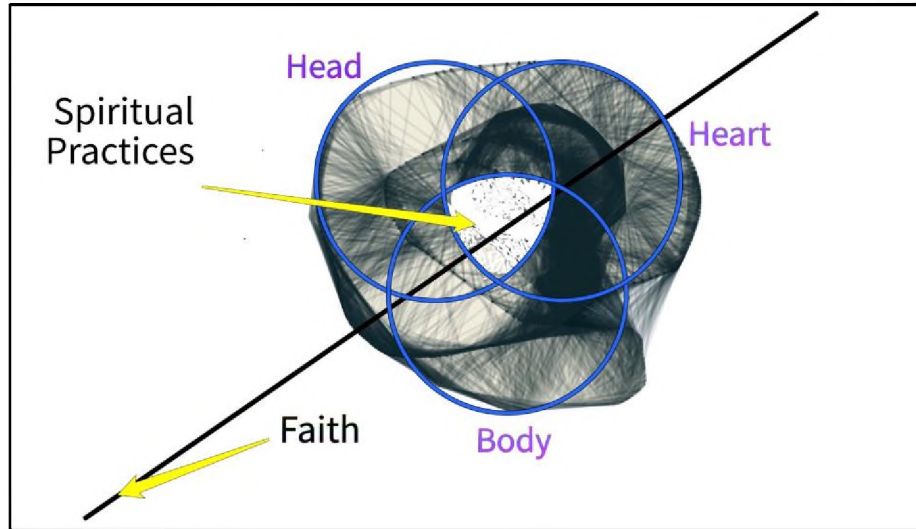
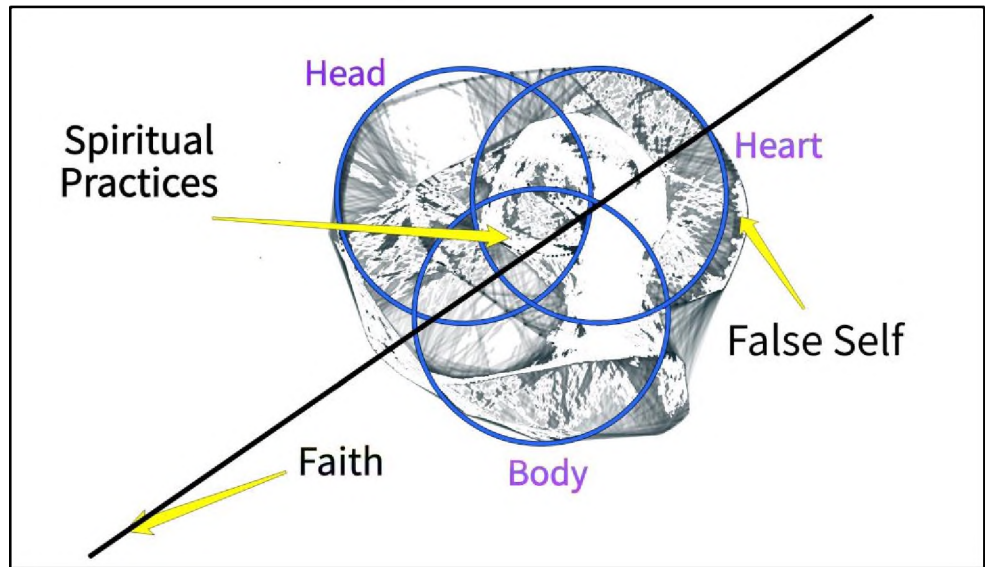


Figure 3 illustrates what happens as we continue to cultivate space to be with God. As we rest, receive and respond to the Holy Spirit, over time, he forms every dimension of our lives to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. He transforms how we think (head), what we love (heart), and what we do (body), until we are full of his light, and the true self emerges.

Figure 3. The Effects of Ongoing Spiritual Practice.



What follows is a description of eight spiritual practices that have helped me abide in Christ, and grow in my knowledge of God and self. .

### **Silence and Solitude**

Silence helps us become more aware of how we use our words – we can use our words to try to control our environments. We can use our words to try and manipulate others. We can use our words to criticize and judge and hurt. Silence teaches us to listen. We were given two ears and one mouth, so that we would listen twice as much as we speak. I wonder if most of us speak twice as much as we listen. Silence also forces us to look honestly at ourselves. It forces us to listen to our lives. And quite often we see things about ourselves that we don't want to admit are there. Henri Nouwen describes silence as “the furnace of transformation...It is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self” (Nouwen 1981, 27). Ultimately, silence is where we learn to hear God's voice. Like Elijah did, when he was running away from Jezebel, he fled to a mountain and the Lord spoke to Elijah not in the earthquake, or the wind, or the fire, but in the sound of sheer silence. Or Samuel in the temple, alone at night, in between waking and sleeping, The Lord called Him by name. All throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus going off by himself to be alone with His Heavenly Father Why? Because silence is where we meet God. When we are silent and still within. We become more aware of God's Voice. When a jar of river water sits still, eventually the law of gravity causes the sediment to settle to the bottom and the water becomes clear. You don't need to do anything to cause the sediment to settle. The same is true

with us. When we sit still in God's presence. The sediment swirling in our souls begins to settle. Silence helps us to simply be with God. Mother Teresa said, "We all must take the time to be silent and to contemplate. I always begin prayer in silence, for it is in silence that God speaks. God is a friend of silence. We need to listen to God because it's not what we say but what He says to us and through us that matters" (Teresa 1995, 7-8).

### **Imaginative Prayer**

Imaginative prayer is the process of entering into a safe space with the Triune God, allowing Him to heal our deepest pain, by meeting our deepest needs with His presence. One form of imaginative prayer is called "Safe Place Prayer". Safe Place Prayer is a way of allowing the Holy Spirit to use your imagination in order to meet with God. Greg Boyd explains:

God created us with image-making brains with the capacity of interacting with him, ourselves, others and the world around us. The human brain is by far the most amazing, complex, and mysterious aspect of the physical world. When our imaginative representations communicate truth to us, when they correspond to the way things actually are, and when they evoke appropriate feelings to motivate us to behave in effective ways, the imagination is our great ally. When our representations of spiritual matters are vivid and correspond with reality, we are able to experience the things of God as real and are transformed by this experience (Boyd 2004, 76).

It is seeing Jesus that transforms us.

As we see his glory, we are transformed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another – this is, in essence, how the fruit of the Spirit is produced in our lives. When we cease from striving in our own effort and yield to the Holy Spirit, and when our faith ceases to be merely intellectual and rather becomes experiential and concrete, our lives begin to reflect Christ's image. As we behold the glory of the Lord, we're transformed into that glory. It is what we see, not how hard we strive, that determines what we become (Boyd 2004, 87).

What are we to do? Nothing, Boyd would say, simply “be” with him in the space he leads you into within your imagination.

The only goal of this time is for you to just be you, with all your imperfections, and to let Christ just be Christ in all his perfection. It is a time to just rest in truth: the truth of who you are and the truth of who God is. And both are found in Jesus, who is fully God and fully human (Boyd 2004, 105).

### **Lectio Divina – Meditating on Scripture**

Is a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow dwelling with the text. We can speak of it as containing four ways of being with the text. These are not steps; though they form a logical order, they may happen in any order or simultaneously (Wilhoit and Evans 2012, 18).

The four ways of being with the text are: 1. Lectio (reading) – slowly, attentively, listen to the passage being read. 2. Meditatio (meditation) – listen to the passage again, this time you are letting the Spirit lead you to what he wants you to focus on, it could be just a single word or a phrase, and as you wait in silence, savor what you are hearing, repeat it back to yourself. 3. Oratio (prayer) - listen to the passage again, but this time you are listening for how the Spirit is calling you to respond. What is he asking you to let go of or take up? What is he calling you to do or become? 4. Contemplatio (contemplation) - final reading, simply rest in God’s presence and let what He has said to you soak into you and become a part of your thinking, feeling, being. In *Healing Care Healing Prayer*, Terry Wardle shares his vision of ministry:

It is a process of growing closer to Jesus Christ and being transformed into His likeness. This is a life-long pilgrimage, measured not by how much knowledge a person has or how well he behaves. It prioritizes knowing and reflecting Jesus. Information serves to help a person progress toward His embrace, and as such is useful and

important. But information is never the goal. Jesus is the goal, and movement toward Him is the standard of personal health and growth (Wardle 2001, 28.)

The emphasis is to move beyond head knowledge to heart knowledge, beyond ideas to encounter, beyond reading scripture to experiencing Christ the author of scripture (Wardle 2001, 28-35).

### **Sabbath**

Why is the observation of the Sabbath a command? In the creation story we are told that on days 1, 2, and 3, God brings form and structure out of chaos, he sets boundaries and division lines. On day 1 he separates the day from the night; day 2 he separates the sea from the sky; and day 3 he separates the sea from the land. Then God fills the boundaries with life. On day 4 he fills the day with the sun and the night with the moon and stars; day 5 he fills the sky with birds and the sea with fish; day 6 he fills the land with animals and the crown of his creation: humanity – male and female – made in his image. On day 7 we see the same pattern of separation and filling. On day 7, God separates the day from all the other days. He stops and rests from all his work of creating and blesses the Sabbath day and makes it holy. What does he fill the Sabbath day with? Answer: Himself. God's blessing infers presence (Genesis 12:3; Exodus 33:14; Numbers 6:24-26). On the Sabbath, God stops, rests, blesses, and makes holy – God enters the purpose for which he created creation. He is settling in to delight in the goodness of what he has made. In 6 days, God builds a house and on day 7 he moves in. How does this relate to us? Well after each of the six days the author ends with “and there was evening and morning” (Genesis 1:5; 8; 13; 19; 23; 31). It is a way of showing the completeness of God's work. But there is no “and there

was evening and morning” on day seven. Why? Because day seven is still open! The Sabbath day is the space where God is waiting for us. The good news is that now, through Jesus Christ, we are able to enter into God’s rest. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8). “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). God commands us to observe Sabbath because he is there waiting for us. Jesus is the way in. He invites us to take his yoke upon us. His yoke is his relationship with his Father. As we relate to Jesus we experience rest – the purpose for which we have been created. “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me...take my yoke upon you and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:27-30). Allender emphasizes the need to take Sabbath seriously by saying:

It is, nevertheless, wrong to violate the Sabbath. We are to sanctify the day and keep it holy. God commands us to obey him because he is our Creator, and he has authority to set the parameters of how we will live in his creation. If we violate his normative structure, there will be consequences that spiral through all dimensions of life” (Allender 2009, 7).

Reading this convinced me of how important the Sabbath is and the need to make it a priority. The Sabbath is not optional (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). He commands us to observe the Sabbath because he knows that we need him and his desire is that we experience shalom. God created the Sabbath for us to be with him. There are three main components

to observing the Sabbath: Anticipation - to anticipate something is to look forward to it. Allender explains how the Jewish people refer to the Sabbath as the “queen.” “The word sanctify has the meaning of betrothal. We are betrothed to the “queen” of our hearts, and we are to prepare our homes for her arrival. We are to welcome her and to anticipate her arrival as the fulfillment of our deepest yearning” (Allender 2009, 59). Preparation – prepare to stop. Delight - “Sabbath is the way we celebrate our union with God, the abundance of his love, and the wild hope of the coming kingdom” (Allender 2009, 28).

### **Centering Prayer**

In *The Sacred Way*, Tony Jones speaks of two types of meditation: Apophatic or nondiscursive meditation and Cataphatic or discursive meditation also called guided meditation. Apophatic or non discursive meditation is a way of emptying one’s mind. Jones mentions two variations to the apophatic method. In the first apophatic method no words are used. This method of prayer was first developed by the Desert Fathers. John Cassian brought it into the Western church. St. John of the Cross and the author of *the Cloud cf Unknowing* taught their students how to practice it (Jones 2005, 80). The goal of apophatic prayer is to be silent and to still one’s mind before the Lord without using words. The second apophatic method, known as ‘Holy Word Meditation’, emerged out of the same tradition by a Benedictine monk named John Main. The difference between these two methods is that Main uses a single word or phrase, rather than no words at all. Main recommends using the Aramaic word “ma-ra-na-tha” (Come, Lord Jesus), repeated internally, stressing the syllables in four equal lengths, for a set amount

of time, morning and evening. John Main, in his book *Word Into Silence*, describes the goal of Christian meditation as follows:

The all-important aim in Christian meditation is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality in our lives; to let it become that reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are (Main 2006, Kindle Locations 258-262).

Discursive or guided meditation is a way of engaging with Scripture and hearing the Lord speak. There are variations of this method, but the Ignatius method has been the most influential in developing a technique, which he describes in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

Ignatius encourages his readers to choose a story from the Gospels, enter into the story using the five senses, with the goal of having a conversation with Jesus, apophatic meditation can be controversial in some Christian circles because it resembles eastern spiritual practices. Jones defends the apophatic way by saying: "the goal of Buddhist meditation is to completely empty the self, the Christian purpose for this emptying is to be filled with the love of God" (Jones 2005, 81). Jones acknowledges that there have been distortions of Christian meditation historically, so he stresses the importance of focusing on Jesus Christ and acknowledges that it is the Holy Spirit who is in control of whatever desolations or consolations we may experience. Jones then explains that the fruit of Christian meditation must always be "love of God and love of neighbor" (Jones 2005, 82).

### **The Daily Office**

In *Praying with the Church*, Scot McKnight describes how he was on pilgrimage in Italy and went searching for a chapel called *Portiuncola* that had



been refurbished by Francis of Assisi. He discovered *Portiuncola* inside St. Mary of the Angels Basilica. For McKnight, *Portiuncola* represents our spontaneous-petitionary prayers; the basilica represents our praying the daily office. McKnight says:

Prayer is both small and private and quiet and all alone (like the *Portiuncola*), and prayer is public and verbal and with others and in the open (like the basilica). Prayer is both private and public, both personal and communal. We may seek individual prayer, but the individual needs to be encompassed by the Church in prayer. We need both the personal and the communal – both are good; both are spiritually formative...as Christians, we are invited to pray both alone in the church (in our own *Portiuncola*) and together with the Church (in the basilica). We are invited to let our personal prayers be engulfed and enlarged by the prayers of the Church. We are invited to pray both in the church and with the Church (McKnight 2006, 10).

As Moses led Israel through the wilderness God gave them a rhythm to help them live in his presence. God provided food for them in the morning that would sustain them throughout the day, the Sabbath – six days of work and one day of rest to enjoy the good gifts that God had provided, and a liturgical calendar as a way of remembering and celebrating all that God had done in the past: Passover, Tabernacles, Purim, etc. The psalmist speaks of a daily rhythm of prayer that he followed: “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws” (Psalm 119:164). Daniel prayed three times a day giving thanks to God (Daniel 6:10).

Ahlberg Calhoun says,

Jesus learned to pray in the traditional Hebrew way. In the morning he prayed the Shema: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4) as well as a series of blessings known as the *tephilla*. In the afternoon the *tephilla* was prayed again. Evening prayer was identical to morning prayer but included private petitions (Ahlberg Calhoun 2005, 224).

Jesus had set times of prayer: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark,

Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). We know this was his rhythm because his disciples knew where to find him. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he focused on the importance of “daily bread” referring to physical and spiritual bread – “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Luke 4:3). Calhoun explains how “it was a devout Jew’s habit to go to the temple at the sixth and ninth hour (noon and three o’clock)” (Calhoun 2005, 224). After Jesus left his disciples, they continued to pray at set times. Luke tells us the pre-Pentecost church “joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14). The post-Pentecost church devoted themselves to “the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Luke uses the definite article implying established times of prayer. Peter and John went to pray in the temple at three in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). We know that the content of prayer in the early church included praying the psalms (Acts 4:23-26). Cornelius (a god-fearing centurion soldier) had a vision while praying at three in the afternoon (Acts 10:3). Peter prayed and had a vision at noon (Acts 10:9). These examples show how fixed-hour prayer was an established rhythm in the devotional life of Israel and the early church.

The purpose of the daily office is to bring us into a deeper relationship with the Triune God. I believe this because this is the purpose of the scripture (John 5:39) and prayer (Matthew 11:25-30), I believe this because of the testimony of the saints over the past two-thousand years and I believe it because this has been my experience. Every time I enter into the daily office with an open heart and mind, I hear the Risen Christ speaking to me. The challenge is that I don’t always make it a priority. I have been a Christian for eighteen years and a

full-time pastor for eight years. I am committed to teaching and preaching God's Word exegetically. I believe in the power of God's word to transform lives. I get to watch it happen Sunday after Sunday. I come to the Word regularly to hear what God is saying for others, but for some reason, even though I know the joy and the life available to me by God's grace, I wrestle with being intentional and setting apart specific times throughout the day to be with God.

Smith talks about the need to persevere in prayer even when we don't feel like it. He offers a helpful warning:

Some...respond to spiritual dryness by neglecting their prayers, because they do not seem as useful or meaningful as they once were. Such people wonder what the value would be in sustaining these prayers. And so they fill up their time with activity that gratifies them in a different way but is a poor substitute for the transforming presence of Christ (Smith 2003, 180).

Here are some of the benefits to praying the daily office: A growing awareness that I am participating in the spiritual life of the universal Church – the communion of the saints – the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1-3). The daily office is a way for the church to live into Jesus' prayer "may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (John 17:23). The daily office is a corporate experience even though it can be prayed in solitude. Together we are praying with believers "who are praying in heaven now and on earth below, saints who have gone before us and who will follow us" (McKnight 2006, Kindle Locations 225-229).

Another benefit to participating in the daily office is that I am constantly reminded that I am not in control. I am choosing to live under the authority of the church, rather than living under my own authority. Without a reading

plan, I would naturally gravitate to reading only the passages of Scripture that I like and praying spontaneously. The beautiful thing is that as I participate in the daily office, not only am I being exposed to a broader, fuller reading of Scripture, but I am learning to pray in a broader, fuller way. Also, by participating in the daily office I am learning to be more conscientious of the time. I only have a certain amount of time each day. How we use our time reveals what we believe is important. I like the way Annie Dillard said it:

How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour and that one is what we are doing. A schedule defends us from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time (Dillard 1989, 32).

### **Fellowship**

Is experiencing the Triune God together. St. John says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). John goes on to explain what it looks like to be in fellowship with the Father, and the Son, as children of God. Children of God do what God the Father commands, they “believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and [they] love one another as he commanded us. The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:23-24). Christian fellowship is synonymous with being a part of God’s family. It looks like believing in Jesus, loving one another, and being led by the Spirit, together. Faith in Jesus Christ is both personal and communal. We must decide how we will respond to Jesus Christ and all that he

has done on our behalf, but then we are drawn into the community of believers.

In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's underlying presupposition is: "Christ existing as community" (Bonhoeffer 1996, 132). The incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended, ever-present Lord Jesus, shares His life with those who have been called by Him through the Word of God, the Sacraments and other believers. Therefore, according to Bonhoeffer, the goal for each believer is to grow in relationship to Jesus, the mediator between God the Father and each other; to see other believers as a gift, and to be thankful for what we have rather than what we don't have. He warns of the dangers of trying to make Christian community into something it was never intended to be: "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." (Bonhoeffer 1996, 38.) Bonhoeffer then contrasts between a community that is Christ-centered, which he calls a "spiritual reality" or a "spiritual community", with a community that is self-centered, which he calls a "psychic reality" or an "emotional community" (Bonhoeffer 1996, 38-39).

Those who want more than what Christ has established between us do not want Christian community. They are looking for some extraordinary experiences of community ... precisely at this point Christian community is most often threatened (Bonhoeffer 1996, 34).

Charles Ringma adds to this:

The Church should celebrate the actual experience of life of its members, not some idealized and sanitised version of it. Since the people are the church, it is their journey of life and faith in the light of Scripture that should be central (Ringma 1994, 58).

Authentic Christian fellowship happens when there is space for the people of God to receive, remember, respond, and relate, when Christ is central,

and when the people of God are able to be their true selves with one another.

What spiritual disciplines must the Christian community exercise together in order to cultivate this kind of Spirit-filled environment? Before the risen Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be his witnesses all across the known world (Acts 1:8). The disciples did what Jesus said. They waited in an upper room, somewhere in downtown Jerusalem, and when the Holy Spirit showed up in power, they were included in the life of the Triune God, and they were empowered to participate in Jesus' ongoing ministry. Luke gives us a picture of the Spirit-filled church in Acts 2:42-47. We see four components to life together in the early church that can be applied to the church today.

First, they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. Luke tells us that about three thousand people were added to their number on the day of Pentecost. After coming to faith, new disciples did not go off by themselves, claiming they needed no other teacher but the Holy Spirit, or denying God's sovereign gift of teachers, but rather they sat at the apostle's feet, hungry to receive instruction as the Word of God was opened to them. The apostles had been with Jesus from the beginning of His earthly ministry. They adopted his teaching in full. Jesus did not leave behind a book or any documentation, but rather he left behind a community of men and women who remembered his teaching, and lived out what He said, and recorded it for future generations. The early church was a learning church.

Second, they devoted themselves to the fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. It means to share something in common. The church is a community of unique individuals, each person has different gifts and talents, strengths and weaknesses, but corporately we share two things in common. First, we share in the experience of The Triune God together (1 John 1:1-4). Second, we share out the experience of God together. *Koinonia* has to do with what we give just as much as what we receive. The word ‘generous’ in Greek comes from the same root word as *koinonia*. In verse 44, Luke says “All the believers were together and had everything in common (*koina*) selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” This was not a ban on private property. Even in our passage, some of the disciples still owned homes for them to meet in. Jesus may call some people to a life of voluntary poverty, like he did with the rich young ruler, but that is not the norm. However, every Christian is called to a life of generosity. The apostle John wrote: “If we have material possessions and see a brother or sister in need, but do not share what we have with them, how can we claim that God’s love dwells in us?” (1 John 3:17). In Wilkie Au’s *Enduring Heart*, he describes the importance of generosity as follows:

Reaching out to those in need gives us dignity and purpose. It taps into our human need to be generative, that is, to bear fruit for others, especially those of the upcoming generation. In this way, generosity enriches our own life and sustains our vitality (Au 2000, 155).

Third, they devoted themselves to worship. The early church devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread...and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for each other, but in meeting

together regularly to worship. “The breaking of bread” could be a reference to eating a meal together, but more likely it is a reference to celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is the centerpiece of Christian worship, for it is in the bread and wine, symbolizing the body and blood of our Lord, that we participate in the life of the Triune God and are reminded of our true self within the Body of Christ. “The Prayers” is a reference to set times of prayer, which we’ve discussed above in The Daily Office.

### **Spiritual Direction**

In *Forming the Leaders Soul*, Morris Dirks defines spiritual direction as: “an attempt to listen to another person for the purpose of helping that individual recognize and discern God’s movement in his or her life...spiritual direction is primarily focused on the directee’s experience and not on ideas or speculative theology. The purpose of direction is to foster a more personal or intimate union with God” (Dirks 2013, 30). In chapter 4, Dirks builds a biblical theology to support spiritual direction by looking at the relational nature of God

The goal of the Trinity is inclusion. The purpose of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in creation is to draw us within their circle of shared life so that we too can experience it with them.” (Dirks 2013, 45); Jesus is the prototype spiritual director – who focuses on “fostering transformation by leading people into a new and deeper kind of seeing and hearing.” (Dirks 2013, 51); Paul who desires to ‘see Christ formed’ in the church (Galatians 4:19); and the self-revealing nature of God – “The New Testament (authors) agree that the center of the Christian life...is all about God’s revelation of himself to the believer (Dirks 2013, 57).

Dirks goes on to explain how spiritual direction works. He draws on the work of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* to offer a template for the role of a spiritual director in helping a directee discern what God is saying. Dirks orients



spiritual direction around three movements within the soul of the directee. First, the director helps the directee become more aware of what Ignatius calls “inordinate attachments” – motivations of the heart that we cling to that lead us away from experiencing the presence and love of God. Dirks gives a number of examples of “inordinate attachments” that many Christian leaders struggle with: The need to be liked – working to keep others happy (Dirks 2013, 80-82); The need to succeed – working to win others’ approval (Dirks 2013, 82-85); The need for perfection – working to make things right (Dirks 2013, 85-87). Second, the director helps the directee become more aware of “the inner movements in the soul – desires, emotions, promptings, longings and thoughts” (Dirks 2013, 94) or what Ignatius calls “consolations” and “desolations.” Consolations are when:

We find ourselves so aware of the love of God that all other attractions fade in light of a compelling attraction to him, we are deeply saddened and remorseful over sinfulness in our lives and the suffering in Christ on our behalf, and we find something that is strengthening to our faith, hope, and love, leading to interior joy and settled-ness in God (Dirks 2013, 96).

Desolations are when:

We feel turmoil in our spirit – a sense of being weighed down, we experience a loss of faith, hope, and love, a resistance to prayer or other spiritual involvement, and we discover movements in our spirit such as despair, rebellion, and selfishness (Dirks 2013, 96).

Third, the director helps the directee focus on certain growth areas: experiential union with Christ – the goal of the spiritual formation process (Dirks 2013, 109-112); finding God in all things (Dirks 2013, 112-115); learning to use our imaginations (Dirks 2013, 116-118); becoming more self-aware – “learning how to maintain a reflective state of mind as you move through the events of your life is certainly a spiritual discipline that takes time to learn” (Dirks 2013, 119);

understanding and processing our desires (Dirks 2013, 121-124); and learning to be holy indifferent when making decisions – “Holy indifference means we come to a place where our interior attitude is one of complete openness. We are willing to do whatever God wills” (Dirks 2013, 124). Dirks paints a picture of spiritual direction as an organic, dynamic, and highly relational process. The metaphor Dirks employs to describe spiritual direction is that of “panning for gold” (Dirks 2013, 129). A spiritual director must learn to: listen to the Holy Spirit - who is “the One who leads the process” (Dirks 2013, 130); listen to the directee – “directors are not listening to words and information; they are actually listening to sacred experience” (Dirks 2013, 135); attend to the directee’s view of God and self – “effective spiritual directors will know how to move back and forth between these two places (view of self and view of God) to assist the directee toward spiritual health” (Dirks 2013 139); and attend to the directee’s prayer life – “the role of the spiritual director is to help the directee begin to process their prayer experiences in ways that lead to hope and new interest or hunger” (Dirks 2013, 144).

In summary, spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into the likeness of Jesus Christ. The experience is one of tension between being and becoming our true selves. The formational process happens as we abide in Christ and submit to the pruning care of our Heavenly Father. Abiding in Christ takes practice. The spiritual practices help us cultivate space to grow in relational intimacy with the Father, through faith in the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we get to know the Triune God, we get to know of our true selves - beloved children of God, adopted by

grace and dependent on God's grace. There are eight spiritual practices that I have found particularly useful in helping me rest, respond and receive God's grace: Silence and Solitude, Imaginative Prayer, *Lectio Divina*, Sabbath, Centering Prayer, The Daily Office, Fellowship, Spiritual Direction. In the next section, we will explore the fruit of the Spirit that grows in us, as we abide in Christ.

## **CHAPTER 7: BEARING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IN CHRIST**

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. ~ John 15:16*

Spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of human life into the likeness of Christ. Our Father in Heaven, intends that we resemble our older brother Jesus, and he is committed to making us holy, free from the slavery of sin, evil and death. Our Father, “cuts off [cleans] every branch in me [Jesus] that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:2). My model is a description of what happens when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who reforms our entire way of life: the way we think (know), the way we feel (be), and the way we act (do), until we resemble our older brother Jesus. We have explored knowing and being in chapters 5 and 6, now we will describe how the Holy Spirit influences our doing. What is the fruit of the Spirit in Christ?

### **Christ-like Character**

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). It is having the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), a mind that seeks to serve others and walk in humble obedience to God the Father (Philippians 2: 5-11). It is having compassion for the weak, the poor, and the sick. It is a turning away from sin and

growing in holiness. Terry Wardle offers a six-step process for turning away from sin:

1. **Recognize** sin as sin. bring it into the light. Wardle encourages Christian caregivers to help people come before the Lord and admit that specific choices and actions are sinful...Help them to speak out before the Lord all that these actions have cost, reminding them that these short-term solutions bring long-lasting destruction to their lives (Wardle 2001, 163).
2. **Repent.** Turn away from sin and turn toward God. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says things like “If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out...if your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off” (Matthew 5:29-30) He was speaking metaphorically of course. The point is to allow the Lord to cut the source of sin out of your life.
3. **Renounce.** “Whatever you submit to will grow stronger. Whatever you resist will grow weaker.” (Siler Lecture 2020). Wardle explains how “sinful choices open the door for the oppressive and harassing work of the evil one” (Wardle 2001, 164). It is important to renounce any involvement the evil one may have had in a person’s life.
4. **Receive** forgiveness. Jesus has paid the price for our sin. He has set us free from the evil one and he has rescued us from death. “Voicing the benefits of grace helps take the Lord’s provision to all the deeper areas within the life of a broken person” (Wardle 2001, 164).
5. **Realign.** Part of repentance is realigning how one lives. It will include becoming more aware of your thought life, choices and habits and then making appropriate changes to ensure that you avoid being in a situation

where you are going to be tempted to sin. It will also include seeking the Lord, by doing spiritual practices that will help facilitate abiding in Christ (John 15:5).

6. **Rejoice** in the Lord for his forgiveness, give thanks for his cleansing power, and praise him for the work he is doing in and through you.

Wardle comments, “as sin is surrendered, the light will begin to move into the hidden recesses where wounds have festered and lies have remained unchallenged” (Wardle 2001, 165).

### **Christ-like Works**

Jesus explains to his disciples:

Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:12-14).

And then he goes on to say: “Ask in my name and I will do it” five more times in this, his final sermon before the cross (John 15:7; 16; 16:23, 24, 26). In Christ, we learn how to pray by the Spirit (Romans 8:26) and then he answers, so that we would see God’s hand at work and grow in our faith. In the Great Commission, Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of all people, baptizing them into the name (the life) of the Triune God, teaching them to do everything he commanded his first disciples to do. What did Jesus command his first disciples to do? “In your going, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.” (Matthew 10:7-8) We can expect to see God

using us to do the same things that Jesus did, in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Christ-like Mission**

In Act 2, we see mission as an overflow of the early church's life together. The apostle's teaching, fellowship, and worship formed the interior life of the church and as they lived in the world as salt and light - "praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47). Alan Kreider wrote a chapter in *Ancient Faith for The Church's Future*, entitled "They Alone Know the Right Way to Live", in which he looked at the explosive growth of the early church up until the time of Constantine. He makes an important observation:

The early church did not engage in public preaching; it was too dangerous. There are practically no evangelists or missionaries whose names we know...the early Christians had no missionary boards. They did not write treatises about evangelism...no examples of leaders urging the believers to be evangelistic...The Great Commission...hardly mentioned... After Nero's persecution in the mid-first century, the churches in the Roman Empire closed their worship services to visitors. Deacons stood at the churches' doors, serving as bouncers, checking to see that no unbaptized person, no "lying informer," could come into the private space-the "enclosed closed garden" of the Christian community...and yet the church was growing (Kreider 2008, 170).

Kreider says the early church was attractive for three reasons. First, spiritual power - they prayed for healing and people were healed, they prayed for people to be liberated from spiritual oppression and it happened, and they were able to endure torture and persecution (Kreider 2008, 171-172). Second, distinctive behaviour – they lived counter culturally. They lived an ethic of love caring for the poor, the sick and the outcast (Kreider 2008, 172-174). Third, catholicity – they were a diverse community yet united together as one, showing hospitality to

all, a blend of rich and poor. This was unheard of in the ancient world (Kreider 2008, 174-176). The important emphasis that Kreider makes is that the church has always focused on its inner life in Christ while at the same time being in the world, for it is only as we are in the world as Christians that we are fulfilling our missional function of being ‘salt and light’ (Matthew 5:13-15). This applies to the church today. We must not hide who we really are in Christ. We must “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

### **Christ-like Vocation**

Another aspect to bearing Jesus’ fruit is vocation. David Benner describes vocation as:

The discovery of our true self...it points toward a purpose of being that is grounded in God rather than in our self. Our vocation, like our self, can be understood only in relation to the One Who Calls (Benner 2004, 87).

Our vocation (or calling) is more than our career or job, it is based on “our gifts and abilities, will grow out of our deepest desires, and will always involve some response to the needs of the world” (Benner 2004, 88). Frederick Buechner picks up on the idea of the needs of the world and describes vocation as “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Benner 2004, 88). Benner explains:

Our vocation is always a response to a Divine call to take our place in the kingdom of God. Our vocation is a call to serve God and our fellow humans in the distinctive way that fits the shape of our being. In one way or another, Christian calling will always involve the care of God’s creation and people. This realigns us to the created world and to our neighbor, moving us from self-centered exploitation to self-sacrificing service and stewardship (Benner 2004, 88).

Benner continues:



The communal nature of the kingdom of God also draws our attention to the fact that we discover our calling—and our true self—in community. Here, through the help of others who know us well, we learn to discern our gifts and find our authentic voice and vocation. We are all called to Christ-following and loving service of God and neighbor. But the specific call that is rooted in your unique identity, gifts and personality will be found as you come to know both God and self in Christian community (Benner 2004, 88-89).

### **Christ-Like Protection**

When we abide in Christ, we are not immune to suffering, but we are safe from the evil one. In Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, he explains who Jesus is and what it looks like to abide in him. Paul is very deliberate in how he structures his letter. There are two halves: Chapters 1-3 and Chapters 4-6. In Chapters 1-3, Paul is describing the new reality that we have been invited to live into, made possible by Jesus Christ. In Chapters 4-6, He is explaining how to live within this new reality and he moves things along with a series of “therefores”:

- 4:1 – “Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”
- 4:17 – “Therefore, you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.”
- 4:25 – “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth to each one of you with his neighbor.”
- 5:1 – “Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.”
- 5:15 – “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.”
- and then in 6:10 – “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

The word “finally” can also mean “henceforth” or “hence forward.” Paul is

saying: In light of all that I have said, what I am about to say is how you are to go on walking for the rest of the journey. You are going to find yourself in a battle for the rest of our lives...from now on, “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:10-12). We are no match for the devil’s schemes, only God can defeat Him. The devil is more powerful than we are and the only way we can stand strong and not fall into temptation is by putting on and keeping on the full armor of God. The New Testament is clear: Jesus has defeated the evil one. He has already won the war, but for some mysterious reason (Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43) the evil one is still allowed to interact and influence humanity. A good analogy would be the difference between D-Day and V.E. Day in World War II. D-Day, June 6th, 1944, was the day that the war ended. The allied forces invaded Normandy and the Nazi’s surrendered. The war was over, but there was a mopping up period of almost a year. It wasn’t until V.E. Day, May 8th, 1945, that Europe was officially safe from the enemy. Jesus defeated the devil 2000 years ago, but now, we are living in the mopping up period, and it will not be until Jesus’ second coming that humanity will be safe from the evil one’s influence. The evil one knows this. He knows his time is short, but instead of surrendering, he attacks as a way of mocking God. Canadian psychiatrist John White explains it this way in his book *The Fight*:

Satan’s supreme object is to hurt Christ, and Christ’s cause. You personally

are of no interest to him. It is only as you relate to Christ that you assume significance in Satan's eyes. Before you became a Christian, he was mainly interested in blinding you from the truth of Christ, or perhaps seducing you further into his terrain, but this was not because of your personal importance, he only uses you to get back at God, so don't take any of this personally (White 2007, 77).

Wardle describes the influence of the evil one as "any level of activity that a demon spirit is bringing to bear on a person is called demonization" (Wardle 2001, 221) Wardle then distinguishes four distinct levels of demonization that he learned from Charles Kraft:

- Harassment – much the same as a hornet flies around a person's head, annoying and distracting him, so it can be with this level of demonization. The demon does not keep the person away from his or her appointed course, but does seek to bother and discourage them (Wardle 2001, 221).
- Oppression – like a fog that settles in upon a person. The individual finds it more difficult to stay on track, and often battles varying levels of emotional and spiritual oppression. It can be more difficult for a person to keep focused on what is true and right (Wardle 2001, 221).
- Affliction – "demons seek to bring emotional, spiritual, and physical suffering to a person in an effort to defeat and demoralize them." (Wardle 2001, 221).
- Bondage – The demon spirit is exercising a certain level of control in an area of a person's life. This demonization is possible because of personal choices that give room for this type of bondage (Wardle 2001, 221).

Jesus calls the evil one the father of lies and all that is false. The evil one does not want us to see who we truly are. He does not want us to relate in a healthy way to others. And he does not want us to know the living God. He is the prince of darkness and seeks to darken our understanding - “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see that light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The evil one is subtle and patient. He’ll plant a thought in our minds and if we allow these thoughts to take hold, they can lead us into sin. Roy Siler describes this as the continuum of sin. In one of his lectures, he explained how when an evil thought comes to mind we have a choice, if we choose to entertain it, it can become a habit of thinking, that can lead to a loss of control and in extreme situations – bondage (sexual addictions, drug addictions, etc.) (Siler 2020), Paul calls these thoughts of the evil one, flaming arrows (Ephesians 6:16) and strongholds:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every idea that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10: 4).

Ed Silvano describes a stronghold as “a mindset impregnated with hopelessness that causes the believer to accept as unchangeable something that he or she knows is contrary to the will of God” (Silvano 2014, 154).

Related to strongholds are memories. Memories are powerful. What we have experienced in the past has a way of shaping who we are today. When a baby elephant is taken captive, its capture will tie his leg with a chain to a post in the ground. The young elephant will try to get away, but he is not strong enough to break free and eventually it will give up trying. An adult elephant could easily

snap the chain, but the memory of his bonds keeps him bound. Growing up, if a person experiences some traumatic event, such as physical, mental or sexual abuse; a parent who was absent; a parent who was present, but not able to connect on an emotional level, or the death of a loved one, these types of experiences can create deep wounds in our souls that never go away, and if they are not attended to, they can infect every dimension of our lives. The same can be said about traumatic experiences. If we are told lies about who we are, and we believe these lies, we will end up living a lie. This is how ideologies like racism and sexism and nationalism develop - it is modelled for us growing up that our race, our gender, or our nation is more superior to others. This is how all false ideas develop. We are taught a false vision of reality, we believe it, and then live it out.

The Good News is that Jesus Christ has defeated the evil one and he has come to “destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8) by setting us free from demonic activity, false ideas, evil thoughts, and strongholds. Jesus’ name literally means “God saves”. When we open ourselves up to Him and learn to abide in him, especially through practicing imaginative prayer, he is able to heal our memories, freeing us from the lies that we’ve believed about ourselves, others and God. His intent is to rescue us from everything that would prevent us from living in the fullness of his love, present in the “now”, experiencing the joy of being (Siler 2020). The apostle Paul tells us to stand firm in this new reality in Christ, secure and safe in him, by putting on and keeping on the full armour of God.

- The Belt of Truth – a belt is needed to bind the rest of the armour together – Jesus Christ is the truth – we are to let him hold us together.

- The Breastplate of Righteousness – the breastplate covers our hearts, the core of who we are. Jesus is our righteousness – because of him we have been made right with the Father, and through him, we discover our true identity as children of God.
- Gospel Shoes – gospel shoes allow us to stand firm on the ground that Jesus Christ has already taken through his death and resurrection. And gospel shoes permit us to walk in step with the Spirit.
- The Shield of Faith – protects us from the accusations of the enemy.
- The Helmet of Salvation – protects our minds from mental strongholds, by keeping our thoughts on the only one who can save us.
- The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God – God’s word is the only thing powerful enough to set us free from the chains that bind us. Jesus said “If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8: 31-32). When we put on and keep on the full armour of God we are able to stand strong against the devil’s schemes and we become warriors in God’s army, used to help set others free in the name of Jesus Christ.

In part 2, we explored what it looks like when the Holy Spirit forms us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This work of the Spirit is all encompassing. It includes how we think (know), feel (be), and act (do). We become our true selves as we grow in intimacy with the Father, through the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual practices allow us to be in God’s loving presence, behold his

glory, revealed in Christ, and hear the voice of the Spirit, leading us in the way of holiness and eternal life. It is a work of grace from start to finish, but we must cooperate, by resting, receiving and responding to what God is saying and doing in us. The Holy Spirit is committed to forming every dimension of our lives, so that we would bear the fruit of Christ: Christ-like character, Christ-like works, Christ-like mission, Christ-like vocation and Christ-like protection.

The final part of my integration portfolio is a research project, in which I seek to implement parts of my spiritual formation model in the lives of the participants.

**PART 3 – RESEARCH PROJECT: GROWING IN INTIMACY WITH  
THE TRIUNE GOD THROUGH SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND THE  
PRACTICE OF SAFE PLACE PRAYER**



## **CHAPTER 8 – REPRODUCING ~ HELPING OTHERS CULTIVATE AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST**

*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. ~ Galatians 4:19*

This research project explored how the use of imagination in prayer affects one's relationship with the Triune God. I introduced three volunteers from St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church Ottawa to the practice of Safe Place Prayer in the context of spiritual direction, to see what impact this practice would have in facilitating spiritual life. Each volunteer participated in a seven-week program that included: a group orientation session, 5-hours of individual spiritual direction over five weeks, and a group debriefing session. Data was collected using two questionnaires, and observations made during the individual spiritual direction sessions. Some of the outcomes were 1. A positive change in the quality of relationship with God experienced by each participant evidenced through personal testimony; 2. Ministry insights that could help Spiritual Directors in the practice of Safe Place Prayer; 3. An increased awareness of one's operative view of God in contrast to one's theological view of God. In conclusion, the use of imagination through safe place prayer is something that could strengthen our souls and support a journey of faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Introduction**

When I first encountered Jesus Christ through the use of my imagination in Safe Place Prayer it transformed the way I see and relate to God. My spiritual director introduced me to the practice four years ago when we first started meeting. He invited me to spend some time imagining myself in a place where I would feel safe and restful. I imagined a place I had visited while teaching English in South Korea. For one year, every Saturday, I would hike up a mountain to a valley with a large rock at the centre and there I would sit, pray, eat a snack and after about an hour walk home. When I entered into the memory of this place and imagined myself there, I was surprised at how I could feel the texture of the rock and the sun on my skin. I could hear the wind rustling the bamboo trees and the tall grasses, and a waterfall trickling nearby. When my director asked me to picture Jesus entering this place, I saw Jesus walking out of the forest towards me. He sat beside me on the rock and in his presence, I was comforted and filled with love, peace, and joy. My director then explained to me how this way of using one's imagination in prayer is something that I could do when I read scripture, participate in worship, and intercede for others. The motivation behind this research project was to share what I have learned about Safe Place Prayer with others and help them cultivate a closer relationship with the Triune God.

## **Opportunity**

We are slowly emerging from the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have been living in various stages of social isolation for almost two years and the effects on our overall health are yet to be determined. Things that were a problem before COVID-19 have compounded and new problems have emerged. The

Center for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH), Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital, issued an advisory statement in July 2020, warning us of the increase in dysfunctional behaviour: drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, anxiety, loneliness (CAMH 2020). As a pastor, I've seen these problems emerge among Christians as well. From my perspective, there is a general sense of fatigue and discouragement within the Church. Those spiritual practices that once helped us in the past have not been available, at least not in my context of ministry: corporate singing, sharing meals together, small group ministry in person, hugs, seeing people's faces. Many are hoping this pandemic will end so we can return to what is comfortable and familiar, but what would it look like to use this situation to our advantage? Instead of asking "what will life and ministry look like as we emerge from this pandemic?" I believe an even more critical question is how can we use this time to go deeper in our relationship with God? When Covid-19 hit, it was like hitting a wall and many felt stuck not knowing what to do and yet with every crisis there is the possibility of change.

When I consider my journey of faith and how I have grown in my identity in Christ and my relationship with him, one of the most important components to my formation has been the use of imagination in prayer. When I experience myself in prayer, interacting with Jesus, spending time in his presence, watching, listening, being loved by Him, it has a positive effect on how I see myself, the quality of my relationships with others, and I discover newfound strength, energy and creativity for life and ministry. This is one of the gifts I've received through the practice of spiritual direction. Four years ago, I became more aware of how to use my imagination in prayer through my Spiritual Director, who introduced me

to the practice of Safe Place Prayer, which I will describe in the definitions section below. Since then, I have been exploring ways of helping God's people become more aware of their imagination through my ministry as a pastor and spiritual director.

This research project has given me the opportunity to further explore the role of the imagination in prayer through the practice of spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer working with a small group of believers from the church where I serve – St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church.

Through the data collected from the two questionnaires and observations made during the spiritual direction sessions, I was able to see a positive change in how most the participants experienced themselves in relation to God, practical insights that can help spiritual directors and Christian practitioners minister to others; and further evidence for the central part the imagination plays in our spiritual formation.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Spiritual Direction** - happens when a spiritual director comes alongside a directee to help them pay attention to what God is doing in their lives. This process of paying attention to God involves building a safe, trusting relationship, in which the director can become more aware of what is going on in their thoughts and emotions. The goal of spiritual direction is to help the directee rest, receive and respond to God's love (Wardle 2015, 61). According to Majorie J. Thompson, a spiritual director is someone who "listens to us, helps us notice things, helps us respond to God with greater freedom, introduces spiritual

practices that can lead to spiritual growth, and loves us” (Thompson 2014, 116-117).

**Imagination** – the imagination is our ability to form new ideas, images, or concepts of external objects and scenarios not present to our senses. We use our imaginations when we read a story, listen to music, make plans, see an advertisement, dream, play. The imagination connects our interior world with the outside world. It has a direct link to our emotions, our thoughts, and our memories. It inspires us to change, and it is the primary way we relate to the Triune God who is unseen.

As image-making creatures, we use the stuff of everyday life to create pictures of the ineffable Mystery of God, but unlike God, we do not create out of nothing but out of what is given us and what we find lying around. Bits of mother and father appear in our God-images. Bits of treasured nature, such as light and darkness, wind and storm, dew and fire...what is important is that we see through our God-images to the God beyond them (Au 2006, Location 1043-1047).

The Bible contains images, symbols, and metaphors that are designed to activate our imagination, helping us see and relate to Jesus Christ, the image of God incarnate. Imagination “when guided by the Holy Spirit and submitted to the authority of Scripture, is our main receptor to the spiritual world.” (Boyd 2004, 16) and the vehicle through which we are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

**Safe Place Prayer** - is a form of guided prayer that uses the imagination to develop a mental picture of a place in order to rest and interact with God. In the context of Spiritual Direction, a director asks the Holy Spirit to sanctify the directees imagination and to protect the time of prayer. The director then instructs

the directee, to breathe deeply and imagine either a real place that the directee has been to in the past or a fictitious place, where the directee feels safe and secure. Once the director has a mental picture of a place, the director invites them to spend time in this space, describe their surroundings using their five senses, and simply rest. After several minutes of rest, the director then asks the directee to imagine Jesus entering into this space. The director asks questions to help the directee engage with Jesus (What does Jesus look like? What is he doing? Do you sense him speaking to you? How does being in Jesus' presence make you feel?) The Spiritual Director brings the prayer to a close by collecting and affirming all that God has done and then spends some time with the directee debriefing on their experience.

### **Supervision, permission, and access**

This Research Project was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mark Chapman, the Doctorate of Ministry director at Tyndale University. I followed the ethical guidelines in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2018). As the curate at St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church Ottawa, I received permission from and was accountable to the Bishop, Rector, Vicar, and Parish Council. When I met with participants online, I was in my office with the door closed to maintain privacy. When I met with participants in-person we met in the church library. Only the Rector, Vicar, and Administrator were aware of spiritual direction sessions happening in person and they remained in the building as an accountability measure. The participants provided me with informed consent to record data during our sessions, as notes, audio files, or video files. These documents will be kept for three years and will

then be destroyed. During the orientation session and the individual sessions, I clarified my role as a spiritual director and the purpose of our study. The identities of the participants have been kept anonymous and when speaking about them in my report a pseudo-name is used. I have shared the results of the report with each of the participants.

### **Context**

St. Peter and St. Paul's is in the heart of downtown Ottawa. It is a historic building, four blocks from Parliament Hill, surrounded by new apartment buildings, Ottawa City Hall, Ottawa University, International Embassies, and large corporations. In 2010, St. Peter and St. Paul's left the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) because of theological differences and joined the Anglican Network in Canada, which is part of the Anglican Church in North America and The Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (GAFCON) – who make up the majority of Anglicans around the world. In 2010, St. Peter and St. Paul's also purchased their building from the ACC and from 2019-2020, completed a major renovation: creating a multiple-purpose lower hall, a professional kitchen, and new office space. St. Peter and St. Paul's is heavily invested in maintaining the building as a way of doing ministry and outreach to the community, and understands their mission as “sharing God's transformative love from the heart of Ottawa.” (<https://www.peterpaulottawa.com>)

I recently started serving at St. Peter and St. Paul's as the new curate. The role of the curate is to assist the senior clergy in general and oversee the youth and young adult's ministry. St. Peter and St. Paul's is an eclectic, multicultural, multi-generational community of believers. They are committed to holding together a

three-stream approach to being Anglican: Catholic (sacramental, liturgical), Evangelical (centrality of the Word, emphasis on the cross, personal conversion, and activism) and Charismatic (dependence and openness to the Holy Spirit). Most adult members have been baptized and confirmed into the Anglican Church and are committed to living out their faith in practical ways: participating regularly in worship, serving, and discipleship. The participants in this project were adult volunteers from the church who were interested in receiving spiritual direction, open to exploring the use of imagination in prayer, and longing to cultivate a deeper relationship with God.

### **Background from Spiritual Autobiography and Model of Spiritual Formation**

The idea for this research action project, focusing on the use of imagination in prayer, emerged from my spiritual autobiography and model of spiritual formation. One of the main themes that flows throughout my story is a deep longing for intimacy with God. This longing developed through a difficult childhood, growing up without a father, but then hearing and responding to the call of my Heavenly Father to follow His Son, Jesus Christ. A number of years ago, I was serving as a pastor, in a small rural church and I went through a burnout experience because I was working hard, serving, giving but never receiving. I felt lost and depressed, and I did not know who to talk to about it. Part of my predicament was that I knew all this information about God, through my studies and my preparations for teaching and preaching, but I did not have a dynamic relationship with Him. I knew God in my head but not in my heart. It was out of desire for a deeper, more real, connection with God that I began to



journey within. I was drawn to scriptures that speak of our union with Christ (John 15:5), our need to be intentional in working out what God is working in (Philippians 2:12), and the promise of transformation (Galatians 4:19, Romans 8:29). As well, I was inspired by the works of Richard Foster (*Celebration of Discipline* 2007, *Prayer* 2008, *Streams of Living Water* 2010) and Dallas Willard (*The Spirit of the Disciplines* 1988, *Renovation of the Heart* 2002), who spoke about the possibility of having a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ and our need to be intentional in cultivating this relationship. What does it look like to live with Jesus now? This question led me to begin the doctorate program at Tyndale University in the Spiritual Formation stream, where I connected with a spiritual director, who introduced me to safe place prayer and the gift of using my imagination. I used to get very little out of personal prayer, but now I see prayer not as something that I have to do, but the source and centre of my life. As I use my senses, imagining myself interacting with Jesus through the stories of the Bible (gospel contemplation), Jesus has become more real to me, and I am learning to see and trust in our heavenly Father more and more. Encountering Jesus in this way has also changed the way I pray. I no longer pray with worry or fear, I pray with freedom and joy. I pray from my heart and my surroundings and the scriptures and random ideas – prayer is paying close attention to God within and without. Christ in us, the hope of glory! When I pray for others, I invite them into this space and imagine Jesus and myself interacting with them. I've also noticed a change in how I interact with others and the decisions I make. As I experience Jesus' love, patience, mercy, forgiveness toward me, I want to extend what I receive from him to others. I am growing in my awareness of His presence

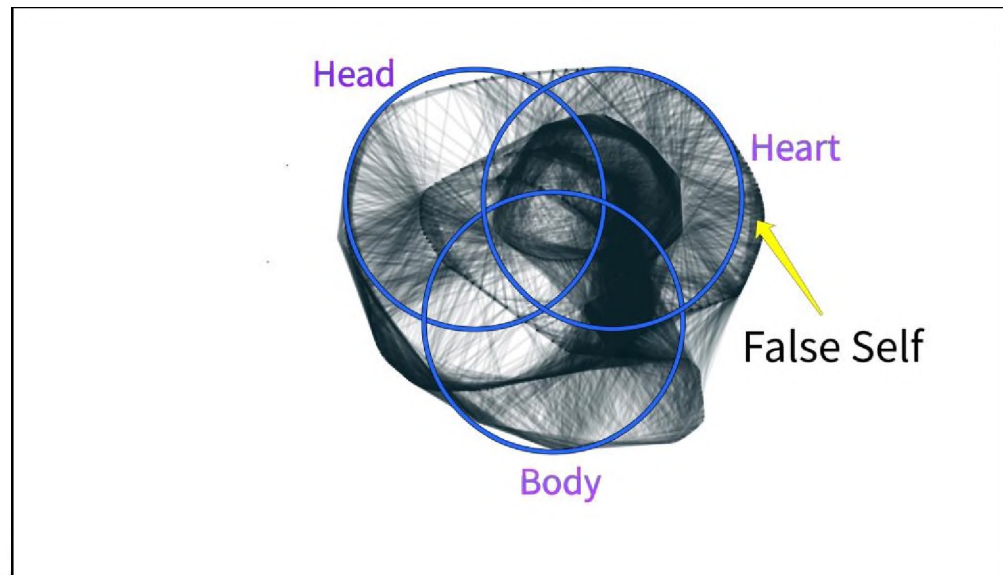
day by day, I am more able to resist temptation, and I am able to see him answering my prayers. He is good!

Also, I have been influenced to use my imagination in prayer through the spiritual writers in the contemplative tradition. The Classics: John of the Cross's *Spiritual Canticle*, Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*, Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*. And more contemporary works: Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved* 2002, Greg A. Boyd's *Seeing is Believing* 2004, and Terry Wardle's *Every Breath We Take* 2015.

I define spiritual formation as: The Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into the likeness of Christ. My spiritual formation model is a description of what the Spirit led process looks like. We become our true selves in Christ as we get to know who God is in his Triune nature. This knowing God and knowing self happens as we abide in Christ, through spiritual practices. I have included three diagrams from my model that help illustrate how spiritual practices impact the spiritual formation process.

In Figure 1, the three blue rings represent the three main dimensions to our being: head (know), heart (be) and body (do). All three dimensions are united together and interact with each other. The dark scribble lines represent the false self. The false self is our default way of being in the world, in which we orient our lives around ourselves and created things, rather than the Creator. When we live independent of God, we are in a state of spiritual darkness that distorts how we feel, the way we think, and what we do.

*Figure 4. The False Self*



In Figure 2, the straight line running through the page represents faith in Jesus Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling, and our identity as Children of God. I use a straight, continuous, unbroken line to reflect the way of the Lord, which is depreciated throughout scripture as: straight (Proverbs 3:6, Isaiah 40:3), narrow (Matthew 7:14), perfect (Psalm 18:30), eternal (Jeremiah 6:16), and indestructible (Romans 8:38-39). Spiritual practices allow us space to exercise our faith, so we can “be” with the Triune God. As we are with him, he works in us according to his will, and brings our inner and outer worlds into alignment with his kingdom.

Figure 5. How Spiritual Practices Impact Spiritual Formation

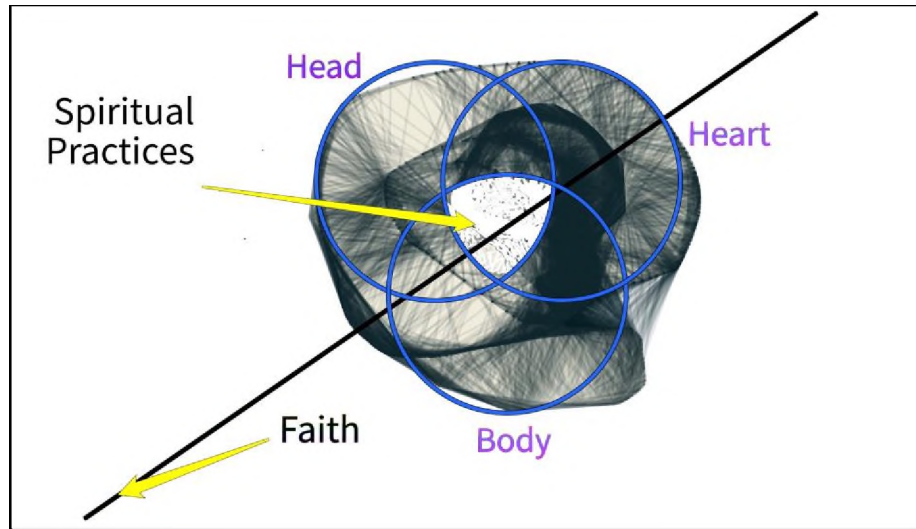
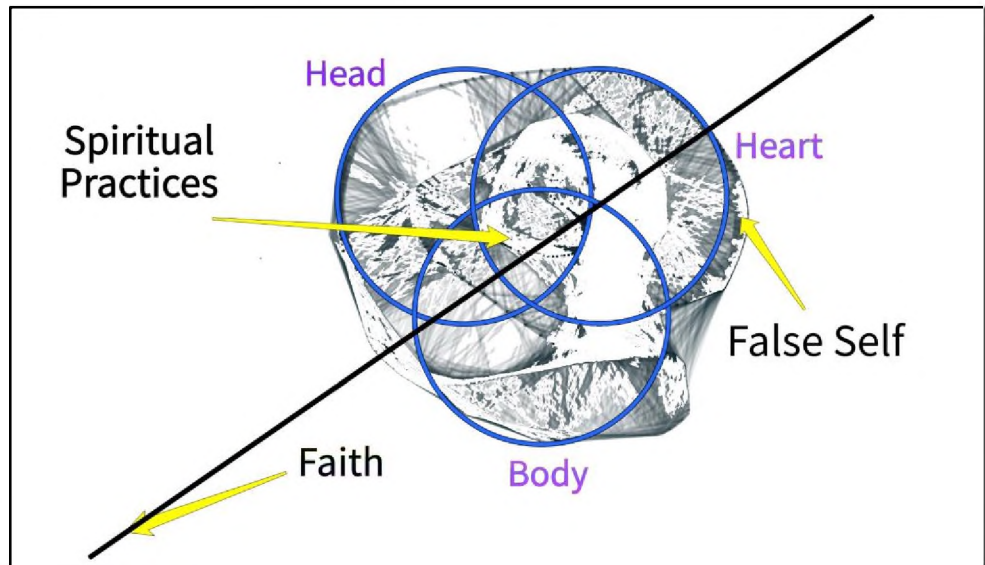


Figure 3 illustrates what happens as we continue to cultivate space to be with God, abiding in Christ, by exercising spiritual practices. As we learn to rest, receive and respond to the Holy Spirit, over time, he transforms how we think (head), what we love (heart), and what we do (body), until we are full of God's light, love, and life, and the true self emerges.

Figure 6. The Effects of Ongoing Spiritual Practice.



When it came time to plan my Research Project, with the goal of developing competencies and positive change to my ministry, it was a natural fit for me to include spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer, because of the significant impact they have made on my faith. The goal was to cultivate space for the participants to encounter Jesus Christ through spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to implement my entire model, being aware of how we are formed in Christ was important when engaging with my directees.

There were a number of scriptures that helped give shape and focus to my project. The most influential were John 15:1-5, John 5:39-40 and Philippians 2:12-13. In John 15, Jesus describes his relationship with the church using the metaphor of a vine. As we abide in him and he in us we will bear fruit. Being with Jesus and doing what he says is our responsibility. The Father is the gardener who prunes us so that we will be even more fruitful. The kind of fruit God wants to see in us is the kind of fruit we see in Jesus (Galatians 5:22). There are other, mostly agricultural, metaphors that Jesus uses in the Gospels, to explain the nature of God's Kingdom and what it looks like to live in relationship with God. These metaphors inspire our imagination, opening us to the reality of God's presence. Our imagination is the primary way that we interact with God. He uses things that are visible and limited to speak of what is invisible and unlimited. In John 5:39-40, Jesus explains how the Scriptures were designed to bring us to himself, yet so often we stop at the Scriptures and use them to acquire information about God rather than entering into the reality to which they speak and engaging with the author.

In Philippians 2: 12-13, St. Paul describes our role and God's role in the process of sanctification. We are to work out what God is working in. This means we are to be intentional in doing certain things with our body, heart and mind that will get us into a place where God can do his work in us. What is the work? He intends on forming the life of his Son in us until we become mature children of God – our true selves (Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15: 51, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Galatians 4:19, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 1:27).

### **Other Resources**

I was also helped in my understanding of how we develop a healthy thought life through insights from the field of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, particularly Curt Thompson's *The Anatomy of the Soul* (2016) and Daniel Siegel's *Mindsight* (2016). Siegel defines mindsight as:

A kind of focused attention that allows us to see the internal workings of our own minds. It helps us to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them, enables us to get ourselves off the autopilot of ingrained behaviors and habitual responses, and moves us beyond the reactive emotional loops we all have a tendency to get trapped in. It lets us “name and tame” the emotions we are experiencing, rather than being overwhelmed by them (Siegel 2010, 12).

Both Thompson and Sigel support the need for helping people become more aware of what is happening interiorly on the journey to becoming whole, integrated, healthy human beings.

### **Project, Methodology, and Methods**

In total, there were three members of St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church in Ottawa who participated in the project.

## Field

I included an open invitation in our weekly communications email to the parish, offering a brief explanation about the project and how to find out more information (Appendix 1). For those who expressed interest, I forwarded them an invitation letter providing more information (Appendix 2), a consent form (Appendix 3) and invited them to participate in an orientation session that happened online, Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. At the orientation session I shared what inspired me to do the study, what would be required of them, reviewed the ethical protocol, handed out the first questionnaire (Appendix 4), and then invited them to continue with the project. Five people signed up: four women and one man. The man and one woman decided to not proceed because of the time commitment that would be required of them. I met with three participants once a week over five weeks – one time in-person, the other two on Zoom. For those I met with in-person I recorded audio files of our conversation. For those I met with on Zoom, I recorded video files of our conversation. We had a final group debriefing session on Zoom Monday, November 29<sup>th</sup>. At the debriefing session, the participants shared their experience. I thanked them for their involvement, explained how I gathered the information, assured that their identities would be anonymous, handed out the second questionnaire (Appendix 5) and encouraged them to continue using their imagination in prayer. All three participants were recruited from St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church who were interested in growing in intimacy with God, open to experimenting with new forms of prayer, and willing to trust me in opening up about their spiritual lives. Erin is a young married woman in her early thirties with no children. Kathleen is a middle-aged

married woman with four teen-aged children. Kristy is an elderly married woman with adult children and young grandchildren. I've known Erin and Kristy since I began serving at St. Peter and St. Paul's in May 2021. I first met Kathleen in 2005 at a different church in Ottawa where we both attended when I was a student intern.

### **Scope**

There were a number of limiting factors. I limited the number of participants to five, considering my other responsibilities as a pastor, student, parent, etc. Those people who signed up would have either needed to read the invitation in the parish weekly email, or they could have heard about it through someone who was informed. This method of communication limited the number of people from the parish exposed to the possibility of being involved. During the spiritual direction sessions, I mainly focused on the spiritual practice of Safe Place Prayer, although there were moments when I shared other types of imaginative prayer practices (Gospel-Contemplation and *Visio Divina*) with Kristy, to help her connect with God. I spent a significant amount of time listening to her story and her struggles, explaining how the Spirit can use our imaginations to help us pray and connect with Jesus. Erin and Kathleen were comfortable and responsive to Safe Place Prayer each session. Another limiting factor was the stability of the internet. There were times when the connection was poor, which may have affected the quality of our attention.

There were also a number of delimiting factors. The participants needed to be members of St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church. The options for spiritual



direction were either to meet in-person at the church, during office hours to ensure other clergy/staff within the building for accountability purposes, or meet on Zoom anytime. When I met in person with participants, we met in a room with a window, and I let the other clergy and staff know we were meeting so another person would be around. When I met on Zoom with the participants, I met in my office with the door closed to avoid distraction, to protect privacy, and to access a more stable internet connection.

### **Methodology**

I used a qualitative methodological approach to the research, looking at the effect spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer had on the spiritual lives of three members from Saint Peter and Saint Paul's Anglican Church. I collected written data from the two questionnaires and observations made during the spiritual direction sessions.

### **Methods**

Two data gathering tools were used in this project: questionnaires and participant observation. The questionnaires included open-ended questions (Appendix C and D). Sensing recommends writing "questions that will elicit the information you are seeking...Open-ended questions let the interviewee pursue any direction and use any words to express what they want to say" (Sensing 2011, 89). Open-ended questions also help participants "construct answers and generate data without unnecessary prodding" (Sensing 2011, 91). The first questionnaire was distributed two weeks prior to the orientation session. I created evocative questions with the intent of helping the participants become more aware of their

emotions, their memories of encounter with God, and their devotional life. I wanted to get a sense for how comfortable they were in using their imagination in prayer. I distributed the second questionnaire during our final debrief session, and gave the participants two weeks to finish. I used similar questions, but focused on how the practice of spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer impacted their prayer life and their relationship with God. I was looking for evidence of growth toward God, recognizing that there might be times of attraction and resistance.

Participant observation was used to gather data during the weekly spiritual direction sessions. Field notes were recorded while the sessions were in progress and expanded shortly after each session to further reflect on what was observed. I also compared what was observed in my notes with the audio and video recordings and the answers to both questionnaires. I was looking for how the participants connected with God through their heads (know), their hearts (be), and their bodies (do). I paid attention to their words, their tone of voice, their feelings, and their body language. I wanted to discover their view God, how they viewed themselves in relation to God, the amount of time spent in sustained prayer using their imagination, what emotions and memories emerged, how they used images and metaphors in prayer, ordinate and inordinate attachments, places of resistance, and how they were integrating their experience in prayer with the rest of their lives.

*Table 1. Phases and Timetables*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Who is involved</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Submit Ethics Proposal	Oct 8	Complete Ethics proposal, submit to the Research Ethics Board	Ben	I received approval from the Tyndale Research Ethics Board.
Pre - Implementation	Sept 1-15	Recruit participants	Ben	I shared information about the project so that participants know exactly what to expect and what will be required of them.
	Sept 15 <sup>th</sup> – Sept 20 <sup>th</sup>	Consent Forms distributed and returned	Ben and Participants	To ensure confidentiality of the group and permission to share information.
Implementation Orientation Session	Oct 4	Introduction to the project	Ben and Participants	A general overview of the project, a description of Spiritual Direction, and the practice of Safe Place; and an introduction to journaling.
	Oct 14 – Nov 12	Spiritual Direction Sessions	Ben and Participants	Each of the three participants met with me five times over the span of five weeks for spiritual direction
	Nov 29	Debriefing Session	Ben and Participants	Group interview. Participants were given a final questionnaire to be completed within two weeks.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Who is involved</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
	Dec 15	Questionnaire #2	Participants	The questions were similar to the first questionnaire, but with an emphasis on how spiritual direction and safe place affected their prayer life and the quality of their relationship with God
Post – Implementation	Dec 2021 – January 2022	Compile and analyze data	Ben	

### **Ethics in Ministry-Based Research**

As the curate of St. Peter and St. Paul’s Anglican church, I held a measure of power over the participants, although I am accountable to and under the authority of two senior clergy, parish council, and the bishop. When making decisions in my context of ministry, I am accountable to SPP and ANiC. My role as curate is to assist the senior clergy in all aspects of ministry in general, while overseeing the youth and young adults’ ministry in particular.

As curate and researcher, I was also acting as a spiritual director, while undergoing training through the Tyndale Spiritual Direction Internship program, where I am accountable to my supervisor and colleagues. As a spiritual director, I am in a position of trust. The participants shared private and personal information with me that was deeply sacred for them. I was intentional in making sure that the identity of each participant was anonymous, and that all information shared was

kept confidential. I reinforced this at the orientation session, the individual spiritual direction sessions, and the debriefing session.

I wanted to create a warm environment where the participants felt safe and able to share. I was aware that some of the participants would feel uncomfortable about the practice of Safe Place Prayer, and resistant in sharing what is happening in their personal lives. I was also aware that in the experience of drawing close to God, strong emotions can be felt, triggering traumatic memories. To mitigate this possible threat, I made it clear that I was not there to disciple or counsel them. They were not required to share with me any information about themselves that they did not feel comfortable sharing. I shared with them my working definition of Spiritual Direction: Spiritual direction happens when a director comes alongside a directee to help them become more aware of God's presence in their lives. The director comes into the relationship as a learner, a collector of spiritual practices, an investigator, with one ear open to the Holy Spirit and the other ear open to the directee, the director listens for clues, asks questions, and watches for opportunities to engage the directee in their relationship with God. The ultimate goal of spiritual direction is to cultivate a safe space for the directee to rest in, receive from and respond to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, in the consent form I explained why I was conducting the study, possible risks and benefits (Not discussed here? what I hoped to discover, what is required of them, how information would be shared, and an emphasis on the voluntary nature of their participation – should they choose to withdraw from the study. (See Appendix B – Consent Form).

## **Findings, Interpretation, and Outcomes**

The number of participants was small. I focused on going deeper into the data and telling their story by comparing and contrasting the answers from the two questionnaires with observations made during the spiritual direction sessions.

### **Findings**

The findings are arranged as follows:

1. The first questionnaire
2. The second questionnaire
3. Observations from spiritual direction sessions

#### **The First Questionnaire:**

Question #1 - What is your first memory of experiencing God? Kathleen remembered God's healing presence and focused on the comfort she received through prayer and the community while she was grieving the death of her father. Erin remembered experiencing God when she was six years old. She went to a Christian camp and heard the Gospel. Kristy could not remember a specific experience of God. She spoke of conflicting ideas of God. "I think I just had a childish idea that God was everywhere, and he loved me. But I'm not even sure about that." Her mom would joke with her and say, "God will get you" when she was being silly. Her mom taught her that God was distant and did not really care what we did in our everyday lives.

Question #2 - When in your life have you felt closest to God? I asked this question to help the participants remember what it felt like to be in God's

presence and to pay attention to what kind of environment they were in. Kristy felt closest to God singing on Sunday mornings. Kathleen shared the experience of being a part of a small group that did an inductive bible study together. Erin spoke of volunteering at a Christian school in Africa and playing the organ by herself in church where she had time to pray.

Question #3 – How would you describe your relationship with God now?

Erin spoke of the need for God in her life so that she would not go to hell. She then shared how she wanted to change this feeling for God and desired a personal friendship with God. Kristy was unsure of her relationship with God. She said she rarely felt his presence. Kathleen spoke of God's comfort and peace. She expressed gratitude that God is with her "on my eighteen-inch journey from my head to my heart".

Question #4 – How do you feel God feels about you? Kathleen shared

how God has lifted her out of chaos and loves her more than she loves him. Sometimes she thinks God sees her as a little child and waits patiently for her to grow up. Kristy spoke of knowing the right answer theologically: God loves me, but then shared how she has been in a long period of dryness and that she doesn't really understand how to interpret the experience of rejection through her relationships with how God feels towards her. Erin felt God was disappointed with her for the way she has been living and that it is up to her to do better.

Question #5 – What spiritual practices do you use in your private

devotions to help you facilitate your relationship to God? Kathleen practiced the morning prayer and compline each day. For many years she was a part of a small group and relied on the community to support her faith. She found journaling

helpful because she could look back and be reminded of the new things she learned. Erin found that listening to God's Word is a way that she could fit God into her schedule, but then shared how she would like to change her approach and discover new practices. Kristy said morning prayer was her main spiritual practice. She would sometimes pause at various places to be quiet before the Lord.

Question #6 – How would you describe your devotional life? Kristy said “dry”. Kathleen has found comfort in a consistent daily devotional time meditating on scripture and various parts of the morning prayer liturgy. Erin said she acknowledged a need to spend more time with God and find good habits. And what motivated her to seek God was a fear of going to hell.

Question #7 – What place does your imagination play in your prayer life? Erin answered, “None at the moment, but can't wait to learn more and apply it to my prayer life.” Kathleen spoke of sometimes visualizing the person for whom she is praying in God's presence. She was curious about whether using one's imagination in prayer is an authentic way of praying. Kristy shared how she used to use her imagination in prayer but not anymore.

Question #8 – What symbols and/or images help remind you of God's presence? Erin said: Nature, hymns, praying and practicing the organ in an empty church, being around Christians that are filled with the Holy Spirit. Kathleen said: The cross on a darkened hill during the 3 hours of darkness; butterflies; sunshine; wind/breezes/breath; the enormity of sky day or night; trees and shrubs; white water rapids/strong current in rivers; Jesus knocking at the door (as in the



painting); Jesus pulling me out of chaos with love and patience. Kristy said: A burning candle and a cross.

### **The Second Questionnaire**

The second questionnaire was distributed at the debriefing session, and I gave the participants two weeks to complete it (December 13th, 2021). Kristy and Erin handed theirs in within the requested time frame. Kathleen did not hand hers in until mid-March 2022. The time lapse between the end of the study and the completion of the questionnaire may have affected Kathleen's answers. She shared how Covid, the protests in Ottawa and the war in Ukraine had traumatized her and her family making it difficult for her to connect with God. Here are the findings from the second questionnaire.

Question #1 - How have you experienced God over the past 7 weeks?

Kathleen experienced "a harsh blow to my faith" with challenges in her personal life due to covid related stress. Kristy shared how she felt like she had become more aware of God's presence in her life and wanted to protect and grow in her relationship with God. Erin said she had experienced God's comfort and peace by hearing him speak to her when she practiced safe place prayer.

Question #2 – How would you describe your relationship with God?

Erin described her relationship with God as a friendship. She saw God as her helper, friend, and guide. Kristy said she'd noticed a change. She felt more open to the possibility of being in a relationship with God. She felt like she was becoming more confident in her awareness of God's presence. Kathleen shared how she was struggling. She continued to commit herself to morning prayer, but found little comfort in it or in reading scripture.

Question #3 – How do you feel God feels about you? Kathleen shared how it was difficult for her to meditate. She tried recently and was sad and weepy. She was having trouble trusting in God's goodness and guidance. Kristy said she felt that the knowledge of God's love was slowly trickling into her heart. Erin felt like God loved her and that he had been waiting patiently for her to come to him. She sensed God's desire to be her friend.

Question #4 – How would you describe your devotional life? Kathleen said she found it difficult to pray extemporaneously but found it helpful to have the support of the liturgy through Morning and Evening Prayer. Kristy said her devotional life had been sporadic. She participated in morning prayer but found it challenging to continue being aware of God's presence throughout the day. She also practiced meditating on scripture, *Visio Divina* using a picture I had shared with her in one of our spiritual direction sessions, and holy word meditation - "Peace" on the in breath and "be still" on the out breath. Erin said she had been praying more regularly. She was interested in finding a devotional Bible reading plan.

Question #5 – What place does your imagination play in your prayer life? Erin said her imagination would play an important role in her prayer life from now on and that she relied on it every time she prayed. Kathleen shared how she was shying away from using her imagination. She did not feel comfortable following her thoughts and not being able to control them. Kristy said it was a struggle to give herself permission to use her imagination in prayer, because of the years of being taught that intellectual assent and right doctrine were more important than paying attention to the emotive part of her being.

Question #6 - What symbols and/or images remind you of God's presence?

Erin remembered back to her time in Africa. There was a certain tree and a racing track where she went in her imagination to meet with Jesus. Kristy described the safe place she imagined during our spiritual direction sessions: a forest of crab apple trees in bloom, a gentle rain. Kathleen thought of her cottage, various paintings and pictures in her house, and delightful quotes and prayers that she printed out and posted on her bulletin board.

Question #7 – What was your experience of Safe Place Prayer? Kathleen said she would dearly like to get back into one and that it was a work in progress. Erin said her experience of Safe Place Prayer brought her back to faith in a loving, caring way, not a judgmental way. Kristy shared how she was apprehensive about Safe Place Prayer at first but found it helpful to be led by a spiritual director.

### **Observations From Spiritual Direction Sessions**

Kathleen's struggle to connect with God came through in our spiritual direction sessions. She had an active imagination, and sensed God speaking to her directly, but she would often doubt her ability to discern God's voice and in our first session she said things like "I feel like I'm faking it," "whatever beautiful thing I can think of I quickly think of something negative," "I am afraid things are not what they appear," "mountain top experiences of God are fleeting, they don't last and they are unreliable." I asked her how it feels to be in God's presence, she said "He's there, but in the background where I can't see." This sense of God being distant and feeling insecure and unable to relate to God was the main theme that emerged throughout our spiritual direction sessions.

In the first session, Erin shared how she felt God was angry with her for the mistakes she had made and the brokenness she was experiencing. She blamed herself for things that were beyond her control. People in her life misrepresented God to her and told her lies about what God is like. But each time she encountered God through Safe Place Prayer, she recognized how God wanted to be with her, and this helped her name the lies she had been told, and claim what was true of God. She saw herself walking hand in hand with Jesus. She saw him smiling at her, listening to her, and laughing with her. After the first session, when we reflected on her experience in prayer, she said “I was hugging him at the end, connecting with him in a way was special. I want to go back there all the time, talk with him, walk with him, and listen to him. It’s sort of making me cry because he wants this relationship. Why haven’t I done this before? He is happy I’ve come now. He loves me.”

Kristy had a difficult time concentrating during Safe Place Prayer. In our first session, she could only maintain focus for about two minutes. In part, she had been struggling with anxiety around a particular memory. I spoke about the importance of lament, bringing painful memories and feelings to the Lord. I listened to her share her story and gave her space to grieve before the Lord. I also introduced her to the practice of centering prayer to help her be still before the Lord. She practiced centering prayer on her own and by our final session she was able to focus her attention in Safe Place Prayer for a sustained thirty minutes. This was a substantial positive change for her.

Many of the symbols and images shared by the participants in the two questionnaires appeared during the Safe Place Prayer sessions. By far the most

common images employed during Safe Place Prayer were from the natural world: trees, forests, mountains, water, rain. I also noticed how different each participant viewed God. For Kristy, the dominant image of God was the Holy Spirit. She experienced the Spirit's presence through the image of a red blanket covering her in a hammock, a gentle rain falling on her, and light filling her from within. For Kathleen, the dominant image of God was Father. She spent a lot of time discussing her earthly father with whom she had a strong relationship. And she would often cry when she thought about his passing. Kathleen saw herself as a little child learning to walk and God delighting in her efforts. For Erin, the dominant image of God was Jesus. She pictured herself walking, sitting, and talking with Jesus in Safe Place Prayer.

### **Interpretation**

In this section, I compare the data from the two questionnaires, my observations made in the spiritual direction sessions, and the insights from other practitioners to describe the relationship between the use of imagination in prayer and one's subjective experience of God.

I noticed a relationship between each of the participants' operative view of God, their view of self, their use of imagination in prayer, and the quality of their devotional life. There is sometimes a difference between one's professed view and operative view of God. Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au explain:

Sometimes the image of God we verbally profess is not really the image that holds sway. It is not uncommon for our professed image (what we consciously believe and say is our image of God) to deviate greatly from our operative image (the actual image that influences our thoughts, feelings and attitudes) (Au 2006, Kindle Locations 1067-1068).

Kristy and Erin were open to using their imagination in prayer and they both experienced a positive change in their view of God, their view of self and they were motivated to be with God out of love. Kathleen struggled using her imagination in prayer, had only a slight change in her view of God and self and she prayed out of a sense of duty. During each session, I would either direct her using Safe Place Prayer, or introduce her to a different evocative practice to help activate her imagination. There were moments of connection when she realized that God was close, but she struggled to accept her physical limitations and often compared herself to other Christians who she felt were more spiritual than she was. There were moments in each session, when she felt encouraged, hopeful, and excited by her discoveries. But by the following session, she would gravitate back to a view of God being distant and disappointed with her, a low self-esteem, and feeling spiritually dry in her devotions. It is important to note that in giving spiritual direction, the goal is to cultivate space for the directee to work out their view of God, and struggle can be a sign of wanting to change, which was true with Kathleen.

Another factor that may have affected the findings could be that I met with Kristy in person and Erin and Kathleen on Zoom. Again, if I were to repeat a study like this, I would keep the meeting place the same for everyone, either online or in-person. Or I would modify the study and create three groups: a control group in which I would not meet with the participants over the 5-week period but assign them the task of practicing Safe Place Prayer on their own, a group that meets in-person, and a group that meets on Zoom. Then I would compare and contrast.

In reflecting on the practice of Safe Place Prayer, I realize that some people are more comfortable using their imaginations in prayer than others. One thing I did notice was how Kathleen and Kristy had more difficulty using their imaginations at first. The idea was new to them, and they expressed concern because of their experience using their imaginations for evil. I shared with them my experience of Safe Place Prayer and how it affected my relationship with God. I also explained what I learned from Greg A. Boyd about how the Holy Spirit can use our imaginations to speak to us. “When our representations of spiritual matters are vivid and correspond to reality, we are able to experience the things of God as real and are transformed by this experience” (Boyd 2004, 76). As we continued to meet, Erin was much more willing to exercise her imagination when she prayed.

The findings show how Safe Place Prayer made a difference for all three participants in how they related to God. It allowed them time to rest in the presence of God, receive from him, and respond to his grace. This research project gave me the opportunity to clarify my approach to spiritual direction: helping people rest in the presence of God through some type of spiritual practice, paying attention to what the Spirit is doing as we prayerfully interact, and encouraging the directee to respond to what God is doing and saying.

### **Outcomes**

As a pastor and spiritual director in training, I am always looking for ways to help God’s people draw close to him and grow into maturity in Christ. This project has helped me grow in confidence of who God is, what God is like and how the Holy Spirit works in us.

The project has influenced other parishioners from St. Peter and St. Paul's to seek God through spiritual direction. After the study, a number of people approached me seeking spiritual direction and they specifically wanted to learn how to practice safe place prayer. I have started meeting with a few of them monthly. My hope is that spiritual direction will become a normative practice within my parish, available to other parishes within the Anglican Network in Canada churches, and that more and more people will come to see the benefit to being in a spiritual direction relationship.

The project was a spiritual benefit to all those who participated. Kathleen continued to struggle in cultivating an intimate relationship with God, but she expressed a desire in practicing Safe Place Prayer in the context of spiritual direction. Kristy and I have been meeting monthly since the end of the research project and she is much more comfortable practicing safe place prayer, more confident in herself, she has a clearer picture of how God is calling her, she experienced significant freedom from certain lies that she has believed about herself, she is more trusting and dependent on God, and she appears more at peace in her circumstances. Erin continues to practice Safe Place Prayer on her own and we have connected a few times to see how she is getting along.

Another outcome to the project was the reminder of how important it is for us to be in relationship with other believers. Spiritual direction provides an opportunity to engage with God and another person at a deeper level. To have another person who listens to you, asks questions to help you discern God's voice, maintains confidentiality, and loves you regardless of what you share - this is the kind of environment where spiritual growth can occur.



I was not surprised by these outcomes. From my experience giving and receiving direction, I have come to see the imagination as central to our spiritual growth in Christ. The project was one small step towards exposing believers at St. Peter and St. Paul's to the treasure that spiritual direction and Safe Place Prayer are. The project also helped me develop practical skills that I can use in my context of ministry and I was able to see my spiritual formation model working in the lives of these participants.

If I were to do the project differently, should I have the opportunity, there are a number of things I would change. First, I would recruit a higher number of participants, between five and eight. Three people is a very small sample size. Second, I would introduce a different spiritual practice each week, that requires the use of imagination: Safe Place Prayer, *Visio Divina*, Gospel-contemplation, making art, and guided prayer. Third, I would do all the spiritual direction sessions in person. I found it distracting trying to do spiritual direction on Zoom. There were times when the internet did not work and it would cause the connection to glitch or shut down. I found myself feeling quite anxious and unable to fully be present because it happened so regularly. When I met in person with the directees, there were no distractions, and I was able to read their body language, and connect more naturally. Fourth, I would spread out the spiritual direction sessions over 10 weeks, and instead of only meeting one-on-one, I would also facilitate group spiritual direction sessions. For example, in week 1, we would meet one-on-one to practice Safe Place Prayer, then in week 2, we would meet as a group to practice Safe Place Prayer. This would not only double the exposure to each spiritual practice, it would also give the participants the

opportunity to discuss and learn from one another. Fifth, I would use the Contemplative Reflection Form (CRF) method of collecting data that I learned from the Spiritual Direction internship. If I would have had this tool before I started my research project, I think it would have helped me pay closer attention to what was happening in the directees, but also what was happening in me.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings from this research project indicate a relationship between the use of imagination in prayer and how we experience and relate to God. Safe Place Prayer is a practice that allows the living God to reveal himself to us in a way that we can understand. It is amazing how unique, complicated and mysterious we all are, and yet the Triune God uses the images and symbols available to us and addresses us directly, bringing about real change.

In my new role as Curate at St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church Ottawa, I am committed to sharing what I have learned from this project with those willing to venture into a deeper relationship with the Triune God. Our faith is strengthened when we are able to rest in, receive from, and respond to the Holy Spirit.

I had the pleasure of working with a small group of Believers who were vulnerable, honest, and real with me. It was truly sacred space. My faith was strengthened from this experience, and I am hoping there will be many people in Ottawa, and in my parish, who show interest in receiving and giving spiritual direction. I believe it is one of the greatest gifts to the church today. The experience of sitting with another person in the presence of the Triune God,

waiting on him together, reading scripture together, praising him together, sharing from the heart together – the glory of God shines all around!

## **CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION: SPIRITUAL FORMATION: THE LIFE CYCLE OF A FRUIT BEARING TREE**

*Blessed is the man who...delights in the law...He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. ~  
Psalm 1:1-3*

As I bring my integrated portfolio to a conclusion, the metaphor of a fruit-bearing tree has helped bring clarity to my story, my understanding of spiritual formation, and my calling as a pastor and spiritual director. A seed must be planted in the soil and die in order for new life to emerge. As the roots go down into the soil, absorbing nutrients, the stalk moves upward towards the light. Dead branches need to be pruned, helping the tree mature, developing fruit, which leads to reproduction.

I see my life as a seed. I was planted in the soil of anxiety, raised in a broken family, and influenced to think of myself in a way that was not true. But nothing could affect the core of who I am in Christ. The spirit of a person cannot be affected by the outside world. Like the shell of a seed protects the life within, even more so, God protects our spirit. The spirit of a person lies dormant, until the life of God within begins to grow and break out of the shell. The only way the life within can break out is if God makes it happen. And the way God makes life

happen is by speaking. This was my experience of coming to faith in Christ. God spoke and I came to life. He filled my spirit with his Spirit and then led me into a new world above the surface. Even though my roots are still entangled in the soil of my childhood, God has been establishing my roots, so that I am able to move towards the light. Being in the presence of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, is the kind of intimacy I have been longing for all my life. Over the past twenty years, I have come to know the living God as my loving Heavenly Father who provides for all my needs, he also happens to be the master gardener who knows exactly what and how to prune that we might grow into maturity in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the introduction, I shared how I see spiritual formation as essential for the development of the individual believer, the health of the church, and the salvation of the world. I believe this to be even more true now that I have completed the program. I developed a spiritual formation model that emerged out of my spiritual autobiography and theological study. The model is a description of my spiritual formation definition: The Holy Spirit led process of forming every dimension of the human self into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This formational process is going to include a change in how we think, what we love and what we do with our bodies. The Spirit is leading us into knowing God the Father, the way Jesus knows his Father. This intimate knowing deepens as we learn to abide in Christ through the exercise of spiritual practices. And over time, as we walk in step with the Spirit, surrendering and receiving from Christ, the fruit of the spirit grows in our lives.

As I reflect on my spiritual autobiography, spiritual formation model and research project, I have developed a number of convictions and insights that have formed the way I approach spiritual direction. Perhaps they can help spiritual directors and Christian practitioners minister to others.

- Jesus is the focal point in our relationship with God. God the Father makes himself known to us through his Son and calls us to ‘listen to him’. The Holy Spirit’s primary role is to illuminate our hearts so that we would see Jesus through eyes of faith, hear the still small voice of Jesus, and know the loving presence of Jesus within and without.
- Jesus, the Word made flesh, primarily speaks to us through the Word written, forming our hearts and minds by his truth, and guides us in how best to love and speak to others.
- I have come to see Christian ministry as: giving away what we receive from the Lord. We cannot give away something that we ourselves do not have. This is an invitation to pray, “Lord, draw those people to me, whom you are drawing to yourself; what you are doing in me, do in others; what you want me to receive, give me opportunities to give away”.
- As Christian practitioners, our number one priority must be to cultivate a life of prayer. This takes practice. As we discipline ourselves to pray at set times in silence and solitude, we are more likely to be aware of God’s presence with us as we go about our day.
- Before I meet with a directee for the first time, I ask them to complete a Myers Briggs Personality test, a Sacred Pathways test, and an Enneagram. These three tests give me an idea of who they are, and how I might best

engage with them. During the first session, I ask them to share their spiritual autobiography with me, and I make notes so that I can go back and prayerfully reflect on them. I also give the directee a shortened version of my spiritual autobiography, and what drew me into spiritual direction, as a way of letting them know a bit about me.

- I spend 15-20 minutes praying for the directee, prior to our meeting. I ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify my imagination and then visualize the person and Jesus together. I pay attention to what I'm hearing, seeing and feeling. I use a journal to record images, words, phrases, bible passages, ideas, and questions that I bring with me into the session.
- It is important to ask good questions. I find the most natural way of generating good questions comes from a posture of curiosity. Seek to discover why the directee thinks, feels, acts the way they do. Pay attention to, and use the questions in the Bible: Where are you? (Genesis 3:9), Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:15), What do you want me to do for you? (Mark 10:51). Questions give people the space to process what they are going through with the Lord.
- When you meet with a directee, listen to what is happening in their lives, and how they are connecting with God, before sharing what you have received from the Spirit, and only share, if what you heard from the Spirit lines up with what you are hearing from the directee.
- In addition to prayerfully preparing for the session, you can expect the Holy Spirit to speak to you, while the directee is sharing during the

session. I've noticed that praying before the session helps me become more aware of what the Spirit is doing in the moment.

- If you come to a place in the session and you don't know how to proceed, it is worth pausing to wait upon the Holy Spirit to guide you. We must rely on the Holy Spirit from start to finish.
- If you come to the end of a session and you feel like there was little progress, remember that one of the main gifts of spiritual direction is presence. Being a loving, consistent friend on the journey of faith is a way of reflecting the loving, consistent friendship of Jesus Christ.
- After a session, take a few moments to pray, commit the person and your time together to the Lord, then ask the Holy Spirit to release you from carrying anything that you need not carry with you. Remember the weight is on Jesus' shoulders (Isaiah 9:6), his yoke is easy, and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30).
- Be a developer and collector of spiritual practices that you can add to your spiritual direction tool kit. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be creative in your devotional time. Quite often, the Lord will give you ideas as you pray, and engage with Scripture, but he also uses images and metaphors that mean something to you. I take a lot of photos of different things that catch my attention, and I will use a photo, along with a scripture verse that connects with the photo, to lead people in *Visio Divina*.

Moving forward, I would like to use my model in creating a curriculum to help individuals and/or small groups become more aware of themselves in relationship to the Triune God, practice spiritual disciplines that most help them



abide in Christ, and serve the church and the world in a way that glorifies Jesus Christ. I would include discussion questions at the end of each chapter, provide suggestions and instructions for how to practice the spiritual disciplines, along with further reading for deeper reflection. I would then take the curriculum and develop a course that I could offer to my parish. I think it would be a valuable asset for people to have the skill and training to write their autobiography. And I would like to do a follow up research study implementing my model to measure the overall health of individual believers and the long-term impact in the life of a parish. I suspect there are many factors that affect our ability to be aware of God's presence in our lives: sleep, diet, exercise, relationships, habits, and our mental and physical health. I would say these are all equally important parts of life that I would like to further explore and include in my model.

What I've learned from the spiritual formation doctoral program at Tyndale, is that: God desires to be known, he desires to be with us, and he desires that we reflect the character of his Son Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. God knows exactly what we need in order to help us mature into fruit-bearing trees that reproduce the life of God in others.

## **APPENDICIES**

## Appendix A – Invitation Letter

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

This fall, I will be conducting an action research project as part of my Doctorate of Ministry studies through Tyndale University. Specifically, I will be looking at the correlation between the use of the imagination in prayer and our subjective experience of God.

My role as researcher, will also be to act as a *Spiritual Director* – someone who “listens to us, helps us notice things, helps us respond to God with greater freedom, introduces spiritual practices that can lead to spiritual growth, and loves us” Majorie J. Thompson

The spiritual practice I will introduce is called *Safe Place Prayer*, which is a way of allowing the Holy Spirit to engage the imagination in order to meet with God. “God created us with image-making brains with the capacity of interacting with him, ourselves, others and the world around us...When our imaginative representations communicate truth to us, when they correspond to the way things actually are, and when they evoke appropriate feelings to motivate us to behave in effective ways, the imagination is our great ally. When our representations of spiritual matters are vivid and correspond with reality, we are able to experience the things of God as real and are transformed by this experience.” Greg Boyd.

I am looking for five adult volunteers who are committed Christians, open to the Holy Spirit, and desire to grow in their relationship with God, who would be willing to meet with me and pray.

### What am I asking of you?

1. Questionnaire #1 – You will receive it on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and you will have two weeks to complete. The questions will be open-ended designed to help you become more aware of the dynamics of your prayer life and the quality of your relationship with God.
2. Orientation Session – Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6-8pm via Zoom. During this time, I will give a general overview of the project, describe what we will do (Spiritual Direction and Safe Place prayer), and explain how to keep a journal to help aid you in processing what you experience in prayer.
3. Five 1-hour Spiritual Direction sessions, once a week, between October 5<sup>th</sup> – November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

4. Debriefing Session – Monday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6-8pm, via Zoom. Where we will discuss the experience of spiritual direction and safe place prayer together as a group.

5. Questionnaire #2 – You will be given another questionnaire, during the debriefing session, with similar questions to the first questionnaire, but related to your experience of spiritual direction and safe place.

Please prayerfully consider participating in this project and let me know by September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Thank You,

Ben Vanderheide

## Appendix B - Consent Form

### Consent to Participate in the Study

*Growing in Intimacy with God through Spiritual Direction  
and the practice of Safe Place prayer*

**October 2021 – November 2021**

Conducted by *Ben Vanderheide*  
*Curate*  
*St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church Ottawa*

Under the supervision of *Dr. Mark Chapman PhD*  
For the course **DMSF 0943 ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

**I understand that I am invited to participate in the research study named above.** This study is intended to record and analyze the impact of weekly spiritual direction using the practice of Safe Place to measure one's subjective experience of God.

**By signing this form in the space provided at the end, I indicate my agreement to participate in the study.**

#### **What Will Participation Involve?**

My participation will consist of :

1. Questionnaire #1 – You will receive it on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and you will have two weeks to complete. The questions will be open-ended designed to help you become more aware of the dynamics of your prayer life and the quality of your relationship with God.
2. Orientation Session – Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6-8pm via Zoom. During this time, I will give a general overview of the project, describe what we will do (Spiritual Direction and Safe Place prayer), and explain how to keep a journal to help aid you in processing what you experience in prayer.
3. Five 1-hour Spiritual Direction sessions, once a week, between October 5<sup>th</sup> – November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021. During this time, the researcher will take detailed notes of the session. All data collected will be confidential.
4. Debriefing Session – Monday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 6-8pm, via Zoom. Where we will discuss the experience of spiritual direction and safe place prayer together as a group.

5. Questionnaire #2 – You will be given another questionnaire, during the debriefing session, with similar questions to the first questionnaire, but related to your experience of spiritual direction and safe place.

### **Are There Significant Risks?**

My participation in this study will entail that I share information about myself, in the context of prayer, that is personal and confidential. The experience of being open and vulnerable before God may elicit strong emotions or trigger traumatic memories. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by the researcher creating an environment that is safe, welcoming, and restful.

### **What Benefits Will My Participation Bring?**

I acknowledge that through my participation in this study, I may experience God more intimately, and help further the study of how the imagination is used in prayer.

### **Will the Information I Share Be Kept Confidential?**

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for publication in the researchers Doctorate of Ministry portfolio. Data collected from or about me will not be shared with other researchers or re-used in other research projects unless my consent is obtained again for those purposes. In order to safeguard my confidentiality, the researcher will report the information using a coded system that protects my identity and privacy.

### **Will My Identity Remain Anonymous?**

My identity will not be made public to the church. The only people to know I will be participating in this research are the senior clergy of St. Peter and St. Paul's Anglican Church, and the other participants in the study.

### **What Will Happen to the Records of My Participation?**

The data collected will be stored in the form of electronic files. Electronic files will be securely stored on an external hard drive. The records will only be accessible by the researcher: Ben Vanderheide, and they will be deleted upon completion of the Doctorate of Ministry Spiritual Formation Program.

### **How Will the Study Results Be Shared?**

The information from this study will be included in the action research project and the final integration project in completion of the Doctorate of Ministry Spiritual

Formation Program. The final integration project will be a public document archived through Tyndale University. All participants will be notified of the results upon publication.

### **Is My Participation Totally Voluntary?**

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this study. There will be no penalty if I choose not to participate. If I choose to participate, **I can withdraw from the study at any time** and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all information gathered about me prior to my withdrawal will be deleted and not included in the final study report. I understand that if I choose to participate in this research I have not waived any legal rights.

### **Consent to Participate**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understood the above information and I freely consent to participate in this research study by signing in the space provided below.

If I have any further questions about the study, I may at any stage contact the director Dr. Mark Chapman PhD (mchapman@tyndale.ca).

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Tyndale University. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study or my rights as a participant, I may contact the Research Ethics Board at reb@tyndale.ca.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix C - Questionnaire #1**

1. What is your first memory of experiencing God?
2. When in your life have you felt the closest to God?
3. How would you describe your relationship with God now?
4. How do you feel God feels about you?
5. What spiritual practices do you use in your private devotions to help you facilitate your relationship to God?
6. How would you describe your devotional life?
7. What place does your imagination play in your prayer life?
8. What symbols, images, things help remind you of God's presence?



## **Appendix D - Questionnaire #2**

1. How have you experienced God over the past 7-weeks?
2. How would you describe your relationship with God?
3. How do you feel God feels about you?
4. How would you describe your devotional life?
5. What place does your imagination play in your prayer life?
6. What symbols, images, things help remind you of God's presence?

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