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Tyndale University College & Seminary

An Exploration of Spiritual Formation to Increase Awareness
and Attachment to God, Self and Others

A Research Portfolio
submitted in partial fulfillment
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Doctor of Ministry
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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this portfolio was to explore spiritual formation through lectio Divina, spiritual direction and a focus group to increase awareness of attachment to God, self and others. The portfolio includes a spiritual autobiography (Chapter 2) that traces my life story and God's presence in it. This is a wonderful tool in becoming more spiritually aware of the many movements of God throughout one's lifetime. This is followed by a spiritual formation model (Chapter 3) that helps believers to answer the question Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Along with, "Who do you say that you are?" The model assists believers to explore their responses to these questions. Then a field research project (Chapter 4) is offered that tests the effectiveness of the model through the experience of five participants over a ten-day period.

The results of the project found in Chapter 4, points to a more secure attachment to God, self and others which was reported by four out of the five participants. Spiritual direction was well received by all participants. Participants also appreciated the mentoring provided and having the experience of someone listening with them for the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. All participants felt they would have benefitted more if the project was longer in length. They suggested a time span of three months. Four of the five participants expressed a desire to continue studying using various components of the project. They stated it provided what was missing in their ability to increase attachment to God, self and others.

DEDICATION

To my husband Tony:
'You and me, Babe – all the way!'

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

By the grace of God and for the glory of God this achievement has been accomplished through the generous, and wise investment of my loving family, my Professors, and my academic adviser.

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All biblical quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), unless otherwise indicated.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Who do you say that Jesus is, and who do you say that you are? These two questions and the application of attachment theory lie behind the three inter-related research projects that make up this portfolio on spiritual formation. The term “spiritual formation” is used within to mean the process of coming into union with God as our center out of which we speak and act, so that others encounter Christ in us.

I am a psychotherapist and spiritual director. I am privileged to listen to many personal stories and spiritual journeys. My understanding of spiritual formation has been impacted through my engagement in psychosomatic styles of therapy and my training in spiritual direction. Psychosomatic orientations incorporate interventions for the psyche as well as the body. My understanding of spiritual formation is to offer a holistic approach of a person’s mind, body and spirit.

There are a variety of authors in theology, psychotherapy and spirituality that have contributed to my knowledge and the approach shared in this portfolio. Their names are noted throughout the body of this work. There are two writers that I would like to highlight, their insights have brought greater understanding to

my own. Dr. M. Robert Mulholland was a New Testament Professor who wrote several books (Shaped by the Word of God: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation, 1985, 2000; The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self, 2006) regarding an individual's spiritual journey in being formed into the living word of God. Dr. Pat Ogden is the founder of the Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute, co-founder of the Hakomi Institute, psychologist, international speaker, trainer and author (Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy, 2006). Sensorimotor psychotherapy, a body-based talk therapy, offers a combination of cognitive and somatic awareness with attachment theory, neuroscience, and mindfulness to treat trauma.

Who Do You Say You Are and Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

In the following chapters I share my quest to answer Jesus' question to his disciples and us today, "Who do you say that you are?" And, "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks his disciples who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:13-20). Knowing who Jesus is to us, as individuals, is not as easy to answer as it may seem. It requires recognizing our internal patterns of behavior, those of our family members, and our defense strategies which help us stay safe relationally but hinders us from deep connection. These patterns of behavior, that are learned and developed within our closest relationships are the same strategies we use when we interact with God. These defense strategies help us to navigate our attachment bonds. I will be speaking more about our attachment style which will help us identify and understand our inner fears that block greater connection and

intimacy with God as this involves self-awareness. Thomas Merton expressed well the aversion toward self-awareness when he stated, “There is no coming to consciousness without pain. People will do anything - no matter how absurd - to avoid facing their own souls. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious” (Kelsey 1976, 103).

In studying the book of Haggai God began to speak to me of the blueprints of my life. That is, the underlying defense mechanisms that I used to navigate my life, imbedded patterns of behavior learned through family and life circumstances that I functioned in without much thought. In the story itself the power of God’s desire to interact with his people is felt throughout the text. The first word the Lord speaks to them is to call their attention to their own true state. God asks them repeatedly to consider their ways and what it has done for them. They have paneled their homes, they plant much and harvest little. They eat and drink but are not full. They have clothes that cannot keep them warm and though they earn wages they do not see the effects of their money because they have holes in their pockets (Haggai 1:3-6 NIV). The Lord gives them a solution to their problem and at the same time lets them know why they were not successful. This is part of the process of bringing one’s darkness to conscious awareness as Merton described. God in his mercy never leaves us alone in the process. He tells them to go to the mountains and get timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure and be honored. It is because you have left my house in ruins that I blew away your harvest and withheld the rain and called a drought on all the land, people and

produce (Haggai 1:7-11 NIV). The Lord is showing them the connection between His house and the state of their lives without him. Realization sets in and the people fear the Lord. When this understanding penetrates their hearts then the Spirit of the Lord stirs up all the people and the building of the temple begins.

One of the blueprints of my life that the Lord showed me was a pattern of striving. This affected every area of my life. I was a doer and did not know how to “be.” Through the study of this book the Lord began the process of realigning the inner movements of my soul with Him as my center. Eventually I learnt how to become someone who knows how to “be” with the Lord.

One role of the church is to disciple or spiritually train believers in their faith. Churches generally offer a wide menu of programs from cradle to grave to assist believers to connect with God and other members. These programs can foster spiritual growth and connection with others. The difficulty is that it may not be easy for some believers to know how to integrate the program information with their own preset patterns of behavior that they may or may not be fully aware of. Church programs provide information to believers that they themselves internalize in a way that may not guarantee success. Some behavioral patterns are so strongly embedded that to change would require something greater than oneself for an exchange. A professor remarked, “We can lay down our burdens before God but our biggest burden we won’t lay down, because our biggest burden is intertwined with ourselves, our own identity” (Shepherd 2014). We simply do not grasp the love of God toward us well enough nor are we grasped

sufficiently by it. Henri Nouwen notes that there is a “struggle and a lot of work for those who come near to God but after that there is indescribable joy... we ought to light the divine fire and ourselves with tears and efforts” (Nouwen 2015, 47).

In my own life, though I desired and longed for God, though I had been an active member in many programs and activities at church I struggled to find a way to connect more deeply with God. God was faithful in providing me with a mentor who was a selfless and giving individual. She was attentive to my needs, she was gentle in her speech and was supportive of my growth without wanting anything in return. Her nurturing and caregiving style impacted me deeply healing some of my own insecure attachment wounds. I have modeled some of the ways that I engage in ministry and my style of counselling after her. In other seasons of my life God brought others both professionally and spiritually, including himself, who led me into greater understanding. Certainly, “Holiness is not a condition into which we drift” (Nouwen 2015, 23). It is a disciplined response to the call of the spirit (Nouwen 2015, 59). In this portfolio you will learn more about my journey with God, how I longed to connect deeply with him but was hindered through inability to trust him and not knowing how. Eventually through continued seeking, attempts, mentorship and relationship with God I found the way to spiritual connection and through that my song. My song is that for which I have been created, gifted and formed to do that brings me joy and strength in living and being with my Lord. This portfolio speaks of my desire and purpose to pass on

what I have learned in my walk with God. I heard the Lord say to me, “I am calling you to teach those I have called to run, how to run.”

The Theme of Attachment

John Bowlby (1907-1990) is considered the founder of the attachment theory. A British psychiatrist, he classified parenting behavior in a similar biologically rooting category with sexual and eating behavior which participates in the survival response of an individual and their offspring. Bowlby defined attachment behavior as, “Any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick, and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving” (Bowlby 1988, 27).

The theme of attachment is a thread that will be found throughout this portfolio and plays a significant part in my understanding of healthy spiritual formation becoming possible. Becoming enlightened of my own attachment style within my family of origin brought to my awareness the way I interacted and connected with God and with others. By gaining understanding of my own insecure anxious attachment style and the repair of it by growing in the love and secure attachment to God and others (through counselling, my own knowledge of therapy and my husband through his own spiritual growth in attachment to God). God granted me the smaller steps of dying to self, no longer leaning into my own understanding, instead trusting God to lead me in his ways of love and unity.

Attachment behaviors are forged from early life experience in a person's family of origin and the intensity of emotions in these behavioral responses indicate the positive or negative aspects of that relationship. For example, where the attachment relationship with the child and caregiver is secure the individual will seek help when they need it, exhibit exploratory behavior as they have experienced their caregivers to be "available, responsive and helpful". This describes secure attachment (Bowlby 1980, 242). Individuals with insecure attachments, when disturbed, will exhibit emotions more intensely, are less likely to seek help when needed (avoidant) and are less likely to explore their environment, and are more likely to cling or stay close to caregivers (anxious). The goal of these behaviors (whether positive such as smiling or negative as in clinging) are to maintain connection with the caregiver. Even though there is some variation in individual experiences that were formed from birth to adolescence. Bowlby found that the attachment style the individual acquires stays with them throughout their life or as Bowlby noted, from "cradle to grave" (Bowlby 1979, 129). This consistency in attachment styles allowed it to be researched and studied over the years.

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) was a developmental psychologist who worked with John Bowlby as a researcher in the Tavistock Clinic, England. Ainsworth recognized the relevance of Bowlby's attachment theory though she was uncertain of its impact between an infant and its mother. She conducted two field studies observing proximity seeking behavior of children to their mother's

and the mother's responses to their young (1-2 years old) children. The first study was in Uganda in the 1950's and a second similar study was done in 1963 while working in Baltimore, USA. In 1978 Mary Ainsworth created a laboratory study known as the Strange Situation, where the term 'strange' refers to something that is unfamiliar. Where a young infant (1-2 years old) and their mother enter a room where toys are available for the child to engage with. Soon after, a stranger enters the room and speaks with the mother. The mother then leaves the room and her child is left alone with the stranger for 3 minutes. The mother then returns to the room and her child, the stranger departs. The mother and child are alone in the room. Ainsworth was interested in the infant's reactions to the toys, the stranger, and interactions with the mother leaving and returning to the room. From these experiments Ainsworth refined and provided evidence for Bowlby's attachment theory. Ainsworth categorized attachment styles in three terms: Secure, Insecure Ambivalent, and Insecure Avoidant. A fourth attachment style was later added by a student of Ainsworth, Mary Main, termed Insecure Disorganized (Main and Solomon 1990, 121-160). These styles will be explored in greater detail later.

In chapter 3 of this portfolio I use the terms armoured self and authentic self. The term armoured self refers to the armour an individual ascribes to themselves at an earlier age of development when feeling overwhelmed by their caregivers and unable to communicate their thoughts and beliefs freely. This armour is created out of their own strength and understanding during that time and are behaviors the individual 'puts on' that allows them to remain connected

though not necessarily true to their internal self. Their self remains hidden behind the armoured self and only presents itself to others when it feels secure to do so or the individual is strong enough and no longer needs to interact through their armour. Authentic self is the inner self that can express itself to others without fear or barriers. One's thoughts, feelings and beliefs are shared openly and unhindered at the person's own discretion. The term armoured self is a modification I have made to a somatic term found in the body of literature (Conger 1994, 92). The term authentic self is a common term found in psychology. I have found the terms armoured self and authentic self to be suitable for the purposes of this portfolio. Discussion toward growing in self-awareness, authentic expression, union with God are found throughout this portfolio.

Components of the Portfolio

This portfolio has three major components: formation through a spiritual autobiography, a model of spiritual formation, and the testing of this model in the form of an action research project and its results.

Chapter 2, a spiritual autobiography, tracks the spiritual experiences, development, and insights through the life of the writer and seeking to see the movements of God toward the person and their response. It is a powerful and emotional experience as you refresh your memory of spiritual interactions, reflect on its impact, and see the spiritual themes that are thread through one's life. As well, it gives an overarching view of one's life, a precursor to when we stand before the judgement throne of God and give account for our life (Romans 14:10-

12). To take stock and give God praise for his many mercies of grace in our lives and an opportunity for further growth.

Chapter 3 develops a model of spiritual formation which considers the spirit, mind and body, of an individual and offers a customized intensive mentorship as a means for spiritual formation. Individuals come to spiritual formation out of their own life story and have their own strengths, weaknesses, challenges, goals and calling. Everyone is considered on their own and a spiritual plan for growth considered. This intensive mentorship program will be part of a school of ministry and may include some or all the following: biblical study, intentional mentorship relationship, psychotherapy, spiritual direction, training in various courses of interest.

Chapter 4 is the report of an action research project. This component involves the results of a small group project involving five participants. Who through individual biblical study, focus group discussion and personal spiritual direction seek to grow in greater self-awareness and connection with God, themselves and others.

A final component, Chapter 5, includes my concluding thoughts of this research journey and doctoral program. I reflect on my hopes and why I choose this program and some of the fruit that I have seen.

CHAPTER TWO:
A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I have always sought God, to love and know him more and to help others do the same. This spiritual autobiography shows the many movements of God to draw me nearer to him.

Growing Up

In this section I would like to share with you stories from my family and how this helped to shape my spiritual formation.

My Parents

My parents were the primary formative influence in my life while I was growing up. The churches of Germany have a history that can be fascinating even to this day, and my family was deeply rooted in that history. My paternal grandparents had been members of a church in Germany whose historical background was connected to *Herrenhut* (Lord's Watch) Moravian Christians who prayed in shifts for one hundred years, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The Moravian Christians have a rich history of evangelism. They were known for their missionary work to the slaves in the Caribbean Islands and for impacting John Wesley in his spiritual journey. However, while my father had

good memories of his childhood, he also had memories of being raised in a very harsh and strict Evangelical Christian home. When my father was a young child living in Germany, he had played with Jewish boys in his neighbourhood, and throughout his adult years, he and my mother had financially supported Jewish causes. These interactions with the Jewish community and the Jewish heritage of our Christian faith was later to influence me.

My mother was from a very loving Catholic/Lutheran family where little mention of church or religion was made beyond my mother's Lutheran confirmation. My mother's parents were very loving and generous towards us. I loved to visit them and spent many summers with them. My parents immigrated to Canada in the 1950's and lived a non-Christian lifestyle. The spiritual growth of my parents can be seen in the types of churches they attended. Initially, our family went to a Lutheran church where the pastor did not believe in the virgin birth. From there, we attended another Lutheran church, which was a bit more evangelical. I was confirmed in this congregation at the age of fourteen.

I cannot remember a time when I did not love the Lord; but my earliest understanding of God came from my cousin. During one of our family visits my cousin and I were talking about God and I told her I wanted to ask Jesus into my heart. I was young, about seven years old, and my cousin prayed with me a simple prayer. She then gave me a big hug and with twinkles in her eyes said, "Oh I love you Susie." I felt very pleased with my decision.

In high school, I met and became very close friends with two Baptist girls who helped me to understand what it meant to be a Christian. My understanding up to then was that I honour God by living as a good person. Through my Baptist friends, I began to think of God as being more deeply involved with my life: more relational, closer to me. Two years later, when I was 18 years old, my parents joined me at the Baptist church. My parents were also seeking God in a deeper way. My father, although raised in the church, had a true conversion experience at this time. My mother also gave her life to the Lord, and both my parents were baptised. They became very involved and over time ministered in many capacities: they served on the board, my father became a deacon, they sang in the choir, and they engaged in door to door evangelistic outreaches, bible studies, and many other activities. They prayed for their children and grandchildren and were watchful over our faith.

My father shared an experience with our family that he had in his mid fifties and I was in my early twenties. He was awoken by a seven-foot angel in the middle of the night. The angel stood by his bed and was dressed in golden angelic robes. He looked at my father and held up one hand making the sign of peace with his fingers. My father shared that the angel did not speak to him and he, being frightened, fell to his knees asking God for forgiveness, too afraid to move. A short while later my father looked up and the angel was gone. My father did not know what this meant but whenever he related this experience, this

evoked great emotion in my father and made me very thankful for my spiritual heritage.

I have one older brother and from him I learned to pay attention and be focused when making choices in life. My brother has always been kind to me and fun to be with. To this day, we enjoy speaking together, sharing laughs, and encouraging each other. My brother, his wife, and their children all love God, and it is a blessing to me that they are part of my family.

Teen to Young Adult

At sixteen, I volunteered with Youth for Christ, engaging in local outreach and bible studies-- A joyful experience I would have again years later when I joined them in their street ministry held out of a bus located downtown London. Where young people from the streets could receive free coffee, food, clothes and conversation. In 1979, I wanted to attend an interdenominational bible college; however, my parents, having joined the Baptist Church, thought it was better for me to attend a Baptist bible college. I went to the Baptist bible college in Alberta and felt like an outsider. The very first week when we were all sitting together at the cafeteria a cuss word slipped out of my mouth and everyone stopped eating and was staring at me. Eventually I did make friends with the young people, took biblical studies courses, and participated in the prison ministry outreach where we played sports with inmates at a minimum-security prison.

After one year of this program, I went to the University of Winnipeg, and volunteered for three years in the family violence unit as an honorary probation

officer. The work included oversight of men's probation orders and counselling young offenders. Three years later I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in psychology and justice and law enforcement.

I got a job first in the federal government, then in the provincial government, where I worked for the next fifteen years doing administrative work. While it was a decent job, I could not accept that this would be my life and longed for more. It was overwhelmingly unsatisfying to my soul.

Early Married Life

If my work life was underwhelming, my marriage and church life was not.

My Husband

My husband and I met while I was studying at university in Winnipeg. Tony was (and still is) a very loving, kind and considerate person. When I first met him, he read the Old Testament and prayed to God, but at that time he did not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of his life. He came from a practicing Hindu family from the islands of Trinidad and Tobago. His early educational years came in a Seventh Day Adventist primary school and a Catholic high school where nominal Christians failed to set an example, encourage or mentor him. According to my husband, there was no available material for teaching Hinduism to children at that time. In his encounters with Hindu priests they would always have a bible available and would quote from it during Hindu service or prayers. For him, the consistency was the bible because it was prominent in his spiritual growth. The bible had one God whereas Hinduism had

many gods, none of which ever helped his mother in her time of need, so he chose the bible as his guide. His mother taught him and his siblings from the King James version of the bible, inspiring him to follow the lead of Old Testament godly men; and he chose to worship, in his own words, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

When we met, we had many chats on what it meant to be a Christian and how Jesus fulfilled the law of the Old Testament. He was interested in knowing more of Jesus as God incarnate, as he wanted to have a greater understanding of who Jesus was and what was his relationship to the Father. Two years prior to marriage, we both joined an interdenominational church called Elim Chapel located in downtown Winnipeg. My husband became a born-again believer and got baptized at Elim Chapel in October 1984. A few months before we got married, we were appointed missionaries to Belgium with Gospel Missionary Union. We went about raising the financial support needed. A few months later, after we raised only 60% of the recommended finances, we felt that door closed to us. We both felt a change in the direction God wanted us to follow, but we did not know what that looked like until many years later.

My Mentor

Around that same period and while attending Elim Chapel, we met this one elder and his wife who were also our young adult leaders, and we remain friends with them and their children to this day. His wife provided me with a role model of a spiritual leader that I wanted to emulate. She eventually became my

spiritual mentor, and her husband is someone I seek out for wise counsel to life's circumstances. She was a housewife with five children. Every morning, she would get up at 5:30 a.m. and have coffee with the Lord. This was her routine for many years. By consistently rising early to wait on God, to hear his voice, and read his word, this allowed her to develop an intimate relationship with him. She was one who was known to hear the voice of God. This was evident in the words of knowledge that she consistently had for people. For example, if someone were to come to her house for prayer for personal requests, she would know what they wanted to pray about before they arrived and often received a solution from God for it. At other times, she would go to the mall and sit on a bench, praying and asking God to send a person to her who needed to hear from him. She had many testimonies of people who had problems, felt lost in life, or were Christians where she received specific words that were uplifting to them. She was a gentle and kind individual, and because of her love of God and her humble, non-judgmental qualities, one often felt as though they had encountered God after being with her. She was also a strong teacher and taught bible classes at church and had several different bible studies in her home. One of her home bible studies had a regular attendance of sixty-five people each week.

I would meet with her once a week to pray, have coffee and do a bible study. She taught me how to quiet myself and listen to the voice of God, how to distinguish his voice from my own and to follow the flow of his Spirit in prayer. One evening we were driving to an event with two other spiritually mature

women. We were praying about an issue, and each one had been waiting and listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In this type of corporate listening prayer, each person waits to hear the voice of God and then speaks out what they heard. When doing this in a group, the individuals will receive similar thoughts regarding the issue, there will be some overlap as each one receives pieces to the puzzle until it is a complete picture. There will be a corporate inner satisfaction of knowing when the prayer has ended. Another aspect of this prayer is that people report that they are listening to what they are saying, their thoughts were not premeditated. That is, through their own voice they are hearing God speak in the words they are saying.

During this time of prayer, I was listening to God and asking him if there was something, he wanted me to say. I received a vision in my mind's eye and spoke it out. I thought, "Wow God, how gracious and amazing are you that you would allow me to be part of this." Yes, even in a place of early beginnings, everyone can hear from God. This experience guided me for many years, including when I was the coordinator of Sunday school and a Sunday school teacher. I would teach the children how to listen for God's voice, to feel his presence, and to follow the leading of his voice. The children trusted in God to give them a word of knowledge about the people they prayed for. They saw the effect by adults crying, laughing, and at times falling under the power of the Holy Spirit. The children experienced other supernatural signs such as finding fine gold dust in their bibles and, during prayer, the palm of their hands became moist with

an oil-like substance and light gold sparkles. At times, we saw light orbs during the service, and some of the children saw assorted colours of light.

During one of our ministry times together, we were praying for a woman who wanted us to pray for her to receive the gift of tongues. As we were praying for her, I had a vision of one man overpowering another, and I spoke out loud of this strange vision that I received. I did not understand how this picture fit with us praying for this woman to speak in tongues. However, my mentor did, and she immediately stopped our prayer and asked this woman if she had been sexually assaulted. The woman said that she had, and at that point we turned our attention to her experience of being assaulted. That day, we were able through prayer and discussion to minister to her hurt and fears. We provided teaching on the character of God. We told her that God does not force his presence on us. His Spirit presents himself to us gently, waiting for us to receive him. God has a gentle spirit and makes himself available, waiting to be received. This time when we prayed for her, she was able to receive from God and received the gift of tongues.

My mentor and I connected over two separate time periods while we lived in Winnipeg, the first time from 1984 to 1988, then from 1990 to 1999. To explain my spiritual growth, I have combined the experience in one growth phase and have left a more detailed timeline of that period for later. I felt it would give the reader a better understanding of my experience rather than have a two-part explanation separated by time.

My mentor was someone who truly poured into my development as a person and into my spiritual maturation. She loved me like a younger sister and brought healing to me through her generous and gentle spirit of love and kindness without seeking anything in return. When one of my children was sick and hospitalized, she would visit me almost daily. When we came home, she brought food and offered to clean my house. If I needed prayer, she would take her time and wait on the Lord listening for his voice; whether it was for five minutes or two hours, she would wait and serve fully in a tireless manner. Her way of praying for people and ministering to them was one that I adopted as I had benefited so much from it and saw the value of serving people in this way. She also ministered individually to people in smaller group settings. Where she felt led by God, she would prophesy over each person in the group. This was evidenced by people crying, nodding their head as she spoke, and looking at her fully engaged. Knowing these people personally and seeing them draw closer to God was very exciting for me.

Geographical Moves

Now we will consider my spiritual formation through geographical moves.

Winnipeg to Trinidad and Back

We left Winnipeg and moved to Trinidad from 1988-1990, to my husband's parent's property in Trinidad, where his family resided and owned over four hundred acres of agricultural land. Their home was on a private, family-owned beach. At that time, they also had many animals there, like a hobby farm.

Beside the house was a large cage which had a couple of talking macaws. Peacocks walked on the property and every so often displayed their beautiful feathers. There were pens with ducks, chickens, goats, and cattle. It was in this setting that our first child, a son, was born. As we slept one night, my husband woke me and told me we were going to have a boy and God called him by name. I asked how he knew this. My husband replied that God just told him. My response was a drowsy "praise God" and we both went back to sleep. A few months later, our first child was born.

The doctor, a Catholic whose family we knew and who would marry my husband's best friend's sister later in life, asked if we had a name. I responded immediately, and he was surprised and asked how we knew. I related the dream/vision my husband had had. He was at a loss for words yet responded, "enough said." Our son was truly a blessing from day one. He was the first grandson for my husband's parents. He occupied my time, and I loved every minute of it. When he was eight months old, he had pyloric stenosis. This is a condition when the pyloric muscle becomes enlarged and blocks food from entering the small intestine. This is an occurrence only in some premature male children and required an emergency operation. I was alone with my son in the Doctor's office when he gave me his diagnosis. My husband was in a small village a few hours away. The Doctor told me the electricity was not working and so his diagnoses could not be confirmed with an x-ray. Rather as confirmation he slapped my son's belly which rolled in a way and based on that, the Doctor said

we would need to operate first thing in the morning. I called husband's family and one of his brothers raced to the small village to bring my husband to me. At that time there was no phone reception there. While we were worried, we fell on the Word of God, that our son was literally called by name and that God had a plan and a purpose for him. We prayed and believed for his healing. It was twenty-four hours of intense worship and leaning on the Lord. The Lord God healed and restored him soon after. We knew that this child would be a priest or pastor when he came of age.

Back to Canada

We returned to Winnipeg in April 1990. We also returned initially to Elim Chapel, our first church, before moving on to Springs of Living Waters Church in 1997, another nondenominational church. The pastor was gifted in teaching people the practicalities of living life in relationship with one another and with God. As soon as he preached each week, people would line up to buy his sermons. They sold like hotcakes, and I was one of many who stood in line to purchase his tapes. We attended this church for about two years. I taught Sunday school, and our oldest son was baptized in this church. One Sunday, I was sitting beside a man who told me that his wife had left him and every Sunday he prayed that his wife would return to him. He would touch the seat beside him and thank God that his wife would join him. He told me she had been gone for a couple of years. Then one Sunday, I came to church, and there was a woman sitting beside him.

Later he came to me with a smiling face and told me that he had reconciled with his wife. I was so excited for him.

Another powerful story was of a young woman who had tattooed the name of Satan on her body. She later gave her life to Jesus. When she was home at night she was tormented, as she would hear the voice of the devil tell her, “You can talk to Jesus all that you want but you are mine. My name is on your body.” She had asked the pastors to pray for her. After they did, she went home and had a bath, and the tattoos with Satan’s name washed off her body. She called later, crying and saying that God had saved her. After that we moved back to London Ontario where we have now been for the past thirteen years. To this day, my husband continues to fly back and forth to Trinidad a few times a year to manage his and his parents’ properties. I had to quit my government job twice. We were now a family of six, with two boys and two girls, with our youngest just two weeks old when we left for London. After our move we started attending Word of His Power Church in London Ontario where our baby played the part of baby Jesus that December of 1999 in the church play.

Toco, Trinidad

I’d like to digress back to 1988 to describe a special chapter of our life in the village of Toco, Trinidad when we set about to grow prawns (a type of shrimp). My husband and his father dug a one-hectare earthen pond. They prepared the ground, built drainage, put a fence all around, added water, and put cascadura fish into the pond. We added the prawns later when they were old

enough to leave the nurseries. We built cement raceways called nurseries and filled them with baby prawns. We combed the beach for old fishing nets and lined the raceways with them to provide some separation for the prawns, as they were very territorial. When the prawns were big enough, we transported them into the larger hectare pond. One male prawn was particularly abusive. When he approached a female prawn, he would forgo the mating ritual and would flip them over to mate. When that female prawn did not comply, he ripped her arm off. We had to separate him from the others. Sometimes, I would swim on top of the water, and I could feel them touch me as I swam by. Other times, I would go out in a small boat and feed them. One night, the generator conked out very early in the morning. The generator was hooked up to a rotron blower which was used to aerate the pond. My father-in-law called us to come and check the pond. When we came outside all the prawns had gathered at the water's edge of the pond and were spinning their antennae in their attempts to aerate the water. My husband and his father were able to repair the generator and restore the aeration system.

We hired local workers to help us put up the fence around the pond. It was a frustrating experience for us. My husband would wait outside their homes in the morning. He would drive them to the estate and watch them work. If he left to do something else, they would stop, and the work would not get done. I would make them lunch. I tried to cook local food. I was never all that great at cooking Canadian food, but I attempted to do my best with the local edition. A common food prepared regularly is a round crepe like bread like a taco known as roti.

Initially, I burnt the first few and so thought I could hide them under the pile I had already prepared, not realizing that the bottom ones held their warmth. My father-in-law came in for lunch and went straight to the bottom of the pile to pull out a warm roti. It was burnt. "Susanne" He said. "You cook shit again." It was a learning experience in more ways than one. My in-law's estate was formerly used as a coconut plantation. This was before the soya bean industry took over, as it provided a cheaper source of cooking oil. My in-laws still made a small income from the coconuts and hired climbers to throw the dry nuts down from the trees, so they could be transported to the copra shed before the final product was transported to town for sale. One day, a well-dressed man walked into the estate and offered his services which entailed climbing the coconut trees. In return he wanted to be paid a rather steep fee. We had never experienced someone like this gentleman before nor after. My husband agreed to his price if he could produce his stated amount. The man took off his clothes down to his underwear and proceeded to climb the trees faster than anyone we had ever seen before. It was difficult to keep up with him and load the coconuts in the van as he scurried up and down the trees. At the end of the day, he washed his skin, put his suit back on, and requested payment. Everyone was so impressed.

Although the estate was beautiful, and we lived by the sea, I found living in the bush to be difficult. Here we were often alone. I was the only white woman in the village. Also noteworthy was that my in-laws were the only East Indian family there. The village was 99.9% negroes, and it was very rough. The natives

thought we had too much of everything and they were entitled to take whatever they could, almost always by acts of praedial larceny (agricultural theft).

At that time, we did not have a computer, long distance courses were not offered, and I had nothing to occupy my time. I felt the Lord wooing me to rest in him and pray but did not know how to do this. I did not know how to surrender to him, how to trust him. I did not have a missionary background from my family to understand how to reach out to the community, even though we had been ordained as missionaries in 1986. We had no field experience. I had no understanding of life in the bush or how to sit with God. I did not have the coping skills, nor did I know where to find them. I was overwhelmed. We attended a Baptist church that was literally a family of five. We did this for a couple of months and then decided to try the church in the next village. It was a Pentecostal church, and the pastor taught his people well. They knew the Word. Sometimes, during the pastor's sermons, his children misbehaved. The pastor's children and wife sat at the back of the church, and when the kids were disruptive, she would slap the children. Everyone could hear the "smack." It jolted the pastor mid-sentence every time. He would stop, listen, and then keep preaching. His wife wore white stockings with large pineapple design down the sides of her legs. I got such a kick out of her and her stockings. This was an example of life in the village and discipline in the church at that time. We learned a lot of scripture from this pastor. He was a kind man who cared for his flock, yet for me it was very lonely, and I still felt isolated from the world. Being raised in the city, I did not know

how to settle into the quiet of country living. As a person who only knew “to do” and live a life full of activities, it felt like we came to a sudden stop. I had not learnt how “to be” in life and so I could not see the beauty of the sea or the lush green country all around us, only its isolation and I felt like a bird in a golden cage. Like Joseph I could not see the purpose our Lord had for this trial. God had to take me back to Canada first. I left Trinidad in May 1990 with our son. My husband closed the project and followed one month later.

Trinidad Second Time Around

Eleven years later, our family moved back to Trinidad after spending a year in prayer for direction. We felt God’s leading to go again. My husband had a job offer there. We packed up our household and boarded the plane. We landed on September 6, 2001. This time around, the job opportunity my husband had fell apart with the dreadful occurrence of September 11, 2001. We were in the Motor Vehicle Department renewing our driver's licenses when those planes crashed into the towers in NY. Later that day, as we entered our in-laws’ home, my father-in-law was glued to the T.V. and said, “Come, come look at this.” We all watched with shock as the plane crashed into the twin towers in New York.

This impacted our family. The company that hired my husband was connected to the U.S. and pulled the job offer. My husband began to work with his father in property management, and I went to law school in Trinidad as I had the opportunity and an interest in it and graduated with a law degree.

During this time, our younger son fell out of a tree and fractured his arm. While we were in the hospital waiting for a doctor, I noticed that there were no toys on the ward. I inquired if they had volunteers or coloring books and was told they did not. This bothered me as I remembered the many volunteers, clothes, games, and books that were available to us when that same son was sick and had stayed in the hospital as a young child in Winnipeg. So, I organized a plan and contacted the head nurse and the manager of the hospital to present my plan to them. They supported my plan, and the head nurse and I continued to meet until I was able to begin.

For the next three years, I signed on fifty adult volunteers from churches and thirty student volunteers from local high schools to come on the wards and be available to read and interact with the sick children; they also assisted with homework for long-term patients. After I made a presentation about the program to the high school children, it was amusing when some of the boys would approach me and say, “Miss can you tell me which girls signed up to volunteer, and then I can tell you if I can come.”

I arranged with the principals of the schools for the high school students to receive community credit hours. Someone from our church designed and built a book cart. I contacted local stores who donated books, pencils, crayons, coloring books, etc. Churches and parents from the school donated toys. We filled up a room as a playroom. I worked with Lawyers for Jesus who provided toiletries for sick children whose families were poor. Para-church groups came and performed

skits and puppetry for the children. The church people could ask families for permission to pray and tell the children about Jesus where they agreed. I ran this program for three years to relax while I was in law school, and it made me question whether being a lawyer was the right fit for me.

I graduated from law school with honors while having the four children sit at the back of the class quietly drawing or reading. My husband sought to trust God in all his dealings, even when things looked very bleak financially. He always held on (even to this day) to Jehovah Jireh, which means "God my Provider." Today his parents, who still have land holdings, depend of him for his advice and wisdom on all matters pertaining to their livelihood, even though they have four other sons and two sons-in-law living very close by in Trinidad. He has very much grown into a person of humility, integrity and wisdom with everyone whom he comes into contact.

We also attended a Pentecostal church in Port of Spain. The pastor was a wonderful man who told the church every Sunday, "If you are having problems sleeping in, it's because I am praying you out of bed." He was encouraging his congregants to rise early and spend time with God. Services were four hours in length, which we got used to. The church took time to worship God and wait in his presence, and then the pastor would preach his sermons. Still, I could not figure out how to calm the anxiety and stress to rest in God. I could feel God wooing me, but I just did not know how to respond. God was again teaching me patience.

At one event, our church in Trinidad featured a weeklong prophetic conference with speakers from the United States. They gave examples from scripture and took time to give the people a good understanding of how this gifting functioned in the bible and today. Speaking in tongues is one of the 9 gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). The apostle Paul instructs us to desire spiritual gifts (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and that we should not neglect the gifts within us but to grow in them (1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6).

Jesus promised signs to those who believe, “These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17). The new testament tells us about these new tongues that Jesus said believers would receive. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were praying together in the upper room when, “There came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4). Scripture tells us that this sound was heard by many and they came and formed a crowd and were, “Bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language to which they were born [Egypt, Mesopotamia, ..Libya, Asia and Rome] saying, we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Act 2:5-11). The result of this was, “There were added about three thousand souls. They were continually

devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:41-42).

There is another way in which the gifts of tongues are given. It is like a language, however not one that is recognized by the natural ear. Paul tells us that this is a heavenly prayer language, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). Paul is giving instruction to believers that if tongues is spoken with others present an interpretation should be given, which comes in the form of either an encouraging word or one of exhortation to build the body up in their faith. If an interpretation cannot be supplied, then the speaking in tongues should stop. Otherwise the non-believers, may think the believers are mad (1 Corinthians 14:22). Paul noted that the believer is speaking into the mysteries of God. "For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit, he speaks mysteries" (1 Corinthians 14:2).

These mysteries can be part of intercessory prayer for ourselves as well as for others, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). This form of speaking in tongues is primarily used for building up the believer. "But you, beloved, building yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 1:20). The Holy Spirit guides the believer in truth, in prayer and in

worship (John 16:13-15). In this portfolio when the gift of tongues is mentioned it is of the one that is a heavenly language.

At the end of the conference, they called people forward, asking if anyone would like prayer to receive the gift of tongues. I went forward, and a woman from the church prayed for me. Every time she prayed, I felt a lot of heat and pressure in my throat, and then it stopped. I also had pressure in my stomach that was bubbling up but would bottleneck at my throat and no sound would come out. This woman continued to pray for me, and I started to speak in tongues. I was so thankful to God for this gift. I had been asking God to receive it for a while. There were times when I wanted to talk to God and did not know what to say. I asked God that if he would give me the gift of tongues, then I could spend more time in prayer talking to him. At the time, I was not familiar with contemplative prayer. Praying with words was the only way that I knew how to pray. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit “searches the mind of God” (1 Corinthians. 2:10). He reveals “the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians. 3:5), “helps us when we are weak” (Romans 8:26-27), “works all things” (1 Corinthians 12:11), guides us (John 16:13), and will comfort, help and advocate for us (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7, 14:16) As I needed help in all those areas, I thought I better get closer to the Holy Spirit.

A Time to Stay and a Time to Move

After three years of living in Trinidad, I again felt stuck and frustrated. We had several challenges and pressures, such as living conditions that could not change for another year or two, clashes in faith, and our children struggling with

cultural differences. It was time to move. I returned to Canada with our children, and my husband made the transition over the next year to rejoin us.

Back in Canada, God was able to use me to share what I learned in Trinidad. Often, I heard people say they asked God for the gift of tongues but did not receive it, so it was not meant to be. There is a fair amount of fear and uncertainty in receiving this gift, which hinders it being released in a person's life. By understanding what is involved in the process, a person's fear and apprehension is removed and they are then often able to flow with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues.

One lady, who was in her early seventies and was a pastor in a church, came to me for prayer. She told me that she desired the gift of tongues but could not receive it. She told me that she prayed in tongues in her sleep during the night but could not do so when she was awake. I inquired about her background, and she shared a family story of when she was a young child. Her father had become a Christian and wanted to spend all his time with God. He would pray, read scripture, and had many mystical experiences. But as a child, she felt very frustrated with her father. Her mother worked very hard to care for the family (there were many children in the family) while her father sat in the house praying and speaking in tongues. This upset her very much. I appreciated her frustration. I could see that she was a woman whose heart was after the things of God. However, the memory of her father and her anger hindered her from allowing the Spirit to speak through her during the day. We talked and worked through her

concerns. As we prayed, the Holy Spirit came, and, she began to speak freely in tongues. It was quite exciting as this elderly woman jumped up and down, shouting praises to God, crying in thankfulness for receiving this gift.

I am reminded of how Paul encourages believers when he stated, “Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5).” As well as, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27). These quotes strengthen what I am describing.

Ministry Experiences

We moved to our new home in London Ontario and a friend recommended a church to us, which we joined. It was a Word of Faith church. The pastors in this new church had trained under Kenneth Hagin, a preacher from the United States who founded the Rhema Bible Training College. The pastors were a couple from India, and the husband had experienced a dramatic conversion. Every week, the pastor would encourage his congregants to trust God and believe his promises for their life. As my husband and I were still spiritually weak in trusting God we found these sermons to be very encouraging.

My paternal grandmother was diagnosed with cancer in her mid-life. She prayed to God asking him to heal her, and he did. She lived to be ninety-three

years of age. When our first daughter was around eleven years old, she had a persistent cough that did not seem to go away. We went to see the doctor, and he told me she had asthma and gave me a puffer for her use and a prescription. I told him we believe God heals and I would like to pray before I give my daughter the puffer. The doctor responded that he had seen too many people that have told him the same thing and have had serious repercussions. He suggested we have her tested by an asthma specialist who would give each of us an objective response. I agreed. We received an appointment to see a specialist three months later. Every day, my daughter coughed, and every day, I thanked God for healing her. I asked our pastors to pray with me, which they did. My daughter went to the specialist. He asked her to blow in a tube three- times. Each time, he asked her if she thought she had asthma, and each time, she said, “no.” At the end of his examination, he told her that she did not have asthma. She stopped coughing two days later.

My understanding of believing in God for miracles has changed somewhat since that time. Today, I have come to a place where I believe God for supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles as I did back then; however, it is from a deeper place of trust. My God is a God of relationship, and as such, we work together. The Lord says, “Come let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). There are other examples in Scripture where people have debated with God to change circumstances: Abraham debating with God for the saving of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis. 18:16-33), or Hezekiah pleading for his life to be extended (2 Kings 20:1-6). As well there will be times of suffering, trials and death (Psalm

34:19, Romans 5:3-4, Romans 8:35, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). On death “Do not be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Revelation 14:13). I trust God and believe he knows what he is doing even if I do not get the whole picture.

Lakeland Revival or Florida Healing Outpouring

In 2008, I went to a conference in Lakeland, Florida that eventually became known as the Lakeland Revival or the Florida Outpouring. What started as a five-day conference, turned into six months of meetings with people streaming in from all over the world. The speaker leading the event was a young Canadian evangelist named Todd Bentley. Ten thousand people attended during the week I was there. I stood in the international line prior to entering the arena and listened to all the different languages spoken around me. I had such a warm glow inside of me as I soaked in the breadth of the body of Christ. Being part of such a multicultural event is something I will always remember. Particularly poignant were the expressions of worship that I observed. No matter what colour, language, or culture the people came from, the interactions with an expression of the Holy Spirit were all the same. During worship, some individuals would groan, some shook, some cried, some spoke in tongues, some laughed, some bowed heads, some had faces glowing, some laid prostrate, and some would shout or experience heat. I thought how consistent God is so that we can recognize the

movement of his Spirit in others no matter where in the world we go. This, to me, was an example of the integrity of God and gave me an awareness of the historical experience of the body of Christ throughout time.

The atmosphere was filled with excitement and expectation as the people began to worship. One could feel the tangible presence of God. The air felt dense and heavy. The people kept worshipping, singing, and praying, ebbing and flowing, for prolonged periods of time. During one of these evenings, I felt a very heavy weight come upon me, and I was bent over for quite some time. I had a vision where I was taken into a quite majestic room in heaven. There were soaring walls made from some sort of marble or stone from floor to ceiling in a patterned shape. A thought that passed through my mind was that I was in the waiting room outside the throne room of God, separated by large, heavy, intricately carved wooden doors. There were other people and some tall angels in this room. I started to feel this pulling from within that would not stop. It was as though I was being pulled from the inside out. It felt somewhat painful because the events of my life that were woven into the fabric of my being were being pulled out of me. At one point, the sensations became so intense that I felt like I could not endure it anymore, and I called out to God to stop. The heaviness lifted, I was able to straighten myself, and the encounter stopped.

What I noticed about myself after this experience was that I had received a measure of healing. Prior to this time, I had a fear for my youngest daughter that often felt more like a terror. Though our home was across the yard from the

school, I had a fear that she could be harmed, and as a precaution I never allowed her to walk alone. She was always accompanied by a member of the family. After the conference, I remember crying to God, saying, "I am giving her to you, and if anything happens to her, if she dies, it'll be your fault." This was a large leap of faith for me. Initially, it was the idea of trusting God for this treasure he had given me and trusting him enough to place her in his care. While this may appear as not much it was a significant movement towards trusting God for me, as prior to this the level of fear felt like terror. The feeling of terror was gone.

Harp and Bowl

A church in Stratford, about an hour from where I lived, had a weekly worship service called Harp and Bowl. The name was taken out of the book of Revelation 5:8 which describes heavenly creatures which each "had a harp" and were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. During the service, the worship leader was joined on stage by two or three other people who sat on chairs. The worship leader would begin with a song, which the sitters would join in with. When the song ended, the people on stage would begin reading portions of Scripture and then pause. The worship leader would then sing using the scripture as words or someone on stage would sing a prayer or say a prayer. This rhythm flowed out of the unction of the Holy Spirit. As they read the scriptures, they would pause and then begin to pray. As they prayed, the Spirit of God would begin to flow. It was a weekly event that lasted for two hours, and there would be a targeted theme each day, such as for their church, for Israel, for

the government of Canada, for the homeless, etc. Those attending the service would join in during the singing and prayer. The presence of God hovered in the atmosphere like a warm blanket. The purpose of Harp and Bowl is not to put on a performance. It is a calm engagement of speaking or singing to God and listening for his voice. There is a giving and receiving in this communication that is intentional; thus, the atmosphere is more contemplative in tone though varying in intensity. I always left these services in a state of peace and oneness with God. It was a service that I was slow to leave.

A Church Plant

After we left Word of His Power Church in 2008, we joined a church plant called Life International Church, an apostolic church (2008-2010). I connected with the pastor's wife. In some ways, she was like my spiritual mentor. She had a very compassionate heart, she was unhurried when ministering to people, she would fast for people, she was a teacher, and she flowed with the Holy Spirit. An active teaching in this church was hearing the voice of God and being intimate with him.

Our family was very involved in this church. My husband was on the board, we were on the leadership team, and our children were involved in all the activities. I led youth group, co-facilitated intercession and a long-distance bible school program, was involved in women's ministry, and participated in community outreach.

I learned a lot about the function of the prophetic gift in people. I had seen the powerful effects of intercession on behalf of others. I had also seen the weaknesses of the human spirit, where there is a mixture of someone's broken pieces mixed with a word from God, the receiver feels uncomfortable, disconnected, and possibly annoyed with the speaker. It was in this church that I began a journey of seeking God in a deeper way. I read scripture with an unquenchable thirst. I studied for hours and spent time in contemplative and meditative prayer. It is where I encountered God as my beloved much more deeply than I had previously known. Reading scripture with God was us dancing cheek to cheek, where he kissed me with the kisses of his mouth. Reading scripture with God I found him to be funny, the most creative and inspiring mentor, lover and friend. I often fell on my knees to worship him, filled with awe of him. It is here that rivers of living water filled my belly. The world became strangely dim and I did not want to leave his presence. I could understand that if anyone catches a glimpse of heaven, they would not want to come back to earth.

In this time of studying, my theology started to shift away from the churches we had been part of. My husband and I sought God in prayer for over a year regarding our place in this church. We wondered if we had anything more, we could contribute. We did not feel that it was a place of growth for our family. Our joy of being in this congregation left us. We prayed and waited on the Lord for another year before we felt released from God to leave.

Family Stories

I was also spiritually formed through experiences with my children and husband, which is demonstrated in these family stories. The stories I am sharing of my children have been read and approved by them as they appear in this portfolio.

Our Older Son and Oldest Child

From our older son, God taught me that we have parts to ourselves that are hidden to us and only come alive when awakened by another. His name means Servant of God. In and through his short life, many came to believe in God. He was four years older than his next sibling and ten years older than the youngest child. Our older son was twenty-six years old when he died on July 06, 2015. He was married the year before. His daughter was two months old. My husband and I were reveling in the joy they had in their relationship and in being grandparents. He was interning to be a priest at a church in Calgary. He was going out for breakfast with his wife and daughter. They were less than five minutes from their home. The drive was a bit hilly when a deer jumped out in front of them. He swerved to miss the deer, and the car went into a ditch, flipped, and hit a tree. His wife crawled out of the car, telling him, "Get the baby she's crying," but he had died instantly. He called us one day during that fateful summer to tell of his prayer to God for a priest's robe for the summer internship. He got two. He told of how the church took an offering in his first week of work and blessed him and his wife to go to Banff on a conference with their newborn and have a mini

honeymoon. He told of a meeting where a priest emptied his pockets and gave him all he had, of receiving a job as a youth pastor, and housing when he and his young family moved back to Toronto. He told of how he was being fast-tracked into the priesthood. He asked why God was doing these things. He was in the process of finishing a master's degree in divinity. He was a great encourager of people. There were so many young people that I had not even met that came to us and told us of how he had helped them out of depression, how they went back to school because of him. Some started their own ministries, travelling to many countries, because he had prophesied over them when they had no direction. Many commented, "I believe in God because of him, I go to church because of him, he was my friend, he encouraged me, he listened to me." Almost 4 years after his death I still meet people and hear many new stories of what he did or said to someone, that brought life and hope to them. My son started a prophetic outreach at a university he attended, and it is still going on today. He worked with the homeless who loved him, and he always spoke to them with such respect that they knew he saw them. He touched and helped so many people in his short life, perhaps more than others would in a lifetime.

The death of a child is an experience that encompasses your spirit, mind and body. My body felt dense with heaviness, often physically broken and cracked. I received two visions. In the first vision, I was playing chess with God; he looked at me and said, "It's your move." I took my hand and swiped the pieces off the board and kicked the table over. I replied, "I hate your stupid game and

I'm not playing anymore." In the second vision, I was cracking a walnut with a steel nutcracker. As I cracked the nut and heard it break, I felt my body break in the same way. I said, "Oh God, I am so broken." God then said to me, "Now you know how broken I am for those that are lost and long for them to be my own." I said, "Thank you, God, for teaching me more about you, for showing me your heart, and for expanding mine that I might understand you more. Thank you for being with me and teaching me about love and suffering so that I can love others more." I am thankful for my son. I said everything I wanted to say to him. He knew he was loved; he knew we were proud of him. God took my son with care and honour in the way he went. My son was enjoying his family and, in an instant, stood before the Lord. He was blessed with wonderful in-laws, a beautiful family, and godly friendships. He ministered and reached out to everyone he was called to touch. Any relationship issues that he had in his life were resolved. For example, a guy that bullied him in grade school met him at university and apologized to him. My son also repented to those he hurt. He had job offers and loved his professors and fellow students. I was able to see him grow from a funny child, to an anxious teen, then to a strong, gracious, intelligent young man who encouraged many, who led many souls to the Lord, and whose family: his wife, daughter, in-law, our family, friends, church and the lost, were the love of his life. Six months prior to his death my son had an assignment; he had to write a funeral service for a young man in his twenties who dies in a car crash. The day before he died, he preached on glory and suffering. My son spoke to me of things to come,

and, like Mary with her son Jesus, “I pondered them in my heart” (Luke 2:19). God in his faithfulness strengthened me from strength to strength, faith to faith, glory to glory. So that when my son died and stepped into heaven, I was filled with grief and loss but not shattered. God had strengthened me so that I could trust him with what I did not understand. Though I will not share all my experiences, I can say that God is good to me, he is kind to me and walks with me.

A prayer that I have prayed often over the years is, “God blow up everything in me, tear down every wall, any barrier, anything in me that hinders me from drawing near to you.” What an insane prayer. The earnest desire of my heart is to worship God with all my spirit, mind and body. This has been my lifelong journey. How do I surrender all of me to him? How can I walk with him in my spirit and in my flesh as Christ did? To reiterate, the challenge for me had been trust. Human relationships failed me. I failed others. I learnt from an early age that I should depend on myself because, at key moments in my life, no one was there to help me. Everyone is kind, loving, and even supportive in their own way, but not at those times that were important to me. Even God was included in that list. Probably, I should throw myself in the pile of those who did not support me because I could not support myself in those times in a way that I wanted to or thought that I should. That is another reason why scripture says, “Love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). Sometimes your enemy is yourself. Our instinctual survival response overrides our heart’s response. A wise professor once stated that

we lay down our burdens to Christ but our biggest burden we do not lay down. Our biggest burden is ourselves and that we cannot lay down because then we will die (Shepherd 2014). That summed up my struggle right there. I could not truly trust God enough to die for him because my fears were greater than my knowing him. I needed to know him more to trust him. I can certainly say that today, I trust God with all my heart, my life, my children, and my husband. I do not worry for any of it. I do not need to understand everything, and I believe that God “has my back.” I know him to be faithful and trustworthy. I know our calling on this earth is to first know him and to walk in his will and his ways because that is why we are here.

My Older Daughter

From my older daughter, God taught me to love beyond the borders of my self-understanding, unconditionally. Her name means Fire of God. When this daughter was young, I had a challenging time connecting with her, though she enjoyed her father very much. It was not for lack of trying. My earliest memories were of going into her room at night to check on her; I would put a doll into her crib, and she would sit up and toss it to the ground. When trying to dress her from the age when she had an opinion, she would let me know that I was not choosing clothes that she liked. When playing Barbies, she would become frustrated that I was not “making up the right story.” Somehow, I was always off or missing the connection with her. I was a hands-on mom and played every day with my children. We would paint our nails, make crafts almost daily, and invite friends

over. Yet somehow, that inner feeling of being in tune with one another was not there. When we returned from Trinidad the second time around, it was an adjustment for the children to re-enter the Canadian school system. As the Caribbean schools were academically advanced, the children found themselves ahead but placed in an age appropriate grade. One son was told to stop cursive writing, as the class had not learnt this yet. My daughter was very bored, and rather than being given work that was of interest to her, she was given more of the same work.

My daughter experienced being bullied at the school. She became quite depressed. My husband and I interacted with her day and night. We played cards, watched movies, played games, and spent lots of time with her. The other three children felt somewhat left out, but they could see that she needed attention. During this time, she told me that “church was not for her and that it was my thing.” She still attended church with our family, but she would sit at the back, completely emotionally flat. I interceded for her heavily. We had a speaker at our church who had a prophetic gifting. For those who wanted to participate, he offered to pray for each congregant. When he stood in front of me, he spoke of being bullied, of my inner pain and heart, and as he continued to talk, I realized he was speaking of my daughter. It was very interesting to me that he had picked up her story from me. I understood it being because of the deep intercession that I was carrying for her. Once, in the middle of the night while sleeping, I felt feathers were being ruffled up and down my back. I woke up and said, “What is it

Lord?” I heard him say, “Go and check your daughter.” When I went to the bathroom, I found her with a small blade in her hand, ready to cut herself. I was so thankful that God was an ever-present help in the time of trouble.

In the process of spending so much time with my daughter and praying for her, we began to click; we had made a connection. We developed a very sweet relationship and began to get better. Another time, I was sitting in a chair, and I noticed a mark on my leg. As I went to scratch it, I had an open vision of my skin peeling back, and I saw a baby dragonfly. I then heard the Lord say, “Your daughter looks good on the surface but there is still stuff underneath.” We continued to love our daughter and nurture our relationship. There were a couple more ups and downs, including a time when our daughter moved out and then returned home. God has been faithful to bring healing and restoration. We grew very close and there is much unity, love and laughter. She is kind and loving, quick witted and creative. She is pursuing her life goals with much vigor and joy. We are so thankful for her.

Deception

A question came to my mind rather often for over a year between 2009 and 2010. It was, “What does end-time deception look like that the very elect are deceived?” I kept asking those around me and received the usual answers you would expect from church folks. What I didn’t realize was that God was trying to tell me that deception was coming to our house. Prior to his death my older son had a dream where he was sitting at the top of the stairs watching the front door

because he was to pay attention to what was coming. We had knowledge but no wisdom and understanding.

My older son had the gift of evangelism, it flowed out of him naturally and constantly since he was a small kid. He would say to other kids in the sandbox, “Hi, do you know Jesus? Want to play?” To prepare for ministry, he went to school in another province. He was called to be a pastor, but felt he was too young and emotionally unprepared for the pastorate. He felt that perhaps going on the mission field for a few years would give him time to mature and still serve God. While at the ministry school, he had a roommate who had come to the Lord after a life of gangs and drug activity. His roommate was a few years older, had a charismatic personality, and was intelligent and very passionate for God. He wanted to go abroad to be a missionary. My son and his roommate spent a lot of time doing street evangelism together. After my son came home from the ministry school, his roommate thought he would join him in our town and together they would go abroad. When I first met his roommate, my chest became inflamed like fire and I looked at him and said, “You are a very angry man.” He responded, “Yes, but the Lord has healed me, and I fast and pray for God to change me.” I have a soft spot for people who have had a rough background, so I thought, “Ok, he knows that he has some stuff and is working on it.” This man was very fervent and passionate for God. He would study the scriptures for hours a day. Then he would be on the streets, ministering to people. I had never met anyone so focused and intentional before. He took me on the streets with him and was fearless in his

desire to tell people about God. He handed out food and tracts and just sat with people, befriending them.

As time went on, he did not find a church that he felt connected to. Then more time passed, and he still did not join with a community. He said he was still in contact with two pastors through whom he had been saved. Slowly, more time passed, and my husband and I wondered why he was not connecting with people. My daughter and I had spent some time doing bible studies with him, and he became more rigid in his thinking. He started to say that the true end-time church left the fallen church and meets on their own, that the church needed to repent from its lukewarm state. He became quite judgmental and focused on the Old Testament laws. My husband and I became quite concerned and spoke with him, saying we would like him not to speak to our children anymore as his theology was not well grounded. We had met with some male pastors, and we strongly encouraged him to speak with them and sort out his theology. He became very angry and began to rant at us, saying we were backslidden and lukewarm Christians. I realized that his rigidity and judgmental mindset was anger hidden in righteous language. Sadly, he did not want to meet with the pastors we had recommended, nor did his views change or soften. His anger intensified toward us and he disconnected from our family.

The impact this individual had on our family was extensive. From this experience I learned to pay attention to subtle changes in peoples' behaviour. I am aware of mental illness and the many ways it presents itself in people. I studied

trauma and trauma-related therapies, and I interact with clients who have trauma. I studied the scriptures on the character traits of the angry man, foolish man, wise man, and prudent man. I also studied the scriptures concerning deception. I have studied the prophetic gift and discernment. I desire to teach the church on what end-time deception looks like and how to discern the voice of God. I have an expanded vocabulary on grace, forgiveness, shame, and compassion for others and self. I understand the brokenness of individuals, family, and humanity that is useful for healing and rebuilding. I have been able to counsel other parents who have adult children that have had dramatic and traumatic changes in their identity, helping them to make sense of, work through, overcome, or reconnect with family members and to heal from grief and loss. Through this suffering God increased our capacity to love, to give and receive grace, to trust him and to know his grace and mercy even more. God truly uses every aspect of our lives for his glory.

Our Second Son

Our third child, and second son, was born in Winnipeg in 1996. His name means “gift of God.” Today he is a young man that seeks God with all his heart. Through the hardship of losing his older brother he has clung to the Lord with all his might for the healing of his heart. Throughout his life he has always tried to keep his focus on God and his heart steady toward him. He is a loving, kind and compassionate son. He loves to worship God, and through always keeping his eyes on God and staying close to him has become a wise young man. He is also creative, a self-learner and funny. We are so thankful for him.

This son was not without his own challenges. Though he was healthy and strong at birth, somewhere around the eighth month, he became ill with the flu. We had him on antibiotics for a while. After this, his facial expressions often appeared strained. I remember our neighbour's friend jokingly commented to my son when he was less than two years old, "Why do you look so stressed? Are your mortgage payments overdue?" Our son's strength slowly waned, and we noticed he was losing weight. We took him to the doctors, and they began to run tests on him while we kept a close watch, encouraging him to eat. His health kept deteriorating, and we began to wonder whether he would live or die. My spiritual mentor had a vision of my son as a young man in his twenties holding his own baby son in his arms. Up to this time, my husband and I had been very concerned for our son's life, as he had no energy to move and would lie still all day. In another time of intercession for him, my mentor received a vision of my son. He looked like a very strong muscular man and with one hand he tore down a brick wall of a city. He was 'storming the gates.' She received Psalm 144:1 as a word from God, that my son was a strong man and God had fashioned his hands for war. We understood these visions and words to mean that he was going to be a strong man of prayer and faith in God. He was going to be a "wise man that scales the city of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which they trust" Proverbs 21:21. Through this prophetic utterance, we had peace that our son was going to live and would have a strong faith in God. Our son would be a righteous man whose foundation would be unshakeable. Despite this our son became

increasingly sick and was finally diagnosed with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder. We thank God that with the correct diet this disease is manageable and not life threatening.

It was a hectic time for us. My husband was in an intense MBA program. He looked after our other two children, cooked meals, and attended to the household while going to school every day. By the grace of God, my husband completed the year with good solid grades. We stayed in a Word of Faith Church for the next ten years. Word of Faith churches are neo-charismatic churches known for their sermons that focus on the promises of God for healing or prosperity. My husband and I felt we needed to learn every scripture on healing for our son and grow our faith in this area. I looked up and read every bible verse and story on healing. I wrote a book illustrating every healing verse by drawing stick people to read to my son, as there were no books for children on God's healing promises. There were lots of books for adults but none that I could find for children. During this time period, I wrote four books in total that are not published. I think I could publish two of them now. I would have to revisit them to reflect those changes in my theology, which moved from a pure Word of Faith perspective to a view that is more tempered and allows for interaction in the relationship between God and the believer as a consideration in the outcomes of miracles. After being in this Word of Faith denominational stream for almost ten years, we felt we could not absorb any more sermons on healing and wanted to hear a wider breadth of teaching. We spoke with our pastors to tell them of our

decision. We hugged each other, blessed each other, and said our goodbyes. They had been good pastors to our family. We had been close to them and were thankful to God for their lives and ministry. As my second son got older, this experience created a compassion in him for sick people and children. He has worked and volunteered in ministries that serve the homeless, in camps for kids and especially loves to make them laugh.

Our Second Daughter

My husband and I wanted another child. We prayed and asked God for a girl. That way, we would have two boys and two girls. One night as we were sleeping, I was awakened by the Holy Spirit and heard him say, “Now.” I turned to my husband, woke him up, and said, “God told me we should try now for the baby.” In retelling this story, my husband likes to put his hand to his forehead and say, “Ok, but be gentle with me,” as he tries to hide his smile. I knew the Lord had given me a girl, and we sought God in prayer for her name, as we wanted it to reflect her identity. The name we felt the Holy Spirit rested on means, “Bringing forth the knowledge of God.” We had prayed and sought God for the names of each of our children (except for our first born which the Lord gave to us) and found that the meaning of their names really did match their personalities. Through this daughter, God taught me what it means to be loved for who I am and as I am. She is mischievous, funny, and caring. She showers me with love and fills our hearts with joy. We are so thankful for her.

When our youngest daughter was seven years old, she was having nightmares. We were praying that they would stop. One night in the middle of the night, she woke up and had a vision of an angel with a sword who drew a circle of fire around her. My daughter spoke out loud and said, "Nightmares, I am no longer afraid of you," and the steady stream of nightmares ended for her.

Being the baby of the family, this child received a lot of doting from her older siblings. She was a child of joy and brought this to all our family. When her older sister left home on Mother's Day in 2011, it was quite traumatic for her, and with the passing of our older son in 2015, to whom she was very close, she was left very sad and felt that God did not honor her faith. It takes time to work through grief before the 'new' way of 'being' in life is sorted through.

This daughter is very hard working. She got a job at a restaurant from an early age and within a year was promoted to head hostess. She is smart, observant and conscientious to do her work. This daughter is very supportive of others. She seeks to build individuals up and to bring out the best in people. She has a passion and love for animals who are at ease with her sensitive and caring nature. She has brought home numerous pets including fishes that were sick or missing a fin, and a bearded dragon that had vertigo, and took care of them all. It reminds me of God. He brings us all in, and even when no one else would want us, he wants us, and he paid for us. My daughter is awakening to life and has started to make plans to begin seeking out her own identity and purpose with God. One day my daughter will have her own testimony, as will my other children.

My Husband

From my husband, God taught me that he can remove the broken pieces of life that have wound themselves around us. In doing so, he makes all things new. My husband and I are best friends. From the moment we met, we wanted to be together. We never tire of each other and love working together at home, in ministry, or at play. We like many of the same sports and types of people as well as outside interests such as theatre and art. Our vision, heart, and passion for our family and for God have flowed in a symbiotic way throughout our life. In the beginning, we were two young people with fearful hearts that did not trust well, yet we loved each other and God deeply. In our process of personal growth and maturation, we have fought each other, wounded each other, and supported each other. Our relationship has evolved to a full bloom of complete trust, intimacy, and unconditional love. He is wise and very loving, always giving selflessly to me and the children, without thinking of himself.

Just as he heard from God regarding the birth of our older son, my husband heard from God again on the day of his passing. God asked my husband if he would release him for God's glory, and my husband answered, "How can I refuse you?" Then with tears streaming down his face he asked his father to help him open his hands and release our son to the Lord. On one chilly morning in December 2015 in Calgary, not too far from the accident location, my husband asked the Lord to show him something in the "now." In a vision he was ushered into the throne room of God saw our older son and God having a conversation of the ages. Our son, sitting at the feet of God engrossed in animated conversation

with him, turned to my husband and said, “Pop, you gotta hear this. It’s amazing!” My son and God then faded in the vision. When my husband came home, he called everyone and described what he had seen.

My husband and I have also been given the blessing of God to see the patterns of our lives continue in the lives of our children and grandchild. Each one of our children, our daughter in-law and our grandchild are called by God to serve him. Each one of them is looking to God for the purpose and destiny that he has preordained for them. I can only give God all the praise and glory for all that he has done in our lives.

Our Dog: Healing Balm

We purchased a small toy breed dog that brought God’s healing balm to our hearts. This dog is very devoted and faithful in her love for us. Though as soon as there is food available or a squirrel to chase, she gets distracted and forgets about us, some things take priority. However, other than that she is devoted to us. She loves our family and sneezes when she begs for food, leaps to our side when we sing songs, and becomes very excited when we make jokes. God has used her to bring much joy in our lives. She was very healing to our hearts, and we are so thankful for her. She is very much a part of our family.

More Ministry Experiences

I will now consider some ministry experiences that helped shape my spiritual formation.

Home Bible Study Blessings

In 2011 we opened our home to a bible study. I prepared and led the lessons, while one of the members ushered in worship. We had group sharing, prayer, and ministry time. We began at 7 p.m. and often finished close to midnight. As I taught, people often began to weep as the Holy Spirit came and touched them. One couple struggling in their marriage was considering getting a separation. We prayed for them, I fasted on several occasions for them, my husband and I ministered to them, and they were able to forgive each other. They are together and doing well today. One woman had had night terrors for many years and was on medication for it. I put both of my fingers in her ears, she heard a “pop.” When she came back the following week, she reported that she still had had a couple of nightmares, but she was doing significantly better. I prayed for her again. This lady reported that the nightmares stopped. I saw her a year later, and she told me she kept getting better and was off medication and had lost ten pounds. Another family’s child was not well, and they had received negative test results. We spent time praying and ministering in the Spirit; the presence of God was strong. After the next round of tests, she received positive results and was well.

People would call during the week and come for personal ministry and prayer. I prayed for several women who had lumps or dark shadows show up in their x-rays. Through prayer, intercession, and fasting, every lump and shadow that was there either came back benign or was gone. God also gave me words of knowledge. One young woman came for prayer, and as we were praying, God

told me that she was physically harming herself in places that were difficult for anyone to detect. I delicately told her what the Lord had told me, and her mouth dropped open. God showed me this so that she would know that he saw her and how sad he was. We prayed together, and I spent time ministering to her. I praised God when I was told she stopped self-harming.

After these experiences, I began to question myself. I said, “God, I am studying the bible on my own and am not certain if I am doing it right. I hear your voice, but some of the problems I am encountering are bigger than what I understand. I can love these people, but I am limited in my ability to help them. I have only one cent in my hand. I cannot even rub two pennies together.” I prayed and thought that God was wanting me to continue my education at seminary, where I could study counselling and bible classes. I let the bible study group know that I would be going back to school, and with hugs and assurance from the Spirit in them we stopped meeting together.

Encounter and Growth

As my older son and I were worshipping God one day, and as we were alternating between praying and praising God, we also waited quietly, listening to the Lord’s voice. As we were doing so, we felt this water mist fall upon us lightly with the most beautiful fragrant aroma. This happened intermittently several times. We were excited, laughing and praising God. One day, I was walking and talking with God when suddenly I was caught up in the Spirit. God spoke to me and said, “If you pray from this place with a heavenly perspective, then what you

say will have greater impact than if you pray from an earthly one.” The Lord was teaching me at that time about the importance of walking in intimacy with him, hearing his voice, and aligning my prayers with his plans and purposes rather than prayers that flow out of my heart. We have greater impact when we know the heart of our Father and pray according to his will. Then our prayers will always be answered because they came from him to us, which we then pray through him and back to him.

On one day, the Lord had been speaking to me, asking me to do something that I thought was not particularly important and so I let it slide from my mind. Later that day, as I was worshipping God and dancing before him, his presence came suddenly and mightily into the room with such power that I fell instantly to the floor and was repenting like crazy. He said, “I will not be mocked” (Galatians 6:7-8). The scripture saying, “every knee shall bow, and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:10) became very clear to me. No one will be able to stand before him in that day. In North America, we often hear a gospel preached where God is made in our image. He is a God who understands us and loves us as we are. His grace is without end. However, God is holy. He is God. He is the potter, and we are the clay (Isaiah 64:8). It is his kingdom, and he has house rules that he made, which we are invited to receive and follow. These rules include acknowledging his sovereignty, his way of approaching him, his standard of godliness, and his definition of relationship and encounter.

My Experience with Meditation

When I first began to meditate, I would spend a couple of hours or more in the day trying to stop my mind from thinking. I had not read any books on the topic, nor was I familiar with mindful attention. In our church we were advised to lie down and soak in the presence of God. I would lie on the floor and strain through the many thoughts that flooded me. Sometimes I would fall asleep but slowly over time I was able to relax and simply be with the Lord. The idea of simply 'being' with God and not being with him as an act of 'doing' was mind boggling for me and almost painfully so. My German upbringing of productivity and constant go gave me no framework to grasp this. It took me a long time and a few discussions with various people before one day it clicked, and I could simply 'be' or 'rest' in silence with God. I had read in a Smith Wigglesworth book that he would sit in silence with God for half an hour and then read scripture for half an hour. I tried this for a while too. Eventually I settled into 2 hours a day of studying scripture and silent listening to God. I noticed if I added another half hour of waiting in silence for God in the evening that this deepened the experience.

I found that when I rested in the Lord though I did not hear anything or have any visions God would speak to me about people later during the day. One day I was walking toward a counselling office and as I passed by an individual, I heard the voice of the Lord say, "He is a scheister" or trickster. Later in the day this same man came into the counselling office and the lady whom he came to see told me, "Don't let the way that guys look or the way he talks fool you, he is a

weasel.” The more I rested with God the more I heard him speak to me about people. Over time I noticed that I often was able to feel in my body what other people felt in theirs. Whether it was fear, pain or other physical sensation. During my times of silence, I also noticed a buzzing feeling in my hands which eventually I felt over my entire body. This I associated with God’s presence and when I laid my hands-on people and prayed for them, they would feel heat or become very calm and quiet. At other times people fell when I laid my hands on them in prayer. While I read scripture and rested in God daily there were seasons when I had a lot of time and would spend this time with the Lord. I ministered to people on a regular basis as I was involved in several church and outreach activities.

It is my experience that there is a rest in God that is so beautiful that it is as if entering heaven itself. It is hard to leave this place: the desire for earthly things becomes so distant. God’s beauty is so great that you do not want to come back. In this place, your senses become heightened. You can see, hear, smell, and know in the physical realm the spiritual conditions of the soul. You can sense and see spiritual beings. Heaven and earth begin to overlap, and you start to walk in both places. The purpose of this is to join with God in his missional work of the restoration of creation, for intercession, for evangelistic proclamation, for healing of the spirit, mind and body to God. We enter the deeper things of God through quietness and rest, not from being overly active. Deep within us is where we will hear God, and in doing so, we begin to hear his desire to transform ourselves, our

community, and our world into his plan. It is here that we can begin to partake of the plans of the kingdom.

When we interact with the inner light, then we see the brokenness of the world, the suffering through the loving eyes of God. When we are obedient lovers of God, change can then occur. God uses us in our humility, not as religious dictators, to affect his plans. Within this is the revelation of suffering. Without some form of loss, we cannot speak of the hope of God. In learning to be a conduit for the power of God, it allows God to energize and transform us by seeing ourselves and the world around us through the light of God's eyes, God's heart, and God's understanding.

Building Project Rebuilding Trust

Through earlier life experiences, I felt unable to trust God in times of distress. When I encountered what felt like life-threatening situations, I was unable to grasp God and hold on to him, allowing him to lead me through. Rather, I would lean on my own understanding and seek resolution in a way that made sense to me. My fear overrode my ability to trust God. Over time, various challenges arose, and I found that as I progressed in my relationship with God, I was increasingly able to trust God. However, the few "big ones" left me feeling stuck. I truly resonated with Paul Pettit's statement that "we keep replaying the fall in our own lives in our own personal rational way even though we are made in the image of God we are corrupt to the core of our human spirit" (Pettit 2008, 56). The effects of the fall that we experience extend through to death, whether our

fears or apprehensions of death or death itself. It is my impression that the church does not teach its people how to spiritually die well. As a believer I can give God my burdens but my greatest burden I cannot lay down as it is intricately woven into the fabric of who I am and to lay that down feels as though I will physically die as a result, I retract and am doomed to repeat this failure again. In 2012, my husband and I entered a building project on a building we own which required the renovation of a fire escape. We sought and were awarded a grant for the repairs and were given a time frame within which to complete the project, with the stipulation that if it was not completed on time then the amount of the loan would have to be paid in full. We had a draftsman complete the plan, and it was sent to the engineers for approval. The city engineers returned the draft five times over a period of a year. A stipulation of the project was that it was to be completed within six months; we had received an extension of three further months and another extension of another two months, stating that at the end of one further month, we would have to repay the grant.

I did not give up on my faith and continued to seek God. I began to cry out to God that he would give me my own well from which a river of living water would flow. I sought him in scripture reading and through increased time in listening prayer. My husband and I called on the name of the Lord repeatedly during this time and determined to trust him in this situation (Psalm 116:4; Psalm 50:15). We resisted the fear that we felt and looked to God as our salvation, stating that we would not choose our way nor the way of the agency, but would

choose God's response to our circumstance (2 Samuel 24:11-13). Two weeks before the end of the final four-week deadline, while sleeping at night, I received a dream from God. In it, I was driving a van with our family on an icy highway, and a dark storm was rolling in toward us. At that moment, our van hit a skid, and our vehicle flipped onto its side. I said, "Ok, that's it; we are done." At that moment, a silver Harley Davidson tow truck pulled up, and the driver said to me, "I can take you and your family for \$2.00 and all your stuff for \$3.00." I replied, "I can afford that." I then woke up and told my husband that God was going to save us. We continued to pray and call out to God, and the days continued to pass without an answer. With only three days left till the deadline, my husband and I felt that we should call the fire commissioner and let them evaluate our incomplete project, as we had not received approval from the engineering department allowing us to move forward to completion. We committed the results to the Lord and felt a sense of peace.

The fire commissioner came and, upon the completion of the inspection, told us we had been falling through the cracks. The reason the city engineers could not approve the draft was that they were attempting to do so under the new code. However, the existing structure fell under the old code and would be grandfathered in. The project was approved, and no further requirements were needed. With that, our ordeal had ended with divine providence. This experience broke the grip of fear and mistrust my husband and I had toward God. Finally, we knew, that we knew: we would never have a lack of trust toward him again. God

is ever so merciful to myself and my husband. This experience strengthened us, so that when the death of our son occurred, we were able to stand with trust in our God and his unwavering grace and love toward us.

Over the last few years, our family has been involved with the local homeless community at the Ark Aid Street Mission. My husband serves on the board. We serve meals, wash dishes, clean floors and tables, drive people to the doctor where needed, assist with finding housing, and perform other duties as they arise. I have preached on occasion before the evening meal was served and during the Sunday morning service, which my son led. Both our sons worked fulltime during the summer, assisting church volunteers serving at the mission. Our older son started out first for three summers then our second son picked up where he left off for the next three summers. I spent the best part of a year offering pastoral care to individuals and sitting with people to hear their stories and to get to know the community better.

Homeless people are often thought of as one dimensional. Their personality consists of homelessness, and, therefore, they appear to have not much to offer, certainly not financially but not relationally either. Some people in the suburbs are fearful or uncomfortable with them. I have come to know and love many of the homeless. They are as varied a group of individuals as you would find among any other class. Some are very artistic and can write poetry, draw, or create things through carpentry or otherwise. Some are quite scholarly and have read intellectual books on medical issues that they are diagnosed with. Some are

very philosophical and can have deep and meaningful conversations. Some are very athletic and are very health conscious. Others are quite practical, some kind, some hurt, bitter and angry, some full of addictions, some emotionally broken, some quite criminal, some musically talented, and some comical. Each desires relationship and seeks it at the Ark Aid Street Mission in London.

Local Ministry Experience

I participated in an outreach ministry called Hardcore Ministries for several years in London 2008-2012. I sat on their board, sought out grants, and participated in fundraising for their events. This ministry reached out to bikers, strippers, and former prisoners - providing haircuts and manicures to women on the streets as well as ministering to the homeless. We organized a street barbeque for the homeless and had over five hundred people come out. We featured a Christian band, had an evangelist preach, and fed people hotdogs, hamburgers, and ice cream. It was a hectic day filled with lots of activity, but it was so worthwhile. We were able to talk to the homeless people, making new friends among them. We prayed for people and listened to their stories.

Over a two-year period, we went into the strip bars. The purpose was to love the women where they were at and to build relationships. We had a no-pressure agenda (i.e., no power evangelism) but only a desire to be available and open to relationship with the girls in the club. Our hope and prayers were that they would come out of this lifestyle and give their lives to Jesus. Going into the strip clubs was a different kind of experience. Some clubs are more raunchy or darker

than others. We would have a group of people in a separate car to cover us in prayer while we went inside. We would go on specific days such as Valentine's Day or Christmas. We would go to stores and ask them for donations of chocolate, makeup, and anything else that seemed suitable. The girls received individual gifts at Christmas and flowers on Valentine's Day; the gifts had a note attached saying we are thinking of them and we love them. Before going into the club, management was approached by the woman in charge of the ministry. They were told that we were church ladies and wanted to meet the girls and give them a small gift. We did not stay longer than forty minutes, so as not to make the customers or the girls nervous and take up paying time. We ordered a soft drink to honour the management. The girls were always happy to meet us, speak with us, and receive our gifts. A couple of the girls did give their lives to Jesus, and we were able to help one of them start a new life and settle her into a local congregation.

We took this ministry seriously. We prepared ourselves by praying, fasting, waiting on the Lord in silent prayer for direction, and praying as a group. We choose carefully who would go to the clubs, as we wanted the team to be fully united in heart and mission. We submitted our own hearts before God to ask whether we needed to seek forgiveness for ourselves and to make sure we harboured no hidden offence toward another. We had women who wanted to join us but had received opposition from their husbands. It was a ministry that stirred people up. Some of the men were concerned that their wives would receive spirits

of lust or have unclean spirits attach to them and did not want them to bring that back home. One Christian individual, upon hearing that I went into strip clubs to minister, commented, “Ewh, you must really have to hose yourself off when you come out of there.”

We met several Christians in the strip club. One employee, dressed in nondescript clothes quietly came to us and said, “I am a follower of Christ. He has me here, and I pray for these people on my own.” Another individual sat at the bar and, hearing we were church ladies, became excited to talk to us. He told us how he listens to his praise music all the time in the car. He thought what we were doing was great and wanted to talk about God, which we did with him. One of the strippers told us about the church she attends in another city. She said that God told her she should not do anymore pole work (which can be a graphic experience). Instead, she moves along the side tables, talking to people and encouraging the girls who work there. I thought, “Praise God she hears and obeys his voice,” and I have prayed for her desire to hear God more, to trust him, and to follow him out the door into a new life. This woman’s testimony is not a lot different than other Christians. People obey God and slightly adjust their behaviour in their efforts to follow him. In some people’s world this may mean no longer gossiping, smoking, or whatever else God is highlighting to them. We all experience incremental growth.

We also witnessed at Blue Waters Correctional Facility for men in Goderich for a few years. We went to minister to young men under the age of

eighteen who were incarcerated for various crimes. We would take turns preaching a short message. I often did a bible teaching. I recall one of the first meetings I went to. The guard led the group of men into the room. There was one tall youth whose hair was tousled; he had cuss words tattooed on his arm and looked around the room with an angry scowl. As he was walking by me, I heard the Lord say, "His mother did not mean to hurt him the way she did. She was scared herself". I stopped him and quietly said what I heard the Lord say. This "freaked him out," as he later told me. He regularly attended our meetings. We had many talks with him. He became a big soft guy toward us and would command the others to pay attention to us when things got a bit unruly. This individual did ask Jesus into his heart and told us he would be going back to school when he got out.

On a few occasions as we were walking into the prison, we would hear these weird screams and shrieks from the windows. A young person would say taunting words and swear at us. He joined our group and became quite disruptive; the guard had to escort him out. During one of the sessions, he became very agitated and became loud. The lady who runs the ministry began praying for him and asking him if he wanted to receive Jesus. He did ask Jesus into his heart and became very calm. He had been in isolation and had broken many windows and some doors, but after he accepted Christ, there was a visible transformation. He joined the young men in the regular rooms. He wrote to everyone he had offended and apologized to them, telling them that he met Jesus and experienced peace. He

still had some anger issues, but it was significantly reduced. We connected him with church people in his hometown when his time was up.

Another young person who came from a very rough family accepted Jesus and remains in contact with the ministry. He has been in and out of prison; however, he always turns to Jesus. Breaking free from a criminal mindset supported by family is difficult, but it can be done. Some of the people that have come to prison with us to speak to the young men are older fellows that had a similar life style when they were young. These older men accepted Jesus as their Saviour and have become solid Christians, providing men with a living testimony of hope. Whenever we led a group at the prison, we always had a sizable number of young men participate. We always prayed over them, and they really enjoyed the prophetic ministry, as we sought to hear God's voice for them. We had the honor of baptizing some of the young men, using a small cup of water to do so. This ministry and its leaders are still very active in fulfilling the call of God on their lives. I am no longer involved with them as the Lord has called me in another direction, but I still counsel strippers, people with prison records, and the homeless. I am grateful to God that I can continue to work with this population.

Psychotherapist

I graduated from seminary with a Master of Divinity, specializing in clinical counselling. In that program, students are required to complete 450 hours of clinical training at an agency. Many of the internships require the student to pay a fee for this training. In addition, the school supplied a list of placements

only in the Toronto area, which was two hours away from my home. Very few placements were available that did not require a fee. Before graduating, I looked at various websites, and found in London, eight minutes from my home, a place that offered internships to graduate students with a master's degree. I did not yet have a master's degree, and for half a year, I kept looking up their website saying, "God this would be a great agency to intern with." One day, I decided to call and speak with the director of the program and ask if they would ever consider taking on a student. She met with me, and we discussed my hopes and what their program provided. After a while, we spoke again, and she offered me a student placement; upon graduation I could continue training with them. I was so blessed by God: there was no fee involved and it was eight minutes from my home. I felt God's support on my counselling journey. My supervisor was a charismatic Christian. He understood my church background and helped me to find my way, integrating all the pieces of myself in a way that felt true to what God was calling me to do. I was blessed with many opportunities of growth. I trained under different therapists and cofacilitated diverse types of groups. I received continuing education in the form of group seminars. I stayed at this agency for two years and was thankful for the agency director, my supervisors, and other therapists.

I wanted to advance in my training and looked at courses that would increase my counselling skills in trauma. As I was speaking with God about it, I had a vision and saw a hand writing a cheque. I felt a restful peace come over me and thanked God for his goodness to me. Four months went by, and the course

was starting the following week. This training was only offered in my city once a year. I reminded God of the deadline and thanked him for his provision. In that week, an individual came to me with a cheque and said, “God wants you to have this.” I felt that God answered my prayer and that he agreed with me. The training was paid in full. I thanked God for his goodness toward me.

A year later, I asked the Lord again for another trauma related therapy course to increase my knowledge when working with clients. I did not have the finances available and would look at the training website repeatedly, telling God how helpful it would be. When I went on this website, I would fill out the application each time but stopped where they asked you to submit payment. One day, I went to look at the training website, and it stated they were not receiving any more applications; their training was full. I was distressed; they had filled up during early bird registration. I called the administration office and told them of my interest and my many attempts to fill out the application and lack of finances. The administrator told me she would get back to me. A week later, I was contacted and told they would make room for me, I could apply for a scholarship to help reduce the cost of the fees, and they would give me a payment plan that would suit my budget. I rejoiced greatly and was very thankful to the training organization for making a way for me to be part of the training and to God for opening doors of growth for me.

Later Years Seminary

I chose to participate in the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale specializing in spiritual formation, which is very much suited to the practice of psychotherapy. Spiritual direction offered me an excellent guide in framing our supernatural encounters with the Divine. The teaching aligns our experiences in such a way that is consistent with church history. It trains one in leading others to encounter God in a meaningful way. This is like psychotherapy where various models provide a framework with which to engage peoples' psyche and behaviour.

The training I received from the doctoral program is the final phase of a three-stage process. Over ten years ago, I was at a conference and heard God clearly call me to ministry. I heard his voice audibly say to me, "I have called you to teach those I have called to run, how to run." What I understood this to mean is that using biblical teaching, my training in spiritual formation, and my clinical skills, I am to bring individuals to awareness of their spirit, mind and body. This includes loosening the bonds that have wrapped themselves around people, bending them away from fulfilling the plans and purposes that God has for them. Spiritually, it means assisting others to walk in their destiny and enter the call God ordained for them before they were born (Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13). What this looks like, is a customized intensive mentorship as a core program of a school of ministry. The aim is to help individuals who are called by God acknowledge their strengths, and identify their weakness from a holistic spirit, mind and body lens to fulfill the call of destiny in their lives.

Forest City Destiny Church

We started attending a church plant Forest City Destiny Church in 2010 with pastors who were new to the city. Its denominational roots flow out of the Vineyard church movement but are now called Partners in Harvest, stemming out of Toronto Airport Church. The pastors had been involved in church ministry for over thirty years and brought maturity and insight in their interaction with people. They know how to love people well and to help them reach their potential. This was so evident in the way their people loved them back. What we appreciated about the congregants was their desire to know God and how focused they were on their spiritual growth. The pastors promoted growth by allowing the church to expand organically. If a congregant felt impressed by God to go on a mission trip, they would outline their plan and give it to the pastors and then organize and lead the event themselves. This freedom saw many people walking in their talents and destinies. It produced excitement and growth for people to learn to trust God in a safe environment with mentoring support. The pastors teach all over the world and are known for their prophetic gifts, mature insights, and depth in their relationship with God. There are now many groups in the congregation that are on mission trips to different countries in the world. There are several weekly groups for bible studies, fellowship, painting, inner healing, relationship building, prayer, evangelism, intercession, healing, and the prophetic. The pastors are instilling in the congregants the pursuit of one's own destiny. It is to the glory of God for his purpose that our talents and callings are given, not for the promotion of self. This clears a path for people to focus on themselves and God, to celebrate the abilities

of others, knowing that they have a course set for success in a way designed specifically for them. The church offers many types of schools with emphasis on leadership, prophecy, the arts, and, recently, the bible. These schools are attended by people locally and internationally.

Our family began attending the church soon after they opened their doors in our city. I was involved in starting up the Sunday school program for the church and helped to get it up and running. I was also one of the teachers who instructed in the bible school run by our home church. My older son was an intern with the pastors and learned a lot from them about God and life in ministry. He participated in the daily activities of church life and was included in leadership meetings and board meetings. He desired to become a pastor and found the training invaluable.

Our Future General Vision

The Lord has given my husband and I clear direction of how we are to equip ourselves. We are to know him intimately as the one who leads us, and we trust him with every facet of our life without question and without fear. We are to know his Word deeply so that we may feed his people. We are to lead others into the love of the Father through relationship and community. God has given us a vision of what this means for us, and he has been opening the doors in the way we are to go as we continue to walk with him. Our desire is to establish a school(s) (first one opening in London 2019). This is a school of ministry for those in ministry or those feeling called to ministry. The core program of the school will

be a customized holistic individual intense mentorship program. In this program everyone will receive a customized program that explores their strengths and offers support to those areas that need growth. This is a one-on-one mentorship program where the person will receive spiritual direction, psychotherapy, instruction in biblical studies, prayer, personal ministry and exploration of calling and support through internships and further professional development. This core program follows the ministry example of Jesus who trained up a small group of individuals in all areas of their life for successful ministry. Due to the intense nature of this program, it will have a small enrollment. Offered alongside this core program will be available individual courses to support the growth of those applying. Individual counselling, spiritual direction, biblical courses and training in missions, preaching, the arts, drama, running a non-profit business, evangelism, and learning to care for those in human trafficking are examples what the school will offer.

During the time I was in my home alone with God studying scripture and praying I felt the Holy Spirit guide me in the way I read the bible. He led me to seek out the historical context, thematic and allegoric meaning of the passages. He touched my heart and spoke to me through the connections of the biblical story and my own life story. As I learnt to discern his presence, he led me in the rhythm of reading, meditating, and praying. I felt my spirit being woven into his and could feel a strong connection with him. During the times of resting deeply with him, I began to know a love that was greater than the love of myself.

In summary, as I opened my heart to trust him more my attachment with him began to change from anxiousness to one of growing security allowing me to let go of the fear of losing myself. It was not until I was in this doctoral program when I learned that the way I was reading scripture was known as lectio Divina.

In the next chapter, I would like to share more about this style of reading and how it fits into my model of spiritual formation. God calls us into relationship with him and into community with others. Growing in greater awareness and connection to God, self and others is part of our spiritual journey. Please join me as I explain how we can do this using lectio Divina, psychological knowledge and spiritual direction to help get us there.

CHAPTER THREE:

A SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus asks the question that hits at the core of our faith: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20). This was an important question at the time of Jesus and remains an important question today. Here he was, standing in front of the second temple by the fountains of Jordan that could be seen from miles away. (Barclay 1966, 196). Jesus is asking this question at a time when the religious powers of the day, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the elite Sanhedrin opposed his teachings and sought to destroy him by branding him as a revolutionary, a law-breaker, a heretic among the Jewish Orthodox. The responses of his disciples to this question ranged from John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah to one of the prophets. More pointedly, it is Peter’s reply, “You are the Christ” that prompted Jesus’ response that would lay down the foundation for all of Christianity (Mark 8:29). Jesus’ response to Peter took the disciples by surprise. And Jesus said to him,

Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:17-19)

The purpose of this model of spiritual formation is to help answer Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” It further seeks to help us answer the question we ought to ask ourselves, who do you say you are? Jesus asks Peter who he says he is and then tells him who he is the “rock,” and this is why we ought to ask ourselves who we are. Who we say we are as Christians is tied to our identity in Jesus. (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3) How we respond reveals where we are at in our journey with him.

The model seeks to provide resources that will help us to hear God tell us who we are and increase awareness in the areas where we need to grow. It will seek to address this growth through a spirit, mind and body perspective (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

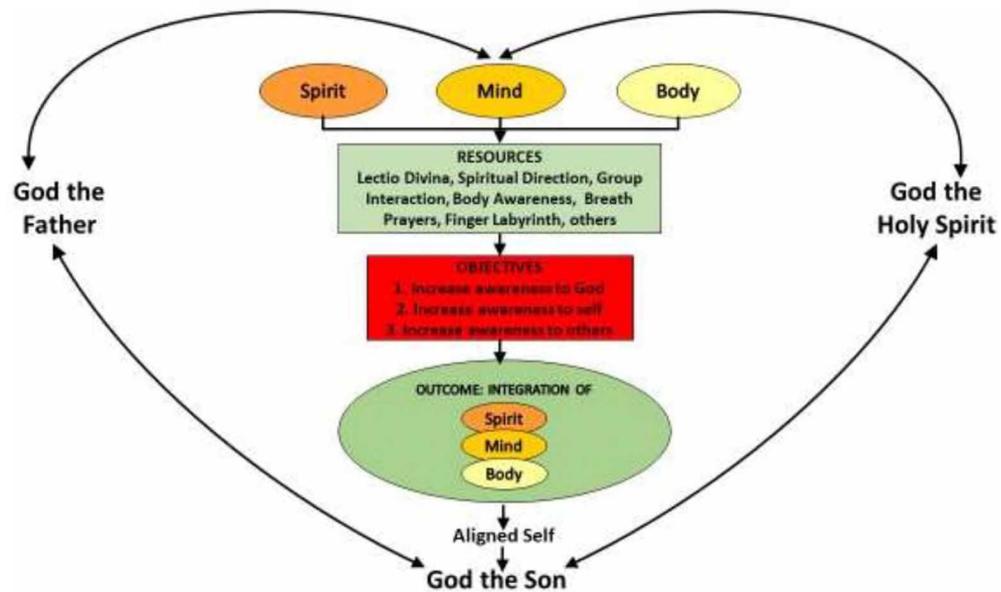


Figure 1 A Model of Spiritual Formation

In this model, I am attempting to offer what I found to be helpful for myself personally as well as what I have observed and researched to be needed in my time of listening to others as a psychotherapist and spiritual director. There are areas in people's lives where they find themselves stuck in a rut unable whether through mental blocks or other circumstances to move forward. Many Christians do not trust God: they struggle with loneliness, have difficulty reading scripture, or are frustrated and unsatisfied in their families, marriages, friendships, church, and careers. Many do not know how to get close to God. The result is a life of keeping up appearances as though these things do not exist, as though they are fine while deep inside, they are afraid to share how they really feel. They may even lack awareness of their specific struggle. This leads to further internal isolation, loneliness, and a longing to be unbound.

Personal Discovery of the Model

In my own journey of Christian growth, I was active in church as a youth and took on various leadership roles as I became older. I went to bible school for a year and was involved in various outreaches to prisons, the homeless, and children in low-income neighborhoods. I led various groups in different seasons such as youth groups, ladies' groups, intercession group and bible studies. I spoke in tongues, prayed for many people, and practiced the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and Bible study. Though I knew that God loved me and had saved me, I struggled to trust him at a deeper level in my heart. I was able to surrender my will to him often, though in some instances it seemed impossible as I was

terrified to die to self. I felt that there was ceiling that I could not penetrate to grow closer to God. I felt lost as to how to fully surrender all aspects of my heart to him as well as how to draw closer to God. I also did not know where to turn for the answer. The idea of having “rivers of living water” flow out of me untapped sounded marvellous but how to attain it seemed far off. As the apostle John put it, “He who believes in Me...from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). In scripture Jesus refers to himself as living water (John 4:4,10) As well if anyone believes in him, they would receive the Holy Spirit who would flow as, “Rivers of living water from his heart” (John 7:37-39). From this scripture we can see that that there is a promise that anyone who believes in Jesus can experience an infilling of his Holy Spirit to such a degree that the overflow will refresh others.

The reality of Jesus as living water changed for me several years ago, when in my quiet time, I asked Jesus if he would “Open the scriptures to me and teach me” as he did his disciples (Luke 24:44-45). I waited for a felt sense awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit, which can be experienced as a centering of the mind, a sense of peace and calm and then began reading. Together with the Lord, I slowly went through passages in the Bible reading, listening, reflecting, asking, and waiting. This interactive process led to the use of commentaries, word searches, and deeper study. Often, I cried to God with awe and wonder at his creativity and wisdom. This came to be my place of encounter with him and self-transformation (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 25), our secret place

of meeting, where “he [kisses] me with the kisses of his mouth” (Song of Solomon 1:2). This biblical passage is a reference to the kiss of God which is likened to an encounter with God through the reading of scripture (Hebrews 6:5, 1 Timothy 4:6). We can encounter God when we read scripture. The bible tells us that, “In the beginning the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In this way, we come to the Father through the Spirit and through the mediation of Jesus as his children (2 Corinthians 6:18). Scripture is also given for us to learn about the character of God and how we can be more like him (2 Timothy 3:16).

As the Lord and I sought out connections, “linked passages, ideas and experiences” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 66), my soul became slowly woven into his, and the felt experience of knowing God and being known by him created a love connection between us where fear, lack of trust, fear of dying to self, and the ceiling fell away. In its place was a wonderful trust with the ease of sweet communication and a new way of being.

From this place of encounter, the Lord called me to walk in the plans that he had for me. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). The Lord said to me, *I am calling you to teach those I have called to run, how to run*. With this knowledge, I did a master’s degree in counselling, underwent training as a spiritual director, and am currently working toward a doctorate of spiritual formation.

As Beatrice Beebe comments, “All research is me-search” (Van Der Kolk 2014, 109). The model that I am proposing certainly falls in line with Beebe’s comment in that often people will research a topic in an area that they themselves are trying to solve. It is my hope that this model will benefit those individuals who are experiencing the same “stuck in-a rut” as I did, as well those who may find some of this information useful in supplementing their own model.

The Biblical Foundation of the Model

The biblical foundation of the model is based on the *Shema*: “*Sh'ma Yisraeil, Adonai Eloheimu, Adonai Echad,*” that is, “Hear oh, Israel the Lord your God (Eloheinu, God in plural form), the Lord is one (God in singular form). Love the Lord your with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

This prayer is a command to love God and to cling to him as a daily way of being in relationship with him. A call to awaken our inner spiritual ear to his word as the breath of life impacting every part of our day “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you arise” (Deuteronomy 6: 6-8). God desires for his people to read scripture so that they can learn about him, understand his ways of being among them, understand relationship with others, gain wisdom, and have a model of a way of life.

The theme of the *Shema* is repeated in Jesus' commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... [and] love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus also emphasizes the importance of having ears to hear by asking "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:14-15, 13:9, Mark 4:9, 23, 24, Luke 8:8, 14:35). In the parable of the Sower, where the seed represents the word of God and the soil the heart of the individual the result of hearing the word is given. Only one out of four seeds bear fruit. Jesus says that, "his word is Spirit and it brings us life" (John 6:63) and it is by the hearing of the word of God that faith comes (Romans 10:17). Jesus tells us that if our hearts are dull or we close our eyes from his word it would be difficult to hear or perceive the things of God. Yet if we opened our eyes to see and ears to hear, understanding would come to our heart and he would heal us (Matthew 13:15).

In the next section using the underlying theories of the model, I would like to explore further the love of God. The loving relationship to which we are invited and how scripture plays a role in helping us to connect more deeply with God and why a person's ears or eyes may be dull or unwilling to be open to God. I will be introducing the model in sections to explain and display the various components of the model along the way to help in guiding us through the discussion.

Underlying Theories of the Model

I will be introducing the model in parts to explain and display the various components of t

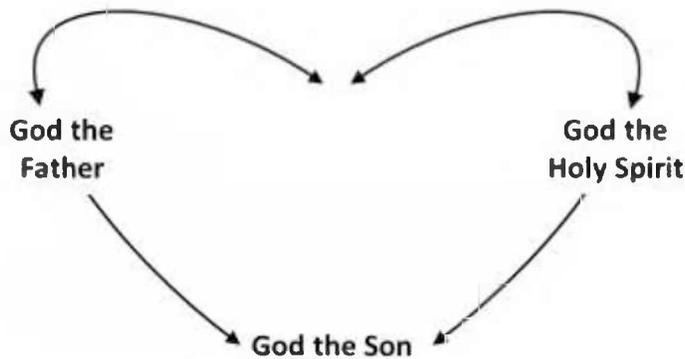


Figure 1a. The Triune Relationship

God desires to be in relationship with us. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). God desires us to move in union and communion just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit moves in oneness of mind (Figure 1a). Jesus prayed that "they [Christians] will all be one, just as you and I are one-as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (John 17:21). The life with God is the center of life and all else is remodeled and integrated by it (Standish 2005, 97). Two primary theories underlie the spiritual formation model. The first theory comes from the field of theology, and that is the concept of kenosis, (Torrance 1996) which provides a key to how to be continually filled with the love of God. The second is from the field of psychology, and that is attachment theory. Attachment theory (Bowlby 1988) which I will be discussing more fully, is helpful as it gives an inner explanation of our outward behavioral response. As

humans, we give and receive love imperfectly. This is due to the relational patterns that we received from our caregivers. Attachment theory can be used to help individuals identify their attachment patterns which creates self-awareness and allows for transformational change. In this model I explore different attachment styles further that help to identify the attachment styles of the individual and provide healthier ways to connect with God, self, and others.

Kenosis Theory

Kenosis is a theological term and understanding that refers to Jesus emptying himself of his own will so that he could fulfill the will of the Father. Following this example in the life of a believer is a key to being continually filled with the love of God. “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8). The love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is heavenly in nature. It is unanimous in giving, serving and loving fully to one another without barriers of shame, fear, anger or pride. God is love. “The Father loves the Son in the communion of the Spirit. The Son loves the Father in the communion of the Spirit. God has his being-in-communion” (Torrence 1996, 72). This means that every action, thought, movement, response of God is in love. Scripture tells us that, “Every good thing given, and every

perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In his will he brought us forth by the word of truth (James 1:17-18). God is also pure light, there is no hidden agenda to deceive or represent himself falsely, his love is pure. He is love and gives love eternally and can never be emptied.

Through redemption in Christ our relationship with God is restored and we can partake of his divine nature, transforming us into his likeness (2 Peter 1:2-4, Romans 1:16 – 17). God’s missional plan for all of creation is for humanity to join the work with Christ. “Jesus calls us that we might be identified with him by the Spirit, not only in his communion with the Father, but also in his great priestly work and ministry of intercession, that our prayers on earth might be the echo of his prayers in heaven” (Torrance 1996, 14). In this, humanity may know the great love that God has lavished on them, so that they may be called the children of God (1 John 3:1). Though Christ emptied himself, he receives continuously from the Father and through the Holy Spirit is giving of himself in unity and love to God. The emptying of Christ is a mystery and refers to his continuous desire to pour out or empty his desires so that he may be filled continually with God’s desires. In this way Christ’s continuous outpouring or emptying of his desire allows for a continuous flow of God’s love and grace to abound in him and through him.

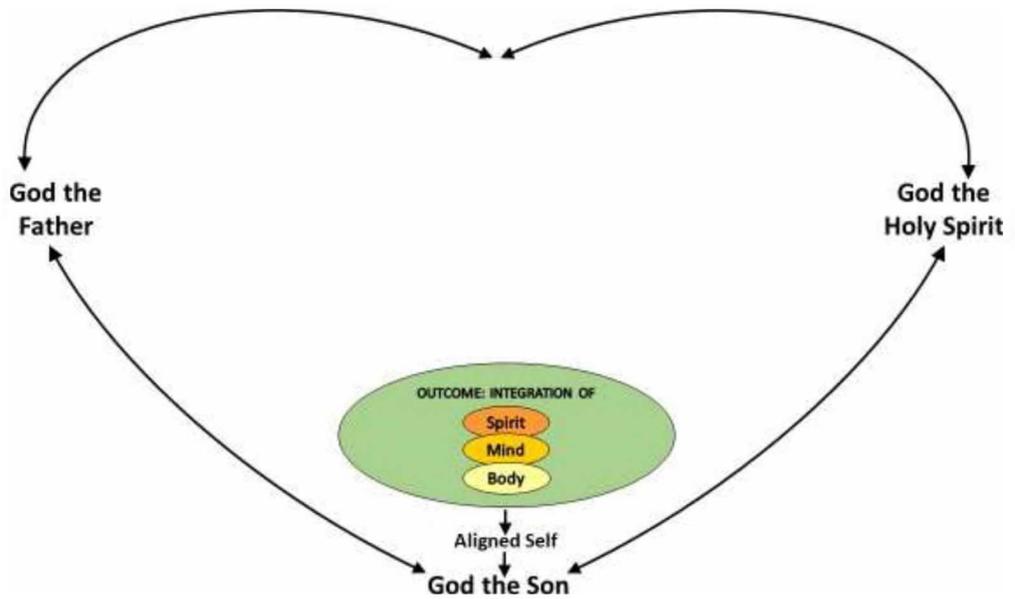


Figure 1b. Self and Others in the Kenotic Flow

As we join in obedience with Christ, and through the Holy Spirit we too empty ourselves of our will and our ways so that we may abound and overflow with the love of God (Figure 1b). Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

For those that choose to participate in the one true offering God is the one that lifts us up out of ourselves and fills us with his Spirit so that we can partake in the divine nature as adopted sons and daughter of God. “It is our self-offering of spirit, mind and body, in response to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude to God’s grace our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ” (Torrance 1996, 15).

Our surrender to the word of God, being formed and shaped within us, washes and renews our mind, a process that makes us more complete in our involvement and ability to interact God, self and others. God calls us to wholeness in our being and invites us to join in communion with him. When we join this union, we do not lose ourselves in this joining. Rather, I respond with the totality of my being. My identity in Christ is not erased. “The return to self is the core of the gospel and Christianity’s role in understanding the law of love by which every person can be made whole in love” (Delio 2013, 80). We are created for connection with God with ourselves and with others. We are connected through the Holy Spirit but the same Spirit that lives in me lives in another that flows through from God and this unites us in the body of Christ, and this is like God where we are one singular as well, we are also created to be one plural. It is the Spirit of God who stirs us up with Christ as our center which causes us to reach out to others. God loves us (John 3:16) and knows us intimately (Psalm 56:8). His love is unconditional (Romans 5:8). He is just, kind and good (Colossians 3:12-14). God knows us in our inner being (Psalms 139:13-16). He sees us in the mystery of our inner selves. God saw that Jacob though a sneaky liar (Genesis 25:23-25) was to become the one who would birth the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 49). God knows what brings us the most joy and satisfaction (Hebrews 13:5). When we are connected to God’s love it removes fear more and more (1 John 4:18). When we encounter the love of God, we feel transformed, have purpose and are at rest. As we encounter the love of our heavenly Father, we

detach from our worldly attachments to attach to God who grounds us in his love through knowing him, his voice, his presence and in being renewed in his love. God sends us out again to love those we encounter in an integrated and authentic manner. We are grounded in the knowledge of God with his love as the center of our understanding and way of being. God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and as such is available to interact with an individual and able to respond effectively to those who call upon him.

However, if God is such an amazing attachment figure, why is it so difficult to attach to him? I would like to examine why it is so difficult for Christians to connect to the love of God. Though they accept Jesus into their heart and with their mind they have read the scriptures and accept that God loves them and has sent his Son to die for them, yet still, distrust of God may live in the body in the form of fear, anxiety or anger. I would like to share a story to illustrate the point. A father comes home from work and spends the evening working on his car in the garage. His child longs to interact with him and stands by the car handing the father a wrench or whatever tool is needed. The father never engages his child with any other conversation other than to say, “pass the wrench.” This scene plays over and over for a couple of years. Later when the child is an adult and seeking the love of Father God plays out a familiar scene. Every evening after work they stand before God in prayer waiting to hear him speak to them. In frustration they never hear him and wonder if they will ever know God’s love in a relational way. In Figure 1c, the spirit, mind and body is

being shown to be separate from each other. I am attempting to demonstrate that these three areas of the self are not always working together in an integrated way. I will be discussing this further in the upcoming section of the role of the body in attachment theory.



Figure 1c. Spirit Mind Body not fully Integrated

Many Christians struggle to know God and to encounter themselves as their families of origin dictate their attachment styles, that is, the way they relate to themselves, God, and those around them. Though Conger provides a definition of character armour as a “rigid, maladaptive, repetitious response to the world developed as a defensive action during an earlier life trauma” (Conger 1994, 92). I have used the term armoured self which is a modification of a phrase to describe adaptive behavior where the authentic self, that is, the inner part of self that speaks without hindrance or finds another way of responding to their caregiver when the inner self feels overwhelmed and unable to speak freely without barriers. The individual at that moment of overwhelm develops a way of interacting (the armour) with their care giver that allows them to remain connected by withholding their preferred way of interacting and replacing it with

one that is believed to be more acceptable. The armoured self is that maladaptive behavior which an individual embraces and functions in to interact with others when their authentic self cannot be expressed. People long for freedom and connection in Christ. They long to get into the kenotic flow as described above. Attachment theory gives one a greater understanding of the issues that may block or hinder our relationship to God. We will now examine the importance of attachment theory as it pertains to attaching to God, self and others.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby (1907-1990) is considered the founder of the attachment theory. Bowlby defined attachment behavior as, “Any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick, and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving” (Bowlby 1988, 27).

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) a developmental psychologist who worked with John Bowlby as a researcher in the Tavistock Clinic, England, refined and provided evidence for Bowlby’s attachment theory. Ainsworth categorized attachment styles in three terms: Secure, Insecure ambivalent, and insecure avoidant. A fourth attachment style was later added by a student of Ainsworth, Mary Main, known as Insecure disorganized (Main and Solomon, 1990, 121-160). These styles will be explored in greater detail later.

Understanding one's attachment style is a step toward self-awareness. Only when a person is self-aware is there openness for change. The importance of individuals becoming self-aware and understanding their relational pattern, or their attachment style, is significant as it has a part to play in their ability to grow close to themselves, to others and to God. "Research and family and marriage therapy suggests that approximately 80% of the emotional conflict between couples is rooted in events that predate the couple knowing each other" (Thompson 2010, 71). Many people desire stronger and deeper connections but often fail to attain this depth, not having the knowledge as to 'why it is the way it is.' One psychiatrist commented that "people can never get better without knowing what they know and feeling what they feel. People sleep walk and do not know what they don't know and how little they are interacting with themselves" (Van Der Kolk 2014, 27). One reason for this "sleep walking" or limited awareness is because people are externally focused. They work, care for families, are busy at church, engage in leisure activities, or go out with friends. Their attention rests on their desires, their needs, and what they lack. When people focus on external activity without pausing to reflect on their emotional, physical, or spiritual state, they are not attuned to or aware of hindrances to intimacy. It can seem that this is 'good enough' and that this is how we 'do life.' Except when there is a loss of life, a divorce, a breakdown of a relationship, a loss of job, or other stress, the weakness of the inner structure is revealed.

The Role of the Body in Attachment Theory

Each child is born into their family with an individual genetically-predetermined temperament to which the parent reacts. This parental reaction then elicits the attachment pattern that the child tends to develop with each parent. The interactions between the parent and infant will reinforce neurological pathways of functioning. This explains why no two siblings ever really grow up alike in the same house, for no two children have the same temperament, and so each elicits different emotional reactions from his or her parents. “Attachment establishes an interpersonal relationship that helps the immature brain use the mature functions of the parent’s brain to organize its own processes” (Siegel 1999, 67). As parents are interacting with their babies, the infants are taking in every non-verbal cue whether it be tone of voice or body language, whether their caregiver’s body or face is tense, anxious, rigid or relaxed and at peace. These non-verbal cues are being written in or encoded into the fabric of their being. Implicit memory is preverbal. It is the feelings, impressions, emotions, and sensory experience felt from one’s caregivers that function below consciousness as a model for what is being encountered now. Explicit memory requires the ability to pay attention to details, allowing one the ability to recall past events and integrate them in one’s story. These interactive patterns of behavior implicitly shape the way we interpret ourselves and others. If we are part of families where loud voices are discouraged, we may speak in quiet tones and pull our body in to not take up too much space. If caregivers desired independence and strength the individual may stand tall with their head pulled back slightly. Over repeated time of holding our bodies in

patterned stances the muscles in our bodies, shape and form our stature into a visual display of our inner response.

“A powerful indication of the wisdom of the body is that it’s movement, posture and physiology will adapt to our surrounding circumstances without our conscious intent to ensure our survival and maximize our self and our well-being” (Ogden 2006, 66). We adjust our character to fit our family’s expectations. The character adjustment we make is like an armour that we use to defend ourselves. Our character armour shows up like a super power. This strategy both helps and hinders the way we interact with God, self and others. It is what we thought up at that time of age and development in a state of duress of the demands of our caregivers. It is an accommodation, a maladaptive response to our caregivers when we feel overwhelmed or under stress by their demands that allows us to stay connected and defend our inner self (that inner part of self that does not feel supported or strong enough to respond authentically). The authentic self is defined as that part of an individual which is unhindered in its interactions with others. It is the inner self that is free to reveal its thoughts, desires and beliefs without barriers. A way in which we reinforce our armoured self may be to disregard the signals our body is sending us. For example, clenching our jaw to hold our tongue, when our body wants to speak, or overworking when our body is fatigued. This armour now becomes reinforced throughout your life. This can cause people to disconnect from the neck down. The process of engagement becomes one of mental awareness while neglecting the wisdom of the body. This is a fractured

sense of self whereby the individual is no longer functioning holistically. In other words, the individual is not tapping into their full potential because of this disconnect (Conger 1994, 22). What we essentially have bottled up is now left to function as a partial entity (Schwartz 1995, 80). The inner self still speaks through subconscious direction, but this is not a grounded state. The body must be included in both the therapeutic and spiritual process for an individual to function holistically, and in becoming grounded. Being grounded means being aware of and accepting all aspects of self. If an individual is afraid and has mistrust bound within themselves, they will only be able to venture spiritually as far as their mistrust and fear will allow them to go. The fear and mistrust must first be made conscious and healed through encounter of themselves and with the love of God, otherwise physical transformation and spiritual growth will be hindered. As a leading neuropsychiatrist notes, “Healing depends on experiential knowledge. You can be fully in charge of your life only if you can acknowledge the reality of your body in all its visceral dimensions” (Van der Kolk 2014, 27). When Christians learn to love God, and love their neighbour, it facilitates a deepening of their faith and their ability to know themselves better. “Holiness is not a condition into which we drift” (Wilhoit 2008, 39). It is a discipline and a response to the call of the Spirit (Wilhoit 2008, 18). Christians are invited by God to walk in his redemption and restoration of the whole earth. Their willingness to do so is reflected in our desire to seek and know him in greater measure.

We are made in the image of God by interacting with others who also bear God's image. This interaction helps us to expand our knowing of Him and ourselves through community encounter. The armoured self is a fearful self and hides its shameful stories. God desires to meet us in this armoured broken state of self. When we receive God's love and embrace it, there is healing and restoration of ourselves so that our unarmoured or authentic self can come forth. We are then able to love others in their broken places.

Secure Attachment

People with secure attachment styles feel secure in themselves and in the relationships they have. This balance is evident in that their internal state and their external reaction agree. These individuals have had a caregiver who has come to terms with their past issues and are no longer reactive to it. As such, they are flexible and available to their children and others in a responsive and sensitive manner. These are parents who help their children to solve problems in non-judgmental ways, guiding them through solutions. The parents are usually "adults who are comfortable being autonomous as well as comfortable seeking help and support from others" (Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006, 48). This secure base of acceptance allows the child, room-mate or co-worker more autonomy and freedom to explore the world around them, yet at the same time allows them to feel securely anchored in that they are loved and accepted for who they are. Children who are raised with secure attachment styles tend to be strong leaders, seek outside help when needed, and have positive interpersonal relationships.

Kirkpatrick notes that secure attachment is the “antidote to fear and anxiety: when the individual is confident that an attachment figure will be available to them whenever he desires it, they are less prone to chronic fear” (Kirkpatrick 2002, 202). Parents with secure attachment styles are emotionally available to their children, attuned to their children’s needs, open to seeking outside help if needed, and have a strong felt sense of who they are. They speak highly of their partners, family, and those with whom they interact. As adults they report, “higher job satisfaction, see themselves as good workers and were confident that they were valued by their coworkers, did not worry about work failure or allow it to interfere with their close relationships” (Feeney, Noller 1996, 75).

Insecure Attachment

Insecure parents love their children and are deeply concerned for their welfare. However, they pass on the attachment style that they have received from their parents. Insecure attached parents are those who have not resolved their own life stories. “As children we take on the unresolved issues of our parents or fall victim to the same problem” (Conger 1994, 119). Children who have parents with insecure attachment styles are at risk of developing psychological and social dysfunctions. There are three sub-categories to this attachment style which will be examined separately.

Insecure Avoidant Attachment

These parents are not properly tuned in to the needs of their children. These parents are described as insensitive, unavailable, dismissive, emotionally

distant, or unaware to their children's concerns. Characteristics of children with this attachment style are that they are independent and want to do things on their own. They avoid seeking help as they have learnt that they will not receive the support that they desire; therefore, they attend to themselves. Their expectation of having positive connections with others is low and therefore seek to strengthen their self-worth through their skills and abilities. They are self-reliant individuals an armoured defense strategy that was acquired through their interactions with insensitive caregivers. They speak in logical, concrete, factual terms limiting the expressions of anger and discomfort to reduce conflict with rejecting or overpowering caregivers. As adults, they are loners and will isolate themselves when they are stressed. They have limited ability to connect to their emotions as they have had to disregard them. They tell their story with little expression and often are unable to recall memories of their childhood. Adults with avoidant attachment will, "characteristically shun situations and relationships that stimulate attachment needs. Actions such as reaching out or making eye contact may feel uncomfortable, awkward or dysregulating. Distancing action such as pushing away emotions or avoiding eye contact may feel more comfortable" (Ogden 2006, 32).

In their work environment Avoidant adults enjoy their work and have a positive outlook toward future job prospects as those with secure attachment. "Avoidant adults prefer jobs where they can work alone, avoid socializing and express greater dissatisfaction with coworkers" (Feeney, Noller 1996, 75).

Insecure Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment

Parents with insecure ambivalent/anxious attachments have not resolved their own life stories. They have unresolved concerns in the way their own parents were unemotionally available to them which either left them feeling abandoned or they superimpose their own interactions with their critical parent in their interactions with their own child. Interacting with their own child can produce an intensity of emotion toward them as they are entangled with blurred emotional memories and boundaries of past images of themselves and their child. “The parent enters an old state of mind and can become filled with sensations of fear of rejection, disappointment or anger which color their experiences with their own child” (Siegel 1999, 105). This can cause an adult to relate to “their child as though they are a mirror image of themselves at an earlier age. In this way entanglements with their own childhood intrude on the way they relate to their child” (Siegel 1999, 103).

Insecure anxious parents will be available and attuned to their child at one time and then overly arouse their child in an invasive manner which is more focused on their own needs than those of the child in another instance. As these interactions/movements of the parent to the child are more attuned to the parent's own needs and insensitive to those of the child's, an insecurity is created within the child and a clinginess to attach to the parent who is unpredictable yet needed for the child to feel secure. “This lack of sensitivity and predictability leads to elevated levels of anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity in the child, concluding that the world is an emotionally unreliable place” (Thompson 2010, 127). The child is

likely to seek external stimulation for comfort as an adult and to seek to be close to others. The ambivalence in parenting style causes them to seek approval and affirmation from others. When anxious, they find it difficult to trust that their needs will be met either by others or by God. Adults with anxious attachment seek proximity and lean toward “enmeshment clinging behavior and increased affective and bodily agitation at the threat of separation and may find it difficult to tolerate distance in the relationship” (Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006, 32).

Insecure Disorganized Attachment

Children in this category experience their parents to be frightening or emotionally overwhelmed and unable to care for them. The parents may be physically, emotionally, or sexually abusive, or the parents may be alcoholics and unavailable to care for the child. The child is overly aroused and disassociates from themselves as a defense mechanism. The child needs the care of the parent and yet at the same time experiences that parent to be scary and unsafe. The parents may exhibit “looming behaviors, sudden invasion attack posture, or frightened - backing away, exaggerated startle response, trancelike expression with aimless wandering” (Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006, 51).

These children’s internal response will not be congruent with their outward behaviour. They may desire proximity but when this occurs may suddenly switch and back away. The body alignment of the child is demonstrative of their internal disorganized state. For example, a child may approach their caregiver with their head turned away. “Disorganized-disorientated attachments

are associated with dissociative symptomatology and the potential to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficits, emotional regulation, and behavioural impulses” (Siegel 1999, 84).

Earned Secure Attachment

Whatever attachment style an individual may have acquired through their caregivers at birth can be changed to what is called an “earned secure attachment.” This occurs when one can resolve their own story, is no longer stuck in the fragmented pieces but able to accept the good and broken pieces of oneself. This can occur by befriending someone who has a secure attachment style. Through a person’s interactions with them he or she can connect in healthier ways which gives them a new perspective in the way they relate to others. Earned secure attachment can occur within a therapeutic relationship. Where the therapist is “able to broker an attachment relationship between the normal life self and the more dysregulated or disowned parts” of the self (Fisher 2019, 254). Through self-awareness and understanding, one can make sense of their own story and come to a place of acceptance and integration. This can also happen in a spiritual sense when a Christian encounter’s the love of God in a deep experiential way. In these examples, the individual is in a relationship where they can experience themselves to be seen and known and where they know another person. This is the place of connection. “Such an encounter is necessary because we cannot change our stories without simultaneously changing the neural pathways that correlate with those changes” (Thompson 2010, 137).

God as an Attachment Figure

In the last 20 years researchers have been exploring the idea that perhaps God can be an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick 1999, 513-522; Beck 2006, 125-132; Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2004, 223-250; McDonald, Beck, Allison, and Norsworthy, 2005, 21-28; TenElshof and Furrow 2000, 99-108; Hood 1996, 619-629). In the Christian religion God characterizes himself as a relational father figure and as a relational husband (Isaiah 54:5, Hosiah 2:16,19, Jeremiah 31:32). For the purposes of this paper we are focusing on God as a father figure.

The Bible informs us that God lavishes his love on us so that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1). God adopts us into his family, we become his children. He offers his children a hope and a future; to be filled with joy and peace. He will never leave us and gives us wisdom when we ask (Romans 8:15, Jeremiah 29:11; Deuteronomy 31:6; James 1:5). He is a father to the fatherless. He rescues the poor who cry for help and the fatherless who had none to assist them. He sees the trouble of the afflicted; their grief and defends the weak (Psalm 68:5; 10:14; 82:3; 146:9; Job 29:12). He tells his children not to fear, "For I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). He will give rest to those that are burdened, he will teach his children, he will give his children peace that surpasses their understanding and if they trust in him, he will make their paths straight giving them a hope and a future (Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 11:28-30, John 14:27, Proverbs 3:5-6, Jeremiah 29:11).

It was stated that the attachment style we have learned from our caregivers is the attachment style we remain with throughout our life. Our father-figure came first and informs the way we interact with people in every area of our life. With our partners, children, families, friends, colleagues at work, and the way we interact with God. Our attachment style attunes our ears and our eyes as to what we hear and don't hear and what we observe and don't notice – this includes our spiritual eyes and ears. Jesus often made statements saying, “those who have ears to hear let them hear” (Matt11:15).

Secure individuals view God as available, loving and not overbearing. God is a safe haven for exploration there is no fear of distancing from him when seeking out theological beliefs. The individual is calm and secure in their belief that God loves them and is with them and this belief supports inquiry as a positive pursuit, movement in religious process and trust in exploring what's beyond. This includes such prayer practices such as meditation and contemplation. Securely attached individuals are least likely to disconnect from God.

Insecure avoidant individuals are uncomfortable with close connections. They are less likely to engage in meditative or contemplative prayer which promote a deeper spiritual bond (Byrd and Boe 2001, 9-24). Interesting is that both secure and avoidant attachment are most likely to engage in theological quest. With the securely attached individual remaining firm and loyal, while the avoidant person, who lacks intimacy in connection, can lose their faith or become agnostic (Beck and McDonald 2004, 92-103; Kirkpatrick 1999, 803-822).

Insecure anxious individuals lean less toward theological exploration as it feels unsafe. They are more likely to be challenged in the area of trusting God. Anxious individuals are more likely to report speaking in tongues (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1992, 78). Speaking in tongues is a spiritual prayer language that helps the one praying feel closer to God. As anxious individuals are vigilant to stay closely connected it would appear to support this attachment style (Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 4-17, Ephesians 6:18).

Those with insecure disorganized attachment are “over represented in the New Age Movement” (Granqvist, 2002, 260-270). Where a spirituality is impersonal, it would not be able to offer a secure attachment as it is unclear to what or whom the person is attaching to. Whereas the Christian God reveals himself to be a loving father who longs to be in relationship with his children. “They may “sense that God is displeased or enraged with them. When confronted with the idea that Jesus loves them, they may begin to feel more rather than less disorganized because of how they respond to intimacy. ... They may interpret attempts to connection within church groups to be disorienting and confusing” (Thompson 2010, 132).

Jesus is reiterating the command of Deuteronomy 6:5, telling Christians to pursue God with all that is within them. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8) participated in the divine nature without limits. “The fall did not erase the image (of God); it only defaced it” (Lim 2002, 217). All people hide pieces (their stories of shame, anger, fear, etc.) from God, bringing a fragmented

self to him. Since nothing is hidden from God, people are hiding from themselves. They need to bring all parts of themselves to God. In knowing and embracing his love, they become whole. Through redemption in Christ our relationship with God is restored and we can partake of his divine nature, transforming us into his likeness (2 Peter 1:2-4, Romans 1:16-17). We with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

God meets people where they are. God knows that he has called imperfect beings. There is nothing perfect in us; only God is good. When people believe, and accept Jesus in their hearts, then they stand in his righteousness. To reiterate, God is omnipotent and knows people’s whole life stories. “He is the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him” died for us that we may live with him (Hebrews 12:2). Christians are the objects of his love. Christians are his joy.

Love unites, anger and fear divides. We often fear that if we grow deeper in connection with God, we will have less life, less of the self that we know and are familiar with. We fear the loss of self in serving God and his purpose and are giving up ourselves and our purpose. We do not trust nor understand the love of God deeply enough and therefore in fear cling to our limitations. We cling to the only self we know.

People can only give what they have received. If Christians are half-hearted, they will speak a garbled word to the lost. Part spirit, part flesh, this is a

poor representation and can turn people off. You are not loving your neighbour as yourself. Instead, Christians are to be equipped and show themselves approved (2 Timothy 3:17). Scripture is the primary tool that God uses to shape people. Jesus is the living word, this should guide the understanding that Christians are to be saturated and steeped in God's word. In the time of Christ, the quality of a student was based on their words and actions. The diligent students spoke exactly like their master. They used the same words and had the same actions. Students memorized and copied every aspect of their teacher's life. "Jesus said that he only said what he heard the Father saying and only did what he saw the Father doing" (John 5:19, John 8:28). Jesus is the perfect student. This is his example to his followers. Christians are to imitate God's speech and his actions. God is looking to bring restoration and has invited Christians to be part of his inner circle to "clothe the naked (Genesis 3:21, Matthew 25:36), comfort the bereaved, visit the sick, bury the dead" (Genesis 3:21, Matthew 25:36, Matthew 5:4). Christians are called to be a witness to the world. Witnesses of what? "That what we have seen, and our hands have handled of the word of life" (Peterson 2006, 15).

In the depth of people's inner beings is the longing for deep connection and love. To be truly seen and known by another. Yet, in this depth there is fear of the unknown that holds people back from trusting that God's love is pure and fully available. The emotional strategies used to sustain ourselves are deeply rooted and engrained in the fibre of our being. They are so rooted as to create an armoured self through which people interact with God, themselves, and others.

When people function as armoured selves, they are attached to their emotions which scripture likens to a childlike state (Hebrews 5:13). Emotions exert strong pulls that people are not always aware of in their interactions with God and others. They fear drawing near to God. There is a deep belief that people will lose the self they know or that God will ask them to do something that they do not want to do and lose themselves in the process. The outer world as they know it keeps them attached through “unconscious reactions to its demands” (Merton 1976, 51). God uses the Holy Spirit to awaken one’s consciousness to seek him. The Apostle Paul says that one’s authentic self is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). “When we identify ourselves as separate and apart from God, we identify ourselves apart from everything else. We live out of a posture of separateness with respect to others” (Mulholland 2006, 29).

The death of the armoured self is a scary and terrifying experience. A person cannot simply be told to die to Christ, this highlights the problem without offering the solution. The bridge is relationship, the desire for more of God that is greater than the desire to save the self. The fear of the Lord is greater than fear of self once one has come to know him. When people do not lay down their lives for God, it is because they do not know him well enough if at all: their connection to him is insecure. The armoured self has many character strategies that it chooses to support itself. Whether it is an idealized self, a professional self, a religious self, or care-giving self; it is a self that is not fully surrendered to God. The individual will do everything in their power to save themselves. Despite this, “For at just the

right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. It is rare indeed for anyone to die for a righteous man, though for good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8). It is a question of exchange. What does one get in exchange for the giving of one’s life? If one does not experience the love of God, in a known way then the giving of oneself, the surrendering to him is terrifying and seems like an annihilation of self, is likely not to occur.

There is a direct connection between Christians’ love of God and their interactions with those around them. To say that they love God and yet have limited patience or ability for positive interactions with others, does not equate. In encountering the love of God, Christians come into deeper encounters with themselves. By attaching to more of his love Christians become secure, anchored, and strengthened to turn and become available to those around them. They embrace themselves more fully and can embrace others through the love of God. This security in being loved by God creates an openness and availability to be present to others without fear. In this way, Christians live a richer life. They live more truthful lives when they encounter the love of God and allow him to penetrate them to their core. When Christians engage in this dying to self and the resurrection and transformation of their authentic self, they enter greater depths of encounter with God and being able to love their neighbour as themselves. This

brings the integration of the spirit, mind and body of an individual where they come into alignment and flow in greater unity within the triune relationship.

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

**Resources to Increase Awareness
to God, Self and Others:
Key Practices for Spiritual Formation**

In the next section I will be discussing the resources used to help others grow in greater connection with God, themselves and others. It is understood that all of this is taking place through the strength of the trinity, as only through the power of God is integration possible.



Figure 1d Resources to Increase Awareness to God, Self and Others

In the model of spiritual formation, I used the following key practices as resources to help individuals grow in their connection to God, self and others.

The resources are ways to help others attach to God and ultimately heal some of the brokenness which leads to integration.

The spiritual formation model that developed during my schooling, ministry, and personal experience was impacted by several specific practices. I will be reviewing Christian meditation, lectio Divina and the relationship with others. These three components are integral to the model as they all provide means in becoming sensitive to and communing with God.

Christian Meditation

Meditating on the Word impacts an individual in one's spirit, mind and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). One begins to appreciate that the body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-19). The body is a sensing organ and becomes alert at a physical level through the ear gate in listening for the voice of God. In attuning to his presence, Christians become aware of God in a felt sense as another person distinct from themselves.

The meditative process for the purposes of this paper is to enter a mindful, reflective state that facilitates a personal encounter with the Christian God who brings to our awareness the armoured parts of ourselves that block deeper connection with him. In this place of divine revelation and encounter, we surrender ourselves to his love which strengthens and enlarges our capacity to integrate all aspects of ourselves into wholeness and union with Christ. God is our creator and is our perfect attachment figure.

The god to whom the individual is praying to must be understood to be relational, otherwise the attachment is tenuous at best. In seeking the divine through Christian meditation, we anticipate an experience of God that would be consistent with the words and teachings of Jesus Christ. In the life of Jesus, we see that his whole ministry was to bring wholeness to people. He healed people physically, and mentally. Everywhere he went. His life was an act of service to all those he met. He spent much time in daily prayer. He had close relationship with his disciples. He also had authority over demons, over death and creation itself, and was wisdom personified. In all of these experiences we are being presented with what we ought to be doing. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also” (John 14:12). Jesus taught us how to pray by addressing God as Father and made the statement, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11). Therefore, when we begin the meditation process in seeking God, we can trust that what we are reaching out to will respond in these ways. God says, “Draw near to me and I will draw near to you” (James 4:8). As we encounter God and begin to experience his love and his acceptance, our fear slowly vanishes allowing for peace and calmness to take root. The path of meditation “is essentially a response to the direct summons of the gospel to leave self behind, it is the awakening of our consciousness” (Kelsey 1976, 51). The discipline of meditation moves us beyond self-analysis, self-centeredness and self-concern

which can lead to anxiety. Through engaging with God and the felt sense of his love, a fellowship grows. One's thoughts become less about oneself and more involved in the shared thoughts of God and his ministry. One's awareness of him creates an attachment to him. One experiences a weaving of one's inner self to him, resulting in a quieting and calming of one's soul.

Meditation is Rooted in Scripture as a Practice to Engage with God.

Jewish meditation begins “with the awareness that God has instructed us to meditate on him and his omnipresence in order to experience him. That is to know him and every facet of our lives... the search to find God not only abstractly but concretely” (Ginzburg 2003, 61). You shall know this day and take to heart that God is God in the heavens above and on the earth below. There is no other” (Deuteronomy 4:39). Though God is omnipresent, to engage with him we need to approach him in a relational way. Quieting our senses helps us to do so. The Psalmist instructs us to “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). The prophet Elijah is told by the Lord to go outside and stand by the mountain where he will pass by him. A great wind passed by him, but the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake or in the fire but when he heard a gentle wind God spoke (Harris 1996, 23). Abraham heard God alone while in the wilderness. As did Moses. Samuel and Isaiah were in the temple. All God's prophets heard the voice of the Lord in a quiet place. Jesus went off on his own in the wilderness for 40 days and nights prior to the start of his ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus told his disciples that the kingdom of God is within them (Luke 17:1). He went off on

his own to pray. Jesus took his disciples away by themselves to a solitary place (Mark 6:31). There are many other references of Jesus praying on his own (Math 14:23, Mark 1:35, 6:46, Luke 5:16, 6:12 John 6:15).

Meditation and Healthy Development

In this section I briefly discuss some information regarding meditation that can arise. I am including it here to bring awareness to it and that meditation is a practice that is best done with a spiritual director or spiritual mentor who has experience and can guide you through the process. In my personal experience the lack of trust I had toward God made drawing near to him a slow and at times fearful process. Fearful in that I did not know if in encountering him I would experience his anger rather than his love. As I sought him out through scripture and prayer understanding of who God is and how he sees me allowed me to let go of fear and embrace his love for me. Unresolved emotions and fears can disrupt the way we think or engage with God and for this reason having a spiritual director or spiritual mentor as a support to help one connect with God in a healthy way.

Christianity is a religion that carries a salvation message, which seeks to restore all of creation to wholeness. Jesus came to save us spirit, mind, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The Greek word “sozo” means to deliver, heal, save, and make whole (Matthew 1:21, 9:21-22, 10:52, 10:22, 8:25, 14:30. Jung felt that when one repressed their fear, anger, and spirituality it could reveal itself through mental anguish such as anxiety or neurosis. Unconscious psychological

disturbance can also show up in various forms of sickness in the body from allergies to cancer (Kelsey 1976, 63).

Developmentally around the age of 3 children will often engage in fantasy play where their inner and outer realities will collide. At this stage they may have imaginary friends or inanimate objects will take on living characteristics. This stage usually ends after age 6. People who suffer from psychosis do not have a strong core self. They are unable to differentiate between their inner and outer world in a rational way. They can have spiritual encounters but are unable to manage these experiences as they themselves are not integrated and have no way of organizing the information within themselves. They have no filter to do so (Kelsey 1976, 202).

Our inner fears and anger that are left unresolved can emotionally overwhelm us and sometimes individuals will dissociate or separate from them. These repressed emotions can show up in symbolic form. Jung referred to the dark unwanted parts of ourselves as the shadow. In the meditative process one comes into direct contact with these emotions. If someone has not resolved these emotions, they can be pulled like a puppet by these forces in destructive ways to themselves or others around them. Where there is an overzealous soul, detachment from outer world relationships or distorted one-sided thinking such as living an isolated life from family or activity we are not living a balanced life between the two worlds. Maturity requires the ability to balance these experiences and integrate all our emotions so that we become whole and can engage with our

authentic self. There are many parts of us that need transformation. Sometimes the very things that we are most shamed about can become the most brilliant part of our being.

Transformation: Becoming One with God

As mentioned earlier we are called to align ourselves completely with God. In order to begin the exploration of self we must have courage to explore the deeper mystery of self. Dying to self can be a scary process. We fear that if I give myself completely to God there will be nothing left of me or for me, it will be a life of service. There is little vision of the new. This is the struggle in the dying of self. Some people will only want to go so far in giving up portions of their lives for God. Drawing nearer to God means becoming poor in spirit. For many the exchange of their old life for something new but not fully yet known is the very thing they harden their heart to in the hearing of God's voice. As Finley notes, "any notion of surrendering ourselves to something as radical as a complete metamorphosis of consciousness itself is too much to risk" (Finley 2004, 143). Yet this is what Jesus has called us to. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul" (Mark 8:34-36). The problem for a Christian is "not desire but disordered desire" (Benner 2011, 149). Letting go of our striving and being in silence and rest, we

open ourselves to know God in a deep and intimate way so that he can become the lover of our soul until then we are the lovers of ourselves.

When we keep moving toward God there comes an overflow of the beauty and love of God that is heavenly, and slowly, we recognize that we were created to be filled by Him. Herein, we become complete. St. Augustine notes in his confessions “Our soul is restless until it finds rest in thee Oh Lord: for thou hast made us for thyself” (Augustine 2018, 1). In agreement the Psalmist declares, “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” in the unification of self to God (Psalm 84). The process of allowing the heart to become focused and open to God may need the help of images to assist in becoming still and attentive to his presence. However, using images as a vehicle for meditation is ok but we are to move beyond images in our communion with God. John of the Cross notes that “Even the most beautiful painting of God is not but our idea of God.” Harris (Harris 1996, 82) suggests that the praying person should “not interfere with forms of discursive meditations and imaginings” (Harris 1996, 82). Our imagination is very powerful and “full of mirrors that we can delude ourselves” (Benner 2011, 111). When we meditate, we want to move beyond the realm of images and meditate through faith. Benner states that this movement is “the realm of reality because faith is the power by which God allows himself to be known” (Benner 2011, 111). When we are meditating the focus is on the word of God. There is no blurring of our vision or the reality of our encounter with him. We access this through faith in reaching out to Him, resting and waiting patiently

for Him. “We cannot expect to draw any illumination or transformation from prayer unless God himself supplies it” (Herbstrith 1989, 78). We are invited by God to come into a place of wisdom and knowledge in the mystery of Christ who is our hidden treasure and in whom we are hidden (Colossians 2:3, 1 John 5:20). Meditation is a way to connect to the deeper levels of ourselves. The path of meditation facilitates this process and according to Kelsey is the “Laboratory of the soul” (Kelsey 1976, 51). Jesus is always knocking on the areas of our lives that are positionally in the stance of armoured defending self. God desires to bring us to a place of salvation and wholeness. He sees those places that are bounded in fear, in shame and in isolation. When we enter this meditative process, we are quiet, opening ourselves and inviting God to join us in our blind spots, the place of mystery to self. We are trusting that what he sees will not cause him to abandon us, that his love is for us not against us. We have this, “deeply rooted intuition of the need to change to be transformed we also fear because it is part of the package of human nature to resist the unknown” (Freeman 1987, 32).

Each one of us is called to bring the totality of our being to the creator (Freeman 1987, 24). As meditative or contemplative prayer can provide a deeper spiritual bond, engaging with a spiritual mentor to guide one through the meditative process is helpful in avoiding unnecessary pitfalls (Byrd and Boe 2001, 9-24). Recently Joy Behar, an American television personality wondered if Vice President Pence was mentally ill when he stated that, “I talk to Jesus and He talks to me” (Behar 2017). Joy Behar’s comments echoed a mental health

professional, psychiatrist Szasz, who stated, “If you talk to God, you are praying; If God talks to you, you have schizophrenia. If the dead talk to you, you are a spiritualist, if you talk to the dead, you are a schizophrenic” (Szasz 1979,101). While this quote is reflective of the mental health profession and their thoughts toward religious experiences in the past (Diagnostic Statistical Manual, DSM-4) the new DSM-5 (2013) recently released recognizes that religious or spiritual experiences may exist within an individual’s worldview or cultural norm. The DSM-5 noted that there are, “two types of religious and/or spiritual experiences should be distinguished from mental disorders: (a) mystical visions and voices from psychosis, (b) “the dark night of the soul from clinical depression” (Jacek 2016, 180). The Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 in Ontario advises Mental Health Clinicians that, “Practitioners can operate under exceptions or exemptions through the Regulated Health Professions Act under section 29 (1) (c) “treating a person by prayer or spiritual means in accordance with the tenets of the religion of the person giving the treatment.”

Studying eight Evangelical Christians in London, England, Dein and Cook, sought to answer the question, “How do these Christians hear from God?” The authors note, “Hearing God is normative in some groups and that these voices differ phenomenologically from those found in schizophrenia” (Dein and Cook, 2015, 97; Dein and Littlewood 2007, 213-228). Their study provides helpful considerations on the authenticity of hearing God’s voice. They compared the experience of receiving communication from God verses external communication

received in psychotic disorders. Participants in the UK study relayed that the communication they received from God were, “thoughts received within the mind; were concerned with mundane matters concerning present life, provided reassurance and were subject to a process of discernment exercised by the recipient” (Dein and Cook, 2015, 61).

In all instances the participants maintain personal agency, that is, they choose whether to obey the voices, thoughts, images or not. The receiving of divine communication for this study group was found likened to, “vivid, rich hallucinatory imagery that is experienced in external reality” ... “drawn upon in all human cultures by artists, poets, writers, mystics and prophets” (James 1916, 212). It is, “imagery experienced as an external independent reality “which is grounded in the psychological reality of a special imaginative process operating outside ordinary awareness” (Stephen 1989, 212). Evelyn Underhill likes hearing from God as the creative process like artists.

In all creative acts, the larger share of the work is done subconsciously: its emergence is in a sense automatic. This is equally true of mystics, artists, philosophers, discoverers, and rulers of men. The great religion, invention, work of art, always owes its inception to some sudden uprush of intuitions or ideas for which the superficial self cannot account; its execution to powers so far beyond the control of that self, that they seem, as their owner sometimes says, to ‘come from beyond. (Underhill 1911, 63)

The above is contrasted with psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia where there is a loss of personal agency and thoughts are inserted and the individual does not have the ability to differentiate this from their own. Authors Dein, Littlewood, and Luhrmann, noted similar expressions in other Christian congregations suggesting these spiritual encounters reflect non-pathological

behavior in these groups as defined by DSM-5 above (e.g., Dein and Littlewood 2007, 213-228 on British Pentecostals, Luhrmann, 2012 on American Evangelicals).

Health benefits of meditating are many. Scientists have found that meditation lowers blood pressure and increases the immune system. A Harvard business review in 1974 noted meditation to reduce stress (Kelsey 1976, 150). Meditation is recommended for children to calm their nervous systems. The rule of thumb for children is you should meditate 1 minute of each year of their lives (Ginzburg 2003, 61).

Divine Reading (*Lectio Divina*)

Lectio Divina is Latin for “divine reading.” It is an intentional spiritual practice that was developed in the second century by Origen Adamantius, Bishop of Alexandria (Studzinski 2009, 28). It is a slower form of reading where one interacts with Scripture through a four-step process as a means of gaining intimacy with God. This four-step process involves reading (*lectio*), meditation (*mediatio*), praying (*oratio*), and contemplation (*contemplatio*). The purpose of lectio Divina is to seek God in Scripture in a known and felt way, as in having encountered the other (Wilhoit and Evan 2012, 61-121). The 21 century is a world of entertainment, where people are rarely still and constantly pursuing the next adrenaline rush. This activity and busyness can even be found in churches, where programs and activities are often seen as a sign of spirituality. Lectio Divina counters this constant motion; in lectio Divina, the participant must be still, must

begin with patience. Lectio Divina is a spiritual response to the human-Divine disconnect.

Reading (Lectio)

Christians come to Scripture in a stance of anticipation, waiting, and seeking to hear from God. Approaching Scripture in this slow and intentional way keeps them present and aware; it is a stance of quiet listening. In this way, they “allow God to speak to our hearts, minds and conscious” (Casey 1996, 14). They notice their emotions that they bring to the reading and those that are evoked by the passage. In slowing down to listen to God, the participants lay their emotional responses before him and let the “felt response of our inner heart pick up a sense of what Jesus is trying to teach us” (Foster 2005, 33). This type of reading requires an unhindered atmosphere. It takes time to quiet oneself and reduce the noise of all one’s thoughts and life events that get in the way of being able to settle down and focus one’s mind on being still. A recommended start is thirty minutes on a regular basis. For someone new ten minutes would be a good start.

Meditation (Meditatio)

Meditation is the process of chewing, absorbing, and interacting through thoughtful reflection of the Word. Participants are listening for God’s prompting either with a visual image or an emotional response such as a word or phrase that jumps out. Included in this slow reading is noticing a felt sense of the Holy Spirit on a word or phrase and pausing to pay attention to these experiences when they

occur. The goal is to develop attunement and sensitivity to God's presence so that participants can hear his voice and interact with him (John 10:27).

Praying (Oratio)

The participant begins by acknowledging God, inviting him to speak through his word. Then they open their heart to hear, giving God time and space to speak. This kind of listening is made possible by the Holy Spirit. It is "God-given power to learn what God's meaning in these words are for us" (Foster 2005, 9). The Christian enters a conversation with God, Jesus as living Word, and the Holy Spirit as revealer to the mind and spirit. They respond in prayer by interacting with the words or images that came to mind in reading the scripture and listening in silence for God's voice. In so doing, Christians can tune into God's presence. "Bible searching and searching prayer go hand-in-hand" (Peterson 2008, 103). God engages Christians with conversation, his invitation is to "come and reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).

Contemplation (Contemplatio)

This is referred to as the place of union with God as well as the secret place (Matt 6:5-6). This is the inner chamber of the heart. Hearing at this level brings Christians to another level of self-awareness and deeper place of healing as they experience being connected and in tune with God. This is a place where they are in a rhythm and flow with God, where there is an ease in one's interaction with him. This is a place of trust and connection, a place of 'being' with God where the participants "tend to withdraw from our words and imaginations

preferring simply to rest with God” (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 113). The Holy Spirit speaks to people in tangible ways. Scripture notes that Christians will experience an increase in their love for God (Romans 5:5) and in dreams and visions (Acts 10:19); that this is where the Holy Spirit will teach them the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:11-13), and that he “intercedes through us with sighs and groaning” (Romans 8:26) (Wilhoit and Howard 2012, 46).

Origen’s Method

Origen offers his readers a series of questions to guide them in the process of divine reading and suggests they consider “what are the words of the text describing. What happened in the historical teaching of the word, what is the word communicating regarding ministry? How does this teaching, or mystery relate to the reader today?” (Studzinski 2009, 52).

Instructions

Learning how to take advantage of lectio Divina can be challenging. It is not a normal practice made in today’s churches. Today, the church has instructed its congregants on the basics of Christian living but often it has failed to guide its people into the mysteries of Christ. This has been a fearful and uncertain place that many denominations have felt best to stay away from. As a result, listening for God’s voice may feel outside of one’s comfort zone. If one is not properly trained in reading scripture, one can feel lost or overwhelmed, perhaps even bored. An individual may abandon reading the Scripture at this point if they do not have support. People may simply be unwilling to spend time in silent listening

and may lack the commitment that is needed to experience the benefits of lectio Divina. Individuals may perform lectio Divina with a distant heart and not allow God's presence to penetrate their heart. The experience then takes the form of obedience or service and lacks the intimate engagement it is designed to produce.

Despite how foreign performing lectio Divina may be, there are ways to minimize the above experiences. It is important to humbly acknowledge God as Creator of life and One who is deserving of all praise. Further, Christians are called to faith and action. Their experience of God should lead them toward a greater love for others and a desire to impart the knowledge of him who created us.

Others (Love your Neighbour as Yourself)

“For we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free” (1 Corinthians 12:13). In Christianity, there is a unity of believers that is rarely found anywhere else in the world. No matter who a person is, they are welcome to be a part of the body of Christ: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The unity of the believers as a body of Christ speaks to the singularity of mind that “they understand themselves to be the disciples of the Lord” and that “the purpose of this bond is based on the love of God for the purpose of joining him in proclaiming the kingdom of God with all the consequences that involves” (Vischer, Luz and Link 2010, 37). The commandment, “love your neighbor as yourself” makes this clear (Luke 10:37).

One's neighbour is also made in the image of God as they have the Spirit of God in them. Jesús came from heaven, he was fully divine and fully human. Jesus walked with God in union in mission and in every aspect of life and fellowship. Jesus died with God on the cross, went to *sheol*, and rose from the dead. Jesus now invites everyone to join with him as he did with God. "The Son of God lifts us up into that life of communion, he sends his Spirit into our hearts and puts his prayer on our lips whereby... our prayers on earth are the echo of his prayers in heaven, participating in his intercession for humanity" (Torrance 1996, 84).

Christians can only give what they have received from the Father. If Christians are half-hearted, they will speak a garbled word to the lost. Part spirit, part flesh, this is a poor representation and can have a bad aroma. It can turn people off. You are not loving your neighbour as yourself. Instead, Christians are to be equipped and show our selves approved (2 Timothy 3:17). Scripture is the primary tool that God uses to shape people. Christians are to be saturated and steeped in God's word. In the time of Christ, the quality of a student was based on their words and actions. The diligent students spoke exactly like their master. They used the same words and had the same actions. Students attempted to copy every aspect of their teacher's life. "Jesus said that he only said what he heard the Father saying and only did what he saw the Father doing" (John 5:19, John 8:28). Jesus was the perfect student. This was his example to his followers. Christians are to imitate God's speech and his actions. God is looking to bring restoration and has invited Christians to be part of his inner circle to "clothe the naked

(Genesis 3:21, Matthew 25:36), comfort the bereaved, visit the sick, bury the dead” (Genesis 3:21, Matthew 25:36, Matthew 5:4). Christians are called to be a witness to the world. Witnesses of what? “That what we have seen, and our hands have handled of the word of life” (Peterson 2006, 15).

Meditation embodies a desire for God that brings the Christian back full circle to include a clearer-more minded, Christ-like compassion for others and ourselves. The deeper we enter meditation, the more we prayerfully ponder sound spiritual teachings (Finley 2004, 26). Jesus Christ paid the Christian’s debt; however, is the Christian willing to pay the debt for others? There is a cost to evangelism and ministry, the cost of loving those who may be difficult or unlovable. The good news is it is the Holy Spirit who empowers Christians to love others sacrificially in drawing them to Christ. The Spirit gives Christians his fruit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

There is a direct connection between a Christian’s love of God and their interactions with those around them. To say that they love God and yet have limited patience or ability for positive interactions with others, does not equate. In encountering the love of God, Christians come into deeper encounters with themselves. Where the heart is hardened, that is, where an armoured self, Jesus will invite the Christian to die or detach from this piece of themselves and soften their heart to open to more of his love. By attaching to more of his love Christians become secure, anchored, and strengthened to turn and become available to those

around them. They embrace themselves more fully and can embrace others through the love of God. This security in being loved by God creates an openness and availability to be present to others without fear. In this way, Christians live a richer life. They live more truthful lives when they encounter the love of God and allow him to penetrate them to their core. When Christians engage in this dying to self and the resurrection and transformation of their true self, they enter greater depths of encounter with God and being able to love their neighbour as themselves. One can observe that the resources act as a catalyst by which a person can experience God in a deeper and more experiential way. The resources used in this model strengthens and fills the missing pieces of ourselves, drawing us deeper into his love and greater attachment. Now that we have discussed all the parts of the spiritual formation model, in this next section I will reflect on what the outcome of this integration would produce.

Integration of Model of Spiritual Formation

Becoming fully aware of our behavioral patterns and the motivations that drive them is a lifelong journey of spiritual growth and discovery. Encountering the love of Jesus, allowing him to flood our total being through his Holy Spirit, allows us to participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). We participate in the divine nature by encountering the love of Jesus, allowing him to flood our total being through his Holy Spirit (Figure 1). This is not like the new age idea that we are born with this nature inside us, it must come down from above. As we move closer to Jesus in greater intimacy and love our eyes and ears will see and hear

new things. Our authentic self is hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:1-4). Relationally this increases capacity to love ourselves and in turn love others with the unconditional love of God. We move in greater alignment with God where we enter the flow of his Spirit and speak a more unified word. We become one singular and one plural as the body of Christ.

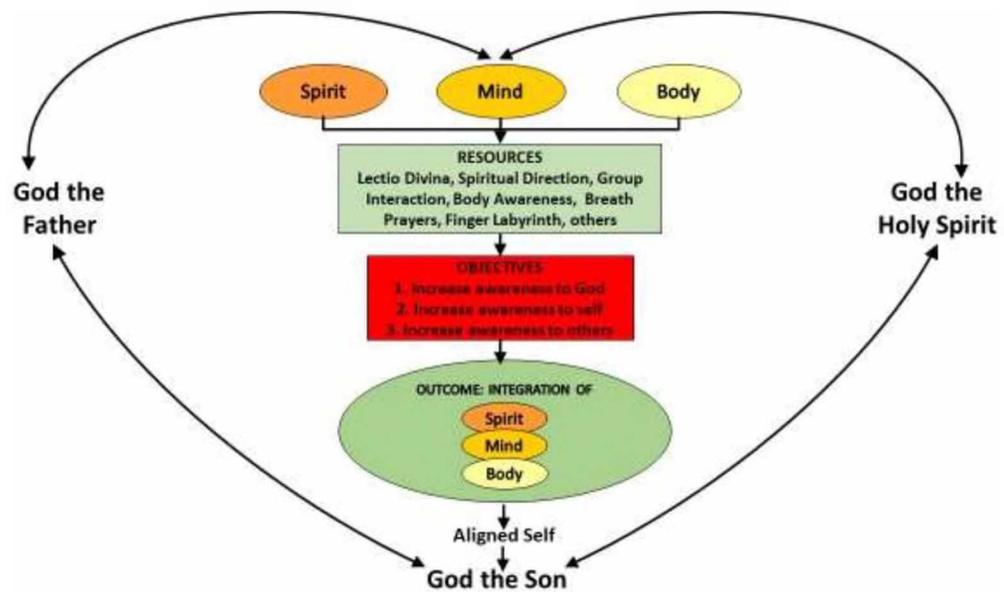


Figure 1. A Model of Spiritual Formation

“Jesus knew who he was and whose he was and his relationship with the father gave him the power and security to love and serve others” (Boa 2001, 45). In scripture God tells us that we are made in his image. We must have clarity of our own image as we truly are, not as we think we are. Our way of being, our openness to God to other human persons and to the world is only partial and limited. Without Jesus we have an identity crisis: we are not walking in the fullness of the divine image, as in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:4-3:24). “There

remains in our human situation an element of selfishness and self-centeredness that restricts the degree to which we can reach out to God and to others in love and union” (Navone 1996, 19). Without the love of Christ, we remain isolated within our own barriers of selfishness and fear, falling back on our own understanding to navigate through life.

God reveals his nature to us through the idea of community found in the trinitarian relationship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is a God of unity in community. We are created for this union through Jesus Christ to be in community with God, self and others. God’s plan of spiritual encounter in the knowledge of him is through relationship. In relationship with him and with others we encounter deeper levels of ourselves. We expand our vision of ourselves and others.

One way in which we view life is through our attachment lens. The way our caregivers interacted with us as infants sets us up for the way we interact with others throughout our life. Part of the model of spiritual formation is recognizing that an individual’s formation through their families impacts their spiritual formation and the ears through which they hear. God in his love and mercy knows us before we were born and knows how to awaken and call us to himself. Yet, he has chosen to place us in community as part of our spiritual formation and development. God’s salvation through his son Jesus Christ is given to us to bring us into wholeness, spirit, mind and body. His love and desire are to bring us to his wholeness.

Jesus said, “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear” (Matthew 13:9-16). The ability to hear with our spiritual ears can be hindered through our attachment styles, our rebellion in not wanting to hear what Jesus is saying to us, the emotional parts of ourselves that may be fearful, prideful or angry, not able to trust Jesus to hear what he is saying. In these instances, we fall back on the knowledge of ourselves.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? What is the process of spiritual formation? Christian spiritual formation acknowledges that we have been adopted into the family of God, we are his children whereby we cry Abba, Father. Just as we have been formed within our natural families, spiritual formation is the transformation of our hearts, minds, words and actions, desires into that of our heavenly Father. This is done through the cultivation of a spiritual relationship with God, self and others. Yet God desires to speak through us by his Spirit, “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you,” (Matthew 10:20).

This relationship with God is forged through the reading of scripture, prayer, meditation, contemplation, and acts of service. Through our encounter with God, we surrender to the felt sense of his touch, growing in godly love through encountering his love in prayer, surrendering to his requests with joy, serving and ministering to others as he directs. We are formed spiritually with others by being in close community through relationship, by encountering God in

others through their testimony and service of him. God meets us where we are at and walks with us as we grow in our relationship with him.

The purpose of being shaped in the image of God is so that we may be, “Complete, the Greek word *artios* means to possess the essence of God” (Mulholland 1985, 46). This is so we become like Christ, we walk in the fullness of his relationship with God and Holy Spirit. We walk in his ministry, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (John 14:12). We join God in his mission, he created us to fit perfectly in his plan and this perfection brings us the greatest joy, it is our song, our talents and gifts. Christ redeems us wholly by helping us to embrace in love all aspects of our selves that the armoured self is trying to protect. By experiencing the love of God and through his love learning to love ourselves more, we can become whole in that his love knocks on those areas of self that need to be awoken, come into awareness, those parts of ourselves that need to be healed. Through encountering God’s love, he lifts us out of self judgement, condemnation and shame, showing us how to love ourselves by experiencing and embracing his love. Through this healing we are then able to turn around and love the other. We learn to love as Christ loved us. This triune flow does not end with this model, nor the testing of it. The purpose of the model is to expand within the christian community and then ultimately into the harvest field.

School of Ministry

In order to do so, my idea to facilitate the expansion is to establish a school the mission of which is to help people grasp the fuller realization of the essence of what it means to participate in communion with a triune God and to share it with others. Just as God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit interact with one another, we too can partake through grace of this relationship and impart it to others. Jesus demonstrates the life that God invites us to join. We become earthen vessels fully emptied to receive his divine will and purpose in our life. This kenotic journey, the emptying of ourselves and allowing the Holy Spirit to continually replenish us helps us to identify and shed the armours we have created to protect us in life. It strengthens the spiritual bond with God so that we can hear his voice and do his bidding without fear so that we can imitate the life of Christ in a more holistic way. As Choutard expresses, “The soul of an apostle should be flooded first of all with light, and inflamed with love, so that, reflecting that light and that heat, it may enlighten and give warmth to other souls as well. That which they have heard, which they have seen with their eyes, which they have looked upon, and their hands have almost handled, this will they teach to men” (Choutard 2002, 30).

In the following chapter I will be demonstrating how I tested the model. For the purposes of this portfolio I will be focusing primarily on lectio Divina, psycho-somatic awareness and spiritual direction. The main criteria in the testing of the model was to observe whether the resources brought about any positive

changes relating to the development of a greater attachment to God, self and others.

CHAPTER FOUR:
A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH
PROJECT

This project incorporated some of the principles of a participatory action research (PAR) project to test and analyze the spiritual formation model developed in the previous chapter. While participants were not involved in creating the study, they played an important role in formulating the data and their input helped guide modifications for future use (Sensing 2011, 58-59). The main criteria in the testing of the model was to observe whether the resources brought about any positive changes relating to the development of a greater attachment to God, self and others.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to teach lectio Divina or “divine reading,” to foster a felt sense awareness of God that leads to a greater sense of attachment with God, self and others. As a psychotherapist and spiritual director, I have met many believers who read Scripture sparingly, have limited knowledge of self and God, are lonely, and feel disconnected from God, their family and church community.

The project provided an opportunity to participate in the objective to grow in greater attachment to (1) God, (2) self, and (3) others. There is a need for Christians to learn how to encounter God, self, and others, when reading scripture. The objectives while reading were:

- become attuned to the Holy Spirit
- learn diverse ways to pray identify God's voice for self and others
- identify their attachment style
- experience group reflection and prayer.

Key Terms

Lectio Divina is Latin for “divine reading.” It is an intentional spiritual practice. It

is a slower form of reading where an individual interacts with scripture through a four-step process to gain intimacy with God. They are reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. The phrase, *lectio Divina*, was coined by Origen in the second century AD (Studzinski 2009, 28).

However, similar practices to *lectio Divina*, though not the same, can be traced back to the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 30:14 we read, “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.” New Testament scripture makes indirect references to these practices in Philippians 4:8 where the author encourages believers to meditate on things that are true, honorable, pure... anything worthy of praise. In 2 Timothy 3:14-16, scripture is expressed as being inspired by God and profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness. This

practice continued in the monasteries. Painter (Painter 2008, 2) explains that, St Benedict incorporated it into the Benedictine rules and that his monks subscribed to three hours daily and it was known as the “ladder of the monks” so termed by Monk Guigo II in twelfth century after Jacob’s ladder . It is noteworthy that Jewish synagogues continue with this ancient practice where “rabbis and their disciples: “fix the sacred words in their minds and hearts, they murmured them aloud like bees feeding on honey” (Painter 2008, 2).

Attachment Styles form very early in childhood and continue right through into our adulthood relationships. Attachment can be described as any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. It is most obvious whenever the person is frightened, fatigued, or sick, and is assuaged by comforting and caregiving” (Bowlby 1988, 27). “Our attachment” to God is likened to the one we have with our caregivers (Johnson 2013, 41). Kirkpatrick was one of the first to recognize that God can be viewed as a caregiver and therefore an attachment figure. Studies have demonstrated that roughly 50-60 % of adults have secure attachment, and 40% have insecure attachment (Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn 2009, 223-263; Shaver and Hazan 1987, 420-435; Fraley, Waller and Brennan 2000, 350-365).

God Image as explicated by Ana Marie Rizzuto (1961), has its roots in Freud's theory and is used to describe the image of God that a child develops and uses in their understanding of self and others.

Spiritual Director is an individual trained in the art or practice of helping others to grow and deepen their relationship with the divine. For this project, the Christian God is accepted as having sent the Holy Spirit to assist believers in supporting them in their Christian growth (1 Corinthians 2:9-13).

Felt Sense is used to describe the meaning an individual makes from an inner knowing. It is connecting the understanding of the mind with the intuitive knowing of the heart.

Contexts of the Project

Several contexts need to be described as background to the research project: the professional qualifications of the researcher, the participants and location of the projects, the needs being addressed, and the cultural and spiritual situation.

Qualifications of Researcher

For over thirty years, I have been active in Christian ministry, leading or being part of various groups and ministries within the church, ministering to the homeless and imprisoned, and working as a psychotherapist, workplace consultant, and spiritual director. I take a holistic perspective, honoring the importance and integration of spirit, mind and body.

I have a Master of Divinity in Clinical Counseling from Tyndale Seminary, Toronto. I am a Registered Psychotherapist (#005721) with five years' experience. I have additional training and qualifications as a Critical Incident Responder, EMDR therapist for the Treatment of Complex Trauma, Focusing and Sensorimotor Therapy, and participated in the Doctor of Ministry program at Tyndale Seminary.

I work with trauma, depression, anxiety, and other relational and spiritual issues with individuals and couples. I have listened to many people's spiritual and personal life stories. Often individuals share their frustration of not being able to sense God's presence in their life and their struggle reading scripture. Further, people do not always share their feelings of loneliness, fear, difficulty, and isolation within the church community though they are active congregants. For those who are in a church community, sharing these feelings can bring shame, which prevents them from disclosing their needs to others and further amplifies their distress.

Location of Project

This project took place at Forest City Destiny Church in London, Ontario. The church has roughly 130 people, with adults ranging from twenty to seventy years old, along with many small children. The mean age is forty-five. Church members are quite involved in various programs. There are a few bands, with some musicians having their own CDs for sale, and artists who paint during the service. In addition to supporting missionaries, the church also has evangelistic

ministries, “Response Initiative”- a monthly night of worship for the city, bible studies, prophetic ministries, mini schools (Leadership, Prophetic, and Psalmist Academy), youth and senior groups, and organized corporate prayer. The church is very active in serving God. The desire to connect with God is deeply desired; however, the path of small steps to get there is not so clear.

Project Participants

This was a pilot study which used a convenience sample taken from individuals who were nearby and available. Five participants were invited to join. They were adults from the church that had previously expressed an interest in bible study, prayer and growing closer to God. They were able to make a time commitment of ten hours a week throughout the ten-day period: one hour per week for individual spiritual direction: two hours per week for group training, reflection and interaction, and one hour each day of the week to read scripture, study/research, pray, and meditate.

There were ten hours of involvement each week over the ten-day period. Each of the five participants received one chapter from the book of Ephesians, which they meditated on within the allotted time. Participants were asked to set this time aside so that they would be able to reflect and share with the group and support their own spiritual growth with God.

Needs Being Addressed

In the initial interview process, participants had stated a desire to learn the following skills: how to read Scripture intentionally, to hear the voice of God with

greater clarity, to distinguish between their voice and the voice of God, to develop connection with God and others and finally, to research scripture and share one's reflections with others in a focused and intentional way. The need was to move beyond head knowledge to knowing him and his love in an experiential way where connection to him develops secure attachment with the knowledge of not being alone. The project was a miniature version of a three-month course and sought to provide an introductory experience to practices that are intended for long term use.

Cultural Context of the Project

Most of our congregants are white middle-class Canadians of European descent, four of the five participants were of Dutch descent. The members are a mix of trades people and university graduates. All are hardworking and generous with their time and finances and have a desire to grow stronger in their relationship with God. Most of the participants come from rural communities and are conservative evangelicals who believe that the word of God is to be taken literally as opposed to that of the liberal emphasis of tolerance with a tendency to not take a literal interpretation of scripture.

Spiritual Context of the Project

The congregants believe that if they worship, pray, read Scripture, and meditate on the bible, then God will speak to them. The Charismatic spiritual tradition believes a Christian's relationship is founded in intimate connection with God who is their spiritual husband, "For your husband is your Maker, Whose

name is the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 54:5). The Christian tradition teaches that God loves you, desires to know you, and, if you seek him, he will respond. Some of the participants shared that in their church experience limited emphasis was placed on hearing the voice of God. The focus was on reading scripture and acts of service. Through this course, I desired to mentor congregants with the hope that a greater felt sense awareness of God would be achieved.

Model and Course Material

In this section I consider the components of the model which include literature, methodology, introduction to research team members and participants, and resources used in the project (lectio Divina, spiritual direction, others, breath prayers).

Background

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. This I command you, that you love one another. (John 15:13-15, 17)

Throughout my life I have desired to know God deeply and to love him with all my heart. I love to talk to him, read and learn about him, and interact with others who love him. I have had a fair degree of success in living a Christian lifestyle; however, there were times that I failed in serving him, and sometimes I failed miserably. I wrestled for many years with my inability to fully surrender

my will. I could serve God well so long as my will, my ego self, was not under threat of death. The fear for my life was greater than my trust in God.

I sought God with greater intensity, I wanted to know my God. I began to read Scripture slowly, waiting and listening for God's voice. As I pursued God through reading scripture, silent listening, and prayer, I felt my spirit become woven together with his and a deep attachment bond was formed. I felt deeply loved, seen, and known. It was here that God healed me of my inability to trust him. I knew that his love was for me and that he was my friend, and the lover of my soul. From this place of relationship with God, I could surrender my fears - the fight to save myself - and trust he would resurrect me to new life in him. God became my safe-haven and gave me a secure foundation of feeling loved and accepted just as I am.

Though God does not need us to help him, he invites us to join him in the restoration of people to him. He invites us to know him and his ways so that we, like Christ, can say, "I only say what I hear the Father saying, I only do what I see my Father doing" (John 5:19; John 8:28). To join with God and serve him with our entirety, our spirit, our mind, and our bodies – is to walk in the restoration and reconciliation of self and then turn to assist another to do the same. In chapter 3 my model provides training in scriptural, and psychological understanding of the self. These three areas facilitate understanding and growth.

Literature, and Resources

I used an *Adult Attachment Scale: Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised Scale ECR-R* developed by Fraley, Waller and Brennan (2000), which can be accessed online through <http://www.yourpersonality.net/> and The *Attachment to God Inventory* by Beck and McDonald (2004). These attachment scales measure openness and responsiveness to connection. Both scales have questions that test degrees of avoidance toward intimacy and anxiety caused by abandonment concerns.

This book, *Discovering Lectio Divina* (Jim Wilhoit and Evan Howard 2012) provide direction in this ancient practice of reading Scripture. The authors give the main principles and allow room for the readers' personal interaction preference within these guidelines.

To understand the contrast between a false self and a true self, the book, *The Deeper Journey* Robert Mulholland 2006 offers a useful description of the many ways in which the false self may arise in one's life as a character strategy. This was a helpful tool to use as a reference to help in the journey toward self-awareness. In his book *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, (Mulholland 1985, 35-47) also offers a sound discussion of Christ as the living word among us and how Scripture forms us into living words in his image. This was helpful in furthering my understanding of what it means to be shaped into the image of God. *The Shema Series* (Itzhak Shapira 2012) is a good complement to *Shaped by the Word*. In this series, the Hebrew understanding of Jesus' two commandments, to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as

yourself is explored (Matthew 22:37-40). Rabbi Shapira provides good instruction of how we are to love God, ourselves, and others, of how God's creatures are interconnected in his image; and of why we need to pursue each other in love.

For those beginning their journey in engaging with God, Frank Laubach's *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (Laubach 1937) provides an attainable example of how to identify and grow experientially in God. Finally, *The Soul of the Apostolate* (Chautard 1961) offers mature wisdom of the effects of an interior life in ministry in comparison to an active life in ministry. The interior life refers to the spiritual development of the soul. The active life refers to serving in ministry.

Neuroscience has given those active in healthcare a leap in knowledge and understanding in how our life experiences are woven into the fabric of our being. This knowledge has brought clarity and success in the interventions used to provide healing and restoration of emotional wounds and blocks. Curt Thompson is a Christian medical practitioner who wrote *Anatomy of the Soul* (Thompson 2010) which examines neuroscience from a Christian perspective.

The Body Keeps the Score (Van De Kolk 2014) is a book rich in explanation of how our life's experiences are held and expressed by our bodies. It combines brain science, psychological information on attachment, trauma and clinical stories. *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy* (Ogden, Minton, Pain 2006) offers a holistic explanation of the link between the mind and the body as an integrative therapeutic approach as it relates to trauma.

Methodology

This research project used the principles of participatory action research (PAR). The participants and researcher were “united and actively involved in seeking to resolve a problem at hand” (Stringer 2014, 11, 21). In this instance, the problem was the desire to increase the individual’s and group encounter of God, which, it was hoped, would create a greater felt attachment to God and to others.

PAR was particularly suited to this project as a group of five individuals agreed to come together to study the biblical book of Ephesians, to share and invest their findings and reflections with each other through listening to what the other has learned. PAR seeks to provide “social and personal interactions towards forming a united community” (Stringer 2014, 23). They agreed to pray for each other over a ten-day period. Table 1 lays out the phases and the timetable and Appendix F provides the project activity outline. The expectation was that people will report out of an actual experience that is embodied and integrated into a living reality versus cognitive head knowledge. In other words, for example, I know in my head that God loves me but, in my heart, I am not certain that I am truly loved unconditionally as the bible says that I am (1 John 4:9-11, Romans 8:37-39). PAR is also suitable to a group where the essence of an experience is shared and is transferable so others can learn from each other.

The hope of this project was that through scripture reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation, journaling, and interaction with others and their experiences, individuals would have a tangible encounter with God and with the other participants. This tangible encounter could create a strong connection which

can lead to an individual feeling securely attached. Scripture calls us to, “love God with all [our] heart, mind and understanding and to love our neighbor as [ourselves]” (Mark 12:30-31). Scripture also states that, “perfect love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18), which enables us to engage with God and each other from a place of authenticity and unity. Through individuals in the focus group sharing their interactions and encounters with God, they “present a description that allows the reader to understand better what it is like for someone to have that experience” (Merriam 2009, 26). The hope was that others within the group would be encouraged in their own pursuit of God.

Participants shared aspects of their life story and through reflection, spiritual direction and group interaction they were able to gain greater revelation in “their meaning making process” making way for gentle transformation (Bell 2010, 19). The inclusion of a “narrative approach is most appropriate when the researcher is interested in portraying intensely personal accounts of human experience” (Gray 1998, 12). This was certainly true of this project which hoped to deepen the participants’ connection with God and with those in the focus group.

Table 1. Phases and Timetable

Phase	Action	Time Frame	How
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Phase	Action	Time Frame	How
Developing the Proposal	Submit the REB application for Ethics Review and supporting documents to reb@tyndale.ca Received REB approval	September 2017 October 18, 2017	Written report
Preparatory Phase	Send out information/ Consent letters to prospective participants.	First week in September	Via email
	Prepare participants workbook and implementation materials		<i>Lectio Divina</i> -Breath prayers -Contemplation - Meditation -Ephesians chapter -Procedures -Blue Letter Bible
Implementation Phase	Receive consent forms and participants time table for individuals	3rd week in October	Via email
	2-hour orientation session for all participants First Focus group meeting	October 18, 2017	-Focus group -Group introductions -Presentation of <i>Lectio Divina</i> -Overview of the next 2 weeks -Handout and completion of 2 assessments; <i>Adult Attachment Scale</i> , and <i>Attachment to God Inventory</i> -Confirm spiritual direction meetings during the week -Engaging with Scripture -Breathe prayer -Contemplation -Journal -Daily log of Bible Study time and contemplation
	Meet with each	October 20,	1 hour In-person, at site

Phase	Action	Time Frame	How
	participant for participant debriefing and spiritual direction	2017	location
	Second Focus group meeting	October 21, 2017	2-hour diverse case analysis
	Participant debriefing and spiritual direction 2	October 24, 2017	1 hour on site
	Third Focus group meeting	October 28, 2017	2-hour group session - Handout and completion of 2 assessments; <i>Adult Attachment Scale</i> , and <i>Attachment to God Inventory</i> Participants hand in their journals and logs Brief case analysis, time of sharing and prayer. Discussion of the next two months.
	Focus group 4 Prepare raw material for participant member checking	November 28, 2017	Member checking Final Handout and completion of 2 assessments; <i>Adult Attachment Scale</i> , and <i>Attachment to God Inventory</i>
Data Analysis and Reporting	Code data for assessments Code data for participant debriefing Code data for journals Code data for focus groups	First 3 weeks in November	
Reporting	Draft written report	February	
	Final written report	April	

Research Team Members

Two Research Team Members assisted the Principal researcher in this project. Both team members are involved in church ministry at Forest City Destiny Church in London, Ontario and hold a common interest in growing closer to God and to others. The team members expressed an interest in the process and outcome of the project. The first team member is Dr. Emmanuel Songsore an adjunct Professor at Western University, who is familiar with qualitative research. The second team member is Hans Oegema, a certified spiritual director. Team members signed confidentiality agreements (Appendix D). Their role in this project was to receive the participants consent forms (Appendix C), offer general assistance, take notes on non-verbal communication as it related to the presentation, interpersonal group interactions, assist in audiotaping of the focus group sessions and in the evaluation of the project (Danley and Ellison 1999, 14). Team members are considered best practices in PAR. Audiotaping of the focus group sessions is important in qualitative research as it prevents researcher bias and inadvertent interpretation of information (Bloor and Wood 2006, 16-17). Audiotaping provides valuable feedback of the entire conversations captured which would not be possible through note taking. All audiotaping were transcribed.

Participants

Five participants were selected from Forest City Destiny Church. They were invited to be part of the research project by way of letter (Appendix B). The

participants were adults ranging from ages fifty-five to seventy-five, comprised of both men and women. These individuals were available and could commit to the commitments of the study. Therefore, they were invited to be part of this pilot project. All of them had expressed an interest in learning to read scripture and growing closer to God.

Participants were given one week to review the information before providing their consent which they did by emailing their response to one of the team members (Appendix C). Participants were provided with anonymity in their decision to decline or accept their offer to take part in this project. Once consents were received, participants were each assigned a number and given pseudonyms to protect their identity not only in the writing up of the research but also the results from the other team members who had access to the data. I would like to give a brief introduction of the participants under the pseudonyms.

Victor: He commented, “I have the time to dedicate to this project, and I enjoy studying scripture.” Victor shared that he grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and knows that God loves him just as he knows that his own father loves him. At one time in his life he attended an event at a Vineyard Church and met individuals that knew God experientially. This created in him a longing to encounter God in the same way. Victor has experienced distinct times in his life where he knew God was speaking to him, such as confirmation of a job or to move to another province. Victor

would like to hear God speak with greater frequency as he has observed in others.

Natasha: Completed an online history of the bible course. She was leaving for the middle east the day after this project was over to visit the biblical places she had studied. Natasha thought this project would be a good spiritual preparation for her. She shared, “I am always interested in learning and growing in my Christian walk...I am curious to see what opportunities this program will present.” Natasha is involved in the Christian reformed tradition and continues to be a congregant there.

Marg: Had been involved in ministry for many years. Her desire was to seek a closer relationship with God and to hear his voice with greater clarity. Marg grew up in the Anglican church, later attended the United church and is now active in the Charismatic stream as a minister.

Jane: Jane found small group interaction valuable for personal growth. Her hope for this project was to, “Go deeper in her walk with God.” Jane grew up in the Christian reformed tradition. She joined the charismatic church in her mid-twenties.

Sheila: Sheila’s desire for joining the group was to “Deepen my connection with God.” Sheila had shared that several years ago she had led a home group bible study that included the use of lectio Divina, though not to the extent that was offered in the project. Sheila grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and has been attending a Charismatic church for several years.

Project Components

In the first meeting which included all five participants, both research team members and myself, (two hours in length) I provided instruction in the practice of lectio Divina, how to discern the voice of God, breath prayers and blue letter bible search engine usage. The meeting also included a brief overview of the book of Ephesians, the assignment of the chapters, a time of introduction, and a sharing of personal goals and fellowship.

Each participant received a package containing handouts (listed on page 163-164) that explain the process of lectio Divina, breath prayer, finger labyrinth, blue letter bible, overview of Ephesians, their assigned chapter, and a notebook to journal their thoughts. During this meeting, participants were asked to complete an *Attachment to God Inventory* and an *Adult Attachment Scale* (Appendix A).

Participants were asked to spend sixty minutes a day reading their chapter according to lectio Divina instructions. They were asked to record which verse(s) they read; their thoughts; any felt sense impression from God they perceived either through images, impressions, or thoughts; and any increased sense of connection to God. They should also note any questions for further consideration the time spent in prayer, meditation, and contemplation, and if the time set aside felt excessive or was not enough.

Spiritual direction was provided to each participant for two one-hour sessions during the ten-day period. This offered support to participants not familiar with this style of biblical study which is a slower method of engagement that is more contemplative.

There were two more meetings of two hours in length where all five of the participants gathered to share their biblical insights, and personal reflections. This was a time to deepen their relationship within the group. There was a time to pray for one another and to practice engaging the felt sense presence of God and listening to God's voice in an intimate group setting.

At the meeting after 10 days, the participants completed the *Attachment to God Inventory* and the *Adult Attachment Scale* and compared their results with their initial scores. Participants were invited to complete both assessments four weeks later for a final follow-up. Participants were asked to conclude with thoughts and reflections of the overall experience and asked to offer any helpful suggestions in refining this model for future use. Participants completed a project evaluation form to assess the instruction received and note what they found helpful or not.

The goal of the project was to explore whether through the process of lectio Divina, an individual can grow in greater awareness of the felt sense of God, which can then lead to a sense of greater attachment to God and others. The attachment scales were used to assess the attachment style of the participants.

The attachments scales were used to increase awareness of self and their interactions with God and others. This study was limited in nature as it is being conducted over a ten-day period. However, Carlson et al., found that in a two-week study where participants were asked to meditate on scripture for only ten minutes three times a week, they experienced a reduction in anxiety and anger

(Carlson et al. 1988, 366). The hope of this study was to increase the felt sense awareness leading to a greater attachment with God and the results supported this hope.

An encouraging factor to this project was that this church's prominent charism is the gift of prophecy. The church provides training in hearing the voice of God with participation allowing for members to join the prophetic team which provides weekly recorded prophetic utterances to those who wish to receive this ministry. For some participants who have been involved with the prophetic team, growing in their connection with God and in hearing his voice was important to them as they wanted to speak with greater confidence.

Participating in the project did not constitute a guarantee in forming a secure attachment to God. An individual may feel uncertain, have a mental block, trust issues, fear or anger that cause a resistance in attaching to God. This may stem from insecure attachment styles received from caregivers or difficult life experiences. There are individuals who came to their Christian faith as adults and could use support in learning various methods to study Scripture and interact with God.

The Study of Ephesians

The book of Ephesians was chosen for several reasons. There are six chapters in this book, and it was hoped that I would have six participants so that each could focus on one chapter of the book and then bring what they learnt to share with the rest of the group. This ties in with the hope of this project for the

individual to connect to God, to themselves, and then to others through the feeding on of the Word of God and then in the sharing of it. While only five participants joined the program, I continued as planned with using the book of Ephesians.

The theme in Ephesians connected well to the objectives of this project. First is the call of salvation to be adopted into the family of God, that we encounter the love of God. Paul prays that the “eyes of our hearts would be enlightened so that we might know the hope of our calling” (Ephesians 1:18). Paul hopes to connect the reader to themselves through new insight (eyes of our hearts) by the revelation of our sinful state. “You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you walked...lived in the lusts of your flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1, 3). Now that the reader is aware of their true state, Paul hopes that “Christ would dwell in our hearts so that we can be grounded and rooted in his love” (Ephesians 3:17). This is encounter. We can then grow in greater connection with God. Once we have the knowledge of God’s love for us and the knowledge of ourselves in God, his love compels us to turn to others, to love them and be united with them. “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). Paul tells the reader what maturity in Christ looks like “humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love...no longer deceived by the schemes of man...setting aside all bitterness, wrath, anger and slander” (Ephesians 4:2, 13, 31). Where we set aside

the old ways of doing life which Paul calls, “In the futility of the mind,” we now become one in Christ and through Christ with each other. This is where we become integrated and aligned through Christ in the kenotic flow (Ephesians 4:17, 4-6). We can live a life of holiness, just as Christ is holy. In Ephesians 5, Paul continues his instructions to the believer in their imitation of Christ exhorting them to “Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” This highlights again our need to become aware of our behaviour which inhibits our ability to draw near to God (Ephesians 5:14). In the final stage, the believer is to be clothed fully in God to stay strong in the faith. “Take up the full armour of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13). God covers us with his armour, which is the knowledge of him and us with him in relationship, where we are connected and attached in the love of God. A person can experience God through his word, opening to his Spirit, receiving more of his love that strengthens and fills the missing pieces of ourselves, drawing us deeper into his love and greater attachment. Relationally this increases capacity to love ourselves and in turn love others with the unconditional love of God. We move in greater alignment with God where we enter the flow of his Spirit and speak a more unified word. We become one singular and one plural as the body of Christ.

Each participant studied the chapter they received throughout the project. They used this chapter to study, meditate, pray and contemplate what they read. They brought their findings back to the focus group so that all may benefit. This

study is called lectio Divina as we have described above. I will now provide more information on the direction and experience of the participants of this divine reading.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a contemplative form of reading scripture that became a standard practice in Benedictine monasteries in the sixth century. This practice encourages encounter with God as it makes use of an interactive reading of the scriptures. The participant reads the biblical passage, meditates on the passage, listening for God to speak, whether by image, reflection or felt sense, prays his or her response or seeking, and then rests in the presence of God.

It is a four-step structure to guide participants through the process of their bible study. Using one chapter from the book of Ephesians, participants were asked to spend one hour each day reading their chapter from Ephesians throughout the entire project.

Step 1, Reading: Participants were asked to read scripture slowly to be able to notice which word or phrase caught their attention. The listening and noticing of the word or phrase that interested them was the first step in the discernment process in engaging in a greater felt sense awareness of God.

Step 2, Meditation: Participants were asked to sit with and meditate on, reflect on, mull, or chew over the word or phrase that captured their attention. This assisted participants to deepen their understanding of the experience through a feeling, emotion, memory, image or thought. Meditation

assisted participants to lean into the felt sense of God, hearing his voice or further revelation of the biblical passage.

Step 3, Prayer: Participants were asked to pray and speak with God about what they experienced during their meditation. Participants may then have felt led by God or experience an unction where they should search out deeper meaning of the word (phrase, vision, image) in scripture to broaden their understanding. Participants would continue the process of step 1 and step 2 until they had a feeling of being satisfied, a full feeling like a satisfying meal. Once participants experienced this satisfaction, they would move to step 4.

Step 4, Contemplation: With the richness of the above three steps, the participants rested in quietness, in intimate communion with God. This was a time of “being,” where the participant’s reported experiencing a calming or stillness that was sensed throughout the body as they rested in God’s presence.

Blue Letter Bible

Blue Letter Bible is an online bible search engine that offers a range of study resources. It can be found at <https://blueletterbible.org/>. I choose this resource as it is one that I use and found to be helpful. During the initial focus group, I provided participants with a PowerPoint demonstration of how to use this resource. I also provided a step by step handout. Searching out biblical words will provide participants with greater insight into the meaning of words and their

impact on the passage and the individual reading it. The aim was that the participants would be able to join the psalmist and say, “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Breath Prayer

The breath prayer is an ancient meditative practice known among the Desert Fathers and Mothers and commonly associated with the Russian or Eastern Orthodox Church. It is used to encourage praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). A well-known breath prayer is the Jesus prayer, based on Luke 18:10-17 and Luke 18:13: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” It can be reduced to “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy” or “Jesus, mercy.”

Breath prayers are helpful in scripture meditation; they assist the participant in focusing on a word or biblical verse and in quieting their heart to be able to hear God or have a felt sense of His presence. They are part of meditative and contemplative practices used by monks and those seeking a deeper connection with God. They were included in this study as part of an educational tool of contemplative practices to help gain awareness of self, to quiet one’s soul to hear the voice of God and discern his presence, and to grow in connection and intimacy with God. It engages the body, the mind, and the spirit. The individual begins by taking a deep belly breath and follows the ebb and flow of their breath, up to their heart and back down to their belly. Deep belly breaths have a positive calming impact on an individual’s nervous system (Xiao Ma et al., 2017, 874). As

the person takes these deep breaths, their mind focuses in on the rhythm of their breath and the person becomes aware of themselves. This is a mindful state that quiets a person's soul, attuning them to the present moment. When the individual is in this quiet, mindful state. Aware of the rhythm of their breath, aware of their stillness, the individual then turns their focus to their spirit, then to the Holy Spirit, and then begins the breath prayer. Synchronizing the words of the prayer to the rhythmic flow of their breath. While the breath prayer begins with "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," it can be shortened to saying the word "Jesus" with the breath in and the word "mercy" with the breath out.

Labyrinth

The finger labyrinth used was a reproduction of a famous labyrinth used by monks since the twelfth century in Chartres, France found in the Chartres Cathedral. Labyrinths are a maze-like structure that have an ancient history. They can be found inside cathedrals or outside areas. People walk these circular paths for reflection, meditation and prayer. A person walking a labyrinth may be repeating a breath prayer (i.e., "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner") or a prayer of their own. They may be seeking God in their spirit or imagining that they are walking with God through the many turns in their life, in friendship with him or in hopes of receiving an answer from God when they complete the maze.

For some, entering a labyrinth is like entering a contained, closed space where they can focus on themselves and God, with the hope of a transcendent experience or encounter.

Data Collection

Data was collected from the following sources: The participants response were taken from their journals, focus group discussion, interview questions asked during spiritual direction and their responses to the questionnaires.

Journaling

Each participant was given a notebook to use for journaling their reflections experienced during the study. Participants were asked to do this once a day. This was driven by the participants own study and interaction with the scripture passage that they were given. The participants documented their reflections of the passage and any words, images, dreams or thoughts they felt they had received from God. Participants shared their journal reflections during their personal time in spiritual direction. At the end of the project Participants handed their journals to me. I made generalized notes according to the themes of this project. All journals were returned to the participants.

Activity Log

Participants were asked to log how much time they spent in the resources given to them. As a general guideline, they were asked to spend twenty to thirty minutes a day in bible study/lectio Divina, ten to twenty minutes a day journaling,

and twenty minutes a day in breath prayers and contemplation. Participants handed in their activity logs to me at the end of the project.

Spiritual Direction

I met with each participant individually for one hour on two separate weeks to give spiritual direction. This allowed for free and open space for participants to ask questions, share their reflections, and bring their own life story and context when reading their assigned scripture chapter. Spiritual direction seeks to assist an individual to integrate their faith and experience of God and their struggles with him. It was anticipated that each participant would have their own reflections and inner movements toward or away from God when reading their portion of Ephesians. I took generalized notes of themes that pertained to the goal of the project.

The purpose of spiritual direction for this study was to offer support to each participant in listening with them for the voice of God as he was speaking and interacting with them. The questions asked of each participant included or were modeled on the following:

- As you read the scripture passage is there a word or verse that you feel a connection to?
- What are the thoughts, feelings, or images that come to mind as you read that word or verse?
- Is there a theme in this chapter that resonates with a desire or life thread in your own life?

- As you read the passage is there anything God is saying to you?
- Are you able to sit in silence with God?
- Do you struggle to read scripture? Was there another time in your life when you struggled with bible reading and if so, why?
- Did you notice any resistance – feeling sleepy when it is time to read scripture, feeling bored while reading scripture, or feeling unsure of what to do next?

During this time of individual spiritual direction, I offered further guidance in the lectio Divina process if the participant requested it.

Focus Group

The participants met in an unstructured focus group format to share their insights and reflections of the chapter readings and to interact as a group. There were three focus group meetings, each being two hours in length. These meetings were audio recorded and transcribed. Sensing (Sensing 2011, 121) notes that the average size for a focus group is “8-12 members...however...optimum group size depends on group interest in the topic.” This group consisted of five participants which allowed for group discussion and prayer. In aiding the role of the facilitator Sensing recommends, “two people partner together” (Sensing 2011, 123) when the group is together, where one person acts as the facilitator and the other as an assistant. I facilitated the group discussion and had the assistance of two research team members who made observational notes and reflected on and discussed these notes later with me. They also provided any other assistance as required.

The first focus group took place on the first day of the project. The researcher (Susanne Baldeosingh), two team members (Emmanuel Songsore, Hans Oegema) and the five participants met at the project site (FCDC Church). The team members' role in this project was to receive the participants consent forms, offer general assistance, take notes on non-verbal communication as it related to the presentation, interpersonal group interactions, and in the evaluation of the project (Danley 1999, 14).

The focus group meetings were a hybrid of discussion, teaching and assessment. That is, the time spent in each was not exclusive to a focus group. The first meeting began with introductions and a discussion of what the participants hoped to receive through the experience. Each of the participants received a package containing the following information:

- A brief history of lectio Divina
- An explanation of each of the steps they were to follow during their bible study time
- A chapter from the biblical book of Ephesians: each participant received a different chapter
- A notebook for journaling
- An activity log to note time spent studying Scripture, praying, and meditating
- A pen
- A practice guide for breath prayers
- A finger labyrinth

- A sheet of instructions to locate online and use Blue Letter Bible resource site for bible commentaries, concordances, and Greek and Hebrew word tools.
- A sheet of instructions to locate online and use the Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised (ECR-R) assessment scale
- An Attachment to God Inventory (AGI)

Participants were asked to complete the ECR-R online with their computer at home and email results to the researcher. The AGI was completed as a group as this assessment requires manual administration and calculation. Once the packages were handed out, participants watched a PowerPoint presentation explaining the reason for the project, the practice of lectio Divina, and the resources they would be interacting with. Participants were given the AGI assessment to complete as a group and their responses were collected. Participants then had time to talk and share some of their life journeys and family stories. Finally, we closed in prayer.

The second focus group took place on the last day of the project. Participants gathered for two hours to share with each other what they learned from the biblical passage they read. Participants shared their reflections, spiritual experiences, or life happenings as part of group sharing and learning. The AGI was completed as a group during this time. ECR-R was completed a second time at home and emailed to researcher. The group prayed together and then closed.

The third focus group met for a follow-up four weeks after the project concluded. Participants were asked if they continued with the study on their own.

The group reflected together on what they liked and disliked and on how this project could be different. The AGI was completed together and participants forwarded to researcher the final ECR-R that they completed at home. The final meeting also closed in prayer.

Questionnaire Assessments

Participants were asked to complete two assessments at three intervals: (1) at the start of the project; (2) at the end of the project; (3) one month after the conclusion of the project. The first assessment was used to provide a baseline at the start of this project. Participants were able to compare their responses to the second assessment completed two weeks later at the end of the study. The participants were asked to redo the assessments for one final time four weeks later, and were asked the question, “Did you continue the practice of *lectio Divina* and if not, why not?” The final assessments were used to measure whether awareness and connection to God deepened if *lectio Divina* continued. If the individual did not continue, did their connection to God, “increase, decrease or stay the same?” The two assessments used were Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) and Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) (Appendix A).

Experiences in Close Relationship-R is a revised psychological assessment tool used to measure an individual’s attachment to those with whom they are in close relationship. “Romantic love, as an attachment process follows the same sequence of formative steps and results in the same kinds of individual differences as infant-parent attachment” (Hazan & Shaver 1994, 1-22). In the last few years

Hazan and Shaver's research has raised more questions whether romantic love and infant-parent attachment are correlated. Researchers give credit to Hazan and Shaver for "some aspects of their findings as well recognize limitations" which requires further investigation ((Fraley & Shaver 2000, 132-154). A limitation being the "assumption that all romantic partners are attached and does not regard differentiation in variance of attachment styles" (Fraley & Shaver 2000, 132-154). Given that research shows limitations whether attachment with a partner or a caregiver remains the same throughout an individual's life, I chose to use these scales to assist participants in becoming aware of their attachment styles and how that might relate to their attachment to God. This questionnaire was developed by Fraley, Waller and Brennan (2000) that they revised from Brennan, Clark, and Shaver's (1998) version. This assessment was used to increase awareness of the participants' attachment style with others, whether it was one of avoidance or anxiety. Avoidance relates to discomfort or intimacy in relationships. Anxiety relates to an individual's fear of being rejected and abandoned. The ECR-R is a 36-item self-reporting questionnaire. Items one to eighteen measure an individual's anxiety in close relationships. Individuals are asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Questions found on the anxiety scale includes: "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me" (3), "I do not often worry about being abandoned" (11), and "I worry that I won't measure up to other people" (17). An individual's responses are calculated, the average is taken, and this is the person's score. Items

nine through eleven are reverse keyed, meaning the higher the number, the lower the anxiety. Items nineteen to thirty-six measure an individual's avoidance. Questions found on the avoidance scale include: "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down" (19), "I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner" (26), and "I am nervous when partners get too close to me" (32). Items twenty, twenty-two, twenty-six through thirty-one, and thirty-three through thirty-six need to be reverse scored before an average can be taken.

A free online assessment was used that participants accessed at home through their own computer. This site kept a record of the information the participants entered. It offered an ongoing evaluation that participants can interact with for as long as they wish. Participants were asked to complete this assessment at the start of the program, at the end of the program, and then four weeks after the program ended. This was to measure if there had been any change in their attachment style. The ECR-R Attachment Style Questionnaire can be accessed at <http://www.yourpersonality.net/>. Consent was granted by the authors to use the assessments (Appendix E).

Where God is the caregiver in the attachment relationship, it can be said that he provides the most secure attachment possible. The roles between Caregiver and care receiver are clearly defined, he is omnipresent and is the quintessential "stronger and wiser Other" (Kirkpatrick 2002, 78). When an individual with an insecure attachment style develops a secure attachment with God, it has been found to positively affect their relationships (Straub 2009, 115).

The Attachment to God Inventory was designed by Beck and McDonald (2004) who based their questions on the Experiences of Close Relationship scale developed by Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998). Beck and McDonald designed the questions to reflect an individual's attachment to God. The attachment themes of avoidance and anxiety are reflected in the 28-item questionnaire. The response to questions is scored on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. There are fourteen questions on avoidance of intimacy with God and fourteen questions that measures anxiety to God. Questions on avoidance include "I prefer not to depend too much on God" (10), "Daily I discuss all of my problems and concerns with God" (22), and "I let God make most of the decisions in my life" (28). Questions on anxiety include "If I can't see God working in my life, I get upset or angry" (3), "I fear God does not accept me when I do wrong" (17), and "I get upset when I feel God helps out others but forgets about me" (27). All odd numbers are related to anxiety and all even numbers to avoidance. Once each column has been added, the result is divided by 14 for the final score. The Attachment to God Inventory by Beck and McDonald can be accessed online (Beck and McDonald 2004, Appendix A).

Ethics

Any study of people raises the issue of ethical concerns. This is especially true in an action research project undertaken within the researchers own group. However, the various issues have been considered and adequate safeguards put in place to meet the requirements of Tyndale Seminary's Doctor of Ministry process

for research approval (Tyndale Seminary 2018, 2:3), including submission of proposal to the Tyndale University College and Seminary Research Ethics Board, and familiarity with and adherence to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) for Canada (Canadian Institutes 2014). Permission from the Research Ethics Board was received October 18, 2017 (see Table 1).

Potential Benefits

This project took place on site at Forest City Destiny Church. The five participants were from Forest City Destiny Church. All participants signed consent forms and were given instruction as to their right to volunteer and to withdraw without consequence. Further, participants were notified that, should they wish to withdraw, they may take their data with them.

Participants sent their responses to the invitation letter to a neutral third party (team member, Hans Oegema) to shield them from experiencing any discomfort should they choose not to be part of this project (Appendix B). This ensured that their privacy was protected. All participants were provided with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The pastors of this church were not part of the vetting process nor had any input regarding participants or data. The potential benefits that participants may receive in joining the project included learning a new way to study Scripture. In recent years this practice has been making inroads in the evangelical stream though it is still not widely known or used.

Participants may gain self-awareness and personal insight, through daily logging of emotions, spiritual insights and scriptural inspirations. They also may grow in the awareness of God, through reading Scripture and listening to and interacting with the Holy Spirit. Growing in the felt presence and sensing a greater attachment to God was another potential benefit.

Through encountering the love of God, it was hoped that their experience of themselves would deepen their desire and capacity to love others more.

Potential Risks

However, there were also possible risks that participants should be made aware. For those participants whose attachment reports indicate that they have insecure attachment (insecure, distant, disorganized) may report difficulty discerning a felt sense of God or question any encounter with him which could cause distress. Other participants may feel intimidated or that something is wrong with them should they be limited in their spiritual experiences as compared to others in the group which may bring about feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness. This project offered minimal to no risk. While the researcher is a member of this congregation those participants invited to join this project are members that the researcher either does not know or has had minimal contact with.

Procedures to Address Possible Risks

Those who may have insecure attachment concerns were able to address them through a few different avenues. All participants received two hours of

individual spiritual direction. Participants were able to privately discuss any questions or concerns they had regarding the study or their interaction with the study material. For those participants having trouble discerning a felt sense awareness of God individual spiritual direction was able to assist in discerning any hindrances through their own spoken narrative. As well, the participants' journals were helpful in recording their thoughts which will provide clues to stuck-ness. As lectio Divina requires slow meditation with scripture, a calming effect is anticipated. Carlson et al., held this to be true with "only three, ten-minute interactions with scripture in a laboratory per week during a two-week study" (Carlson, et al. 1988, 366). Kirkpatrick found that when people pray, they experience God as being near. "According to most Christian faiths, God (or Jesus) is always on your side, holding your hand and watching over you" (Kirkpatrick 2005, 58).

Other participants may have feelings of inadequacy. Like physical and mental development, spiritual development takes time and investment of energy and resources to develop. All participants received a handout in their participant's package which was reviewed in the introduction session. This handout discussed the stages of spiritual growth. This information helped participants understand that though they may all be adults, some may be more spiritually developed than others.

The personal information obtained through the attachment assessments brought self-awareness to the individual which produced a calming effect.

Individuals did receive greater insight in the way they attach to others and to God. The online attachment assessment allowed the individual to continue to interact with the program if they wished as a resource for further reflection and support.

To address confidentiality, all the participants invited to be part of the model were asked to respond to a neutral third party to accept or decline this offer. In this way, it is hoped that participants did not feel pressure or loss of face in turning down the researcher who is one among them in the congregation. For those participants who have interacted directly with the researcher, there was no obligation to continue interaction in this project and no need to justify their response whether to participate or not.

Procedures to Respond to Power Imbalances

The researcher provided each participant with a daily log to record their thoughts, emotions, and felt sense when interacting with scripture and prayer throughout the day. This provided the participant with a tracking system where they were able to observe the movement of their thoughts regarding scripture and daily life events. There was a question and answer time, meeting of the other participants, and a review of the confidentiality and rights of participants. The names of the participants were not made public to the congregation. The times for personal debriefing and spiritual direction were scheduled during the week when the congregation was not present, where few staff were present. The day and time for the group meeting were held at a similar day and time where only a few church staff were in the facility.

The hope for this group was to assist individuals to sense a greater attachment to God and to others. To that end, there was some disclosure of life stories that intercept with the theme of this project. Participants determined how much information they would like to disclose with each other. Participants did receive a boundary sheet handout and group disclosure was regulated by the researcher who is a registered psychotherapist.

Findings, Interpretations and Outcomes

The results of the project are presented in this section. It is interpreted using graphs and charts, and the findings are discussed along with future implications. Origen regarded this style of study as formational, “Where the logos was incarnate and could touch and teach readers and hearers” where the Holy Spirit leads the process of exploration of the scriptures (Studzinski 2009, 44). In this style of reading participants reported affective responses of heartfelt changes and repentance. Participants experience, and insights will be used for input in the future development of this project into course material. As per privacy guidelines, all participants were given pseudonyms. A brief description of the participants is provided, together with a list of the resources presented and how they were used in collating the data to support the objective which is to achieve greater intimacy with God as the ultimate reconciler of authentic relationship, within ourselves and others.

Data collected from the ECR-R and AGI attachment models are discussed using Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4. Findings for the data collected from the

resources (focus groups, interviews in the form of spiritual direction, and journals) are noted in Appendix G. Discussions and interpretation for each chart attempt to correlate the findings to the Objectives of the study i.e., developing a more intimate relationship with God, self, and others. Project outcomes are listed in Table 3. The responses from the participants were coded under the three categories of body, belief and spirit. These categories emerged organically. Participants reported an increase in faith, a deeper connection with God, being centered and at peace.

Assessment Tools

Participants were asked to complete the Experience to Close Relationship – Revised (ECR-R) at home on three separate occasions (start of project, end of project and for follow up) and email their results to me. As previously discussed, (p.167) the purpose of these assessment tools was secondary in nature, in that they were used to bring awareness in a concrete way to the Participants own attachment styles. The scores for the Experience Close Relationship-Revised (ECR-R) were computer generated combining both avoidance and anxiety on one scale (Figure 2). During each of the three focus groups participants also completed an Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) as a group on site and handed their results over to me. Avoidance results were recorded and placed on Figure 3. Anxiety results were calculated and are featured in Figure 4.

The first focus group (the first interval) provided a base reading of their attachment styles. The second interval was recorded at the end of the project. The

third interval (here after referred to as follow up) was taken four weeks later to observe whether participants had continued the practice or not and if the readings reflected ongoing change.

Participants reported that this was the first-time they had been exposed to a test that asked questions pertaining to their attachment style. For example, ["I do not often worry about being abandoned" (11), and "I worry that I won't measure up to other people" (17)]. It offered more understanding and self-awareness of the nuances in their felt sense of avoidance and anxiety.

The differences in the bar graphs are representative of different life stories. Insecure attachment styles result in either greater avoidant/distant or anxious behavior. The greater the avoidant/distant attachment the taller the bar. Correspondingly the lower the bar the greater secure attachment.

Experience Close Relationship-Revised (ECR-R)

In theory, Figure 2. Experience Close Relationship – Revised ECR-R, below should illustrate a bench mark reading of avoidance/anxiety between participants and their spouses over a period of three meetings (Figure 2). Both the avoidance and anxiety readings reflect all the participants responses. Based on the graph following the Likert scale of 1.0 - 7.0 all the readings show a below average score of avoidance and anxiety (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991, 226-244). This is a healthy score in that a score of low avoidance and low anxiety demonstrates secure attachment. These scores are reflective of long-term relationships and stability within the marriages. In taking the test for the first time,

participants expressed uncertainty in rating themselves in terms of their avoidance and anxiety levels. For example, Marg’s scores are relatively indeterminate, in that there is not a lot of variance.

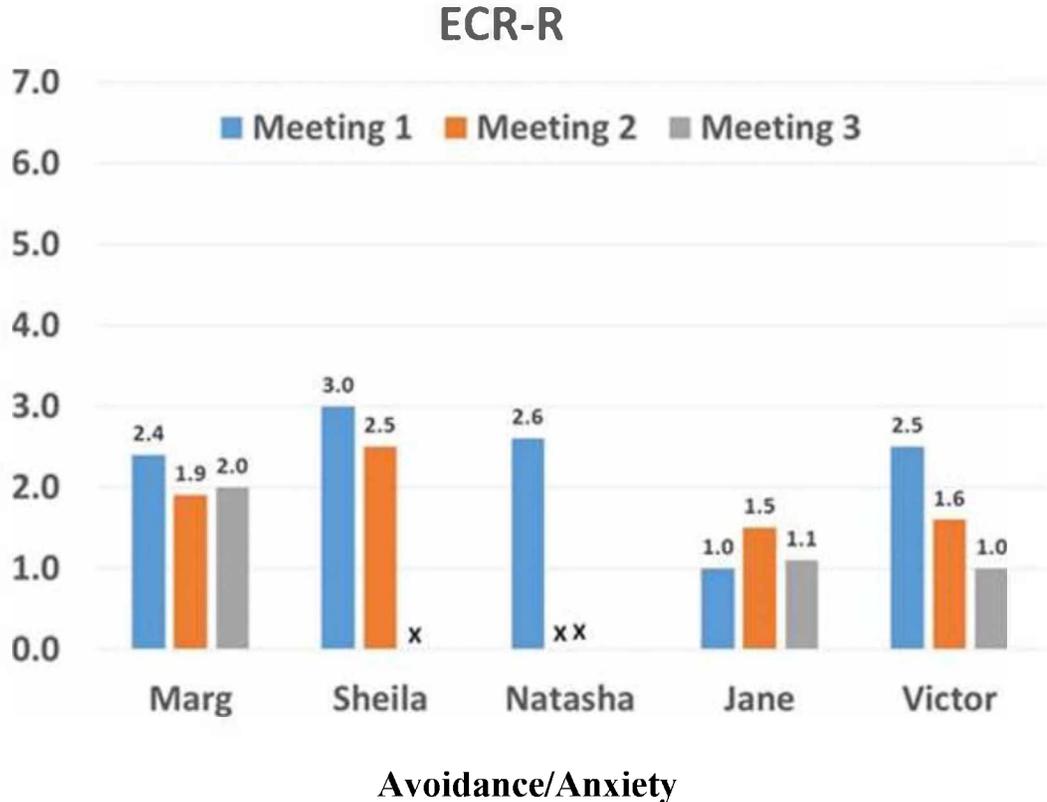


Figure 2. Experience Close Relationship – Revised ECR

In week one Marg scored 2.4 which is a healthy score according to the Likert scale. In week two, she shows a decrease in avoidance and anxiety toward her spouse at project completion. In the one month follow up, she shows a slight increase in avoidance and anxiety. Overall, it is still lower than at the initial stage. We can say there was gentle movement in a positive direction.

Sheila's initial reading also projects positively towards lower avoidance and anxiety towards her spouse. A follow up was not completed due to family illness. The letter x denotes the absence of a result at the follow up.

Natasha was only available for the initial test. While that score is healthy as per the Likert scale, she was unable to complete the other two tests. She lives in the country and at that time had hydro issues. She is not computer literate and had difficulty doing the test without assistance. The chart reflects two x's for the missing scores.

Jane's results show a slight increase in her avoidance and anxiety response. It is not clear whether this increase is due to heightened anxiety in responding to the questions, or personal life circumstance. In the follow up test her results show a slight decrease which almost returned to her original reading. This test measures avoidance and anxiety toward her spouse. In this regard she appears relatively stable in her relationship to her spouse, as the small amount of movement reflects little or no change in avoidance.

Victor's projections display a tendency towards lower avoidance/anxiety as the project continued. The results show a gradual increase in felt-sense security with his spouse. This may be due to the test bringing clarity of the term's avoidance and anxiety. Victor was the only male in this project, Gugova and Heretik et al., found that on the attachment scale married men scored significantly higher in avoidance and women scored higher in anxiety (Gugova and Heretik 2011, 33; Chopik et al., 2013, 175-181; Del Giudice 2018,1). Victor's response

would seem to concur. This is a relatively new area of research that psychologists are now exploring in the field of attachment. The above findings to date appear to hold true for Western culture.

Attachment God Inventory – Avoidance Figure 3

The AGI questionnaires were completed as a group at the three intervals. As in the ECR-R readings, participants shared that they felt unclear as to how to respond to the questions. The questionnaires challenged the participants to reflect on their attachment style with God, something they had never formally done.

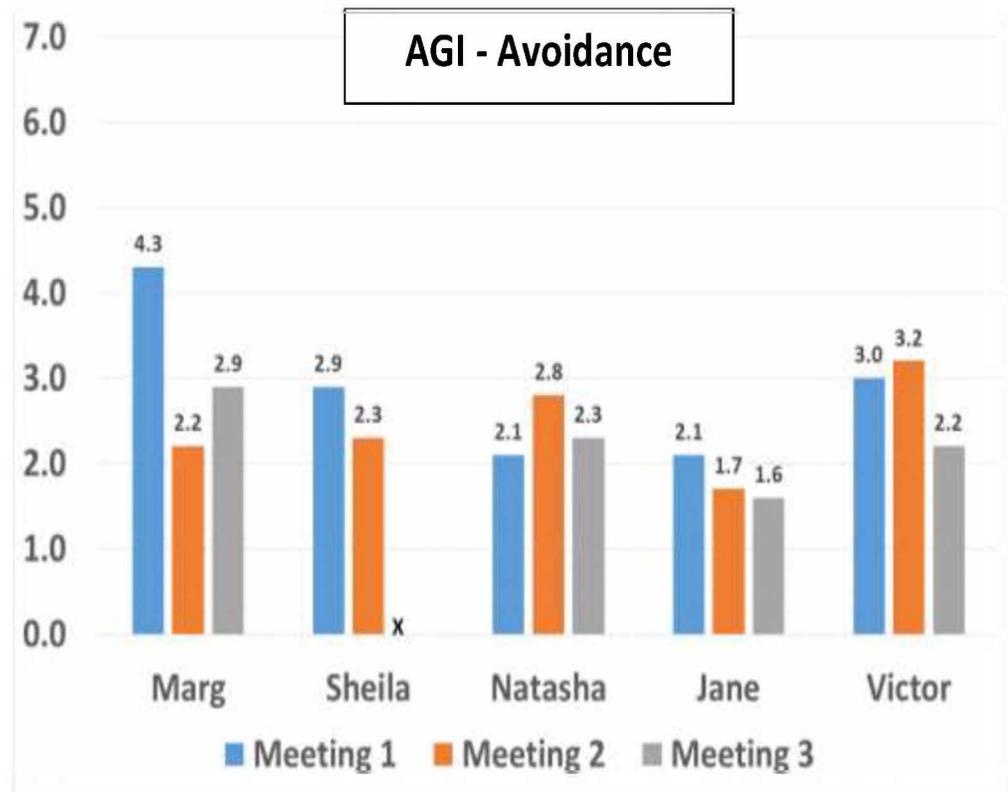


Figure 3. AGI Vertical Axis = Change in Avoidance Over Time

Marg's initial score of 4.3 reported a relatively high degree of avoidance toward God. In the first week during spiritual direction Marg stated, "I have difficulty experiencing what it means to be free in Christ." As well as "It is difficult for me to receive from God; My mind flips back and forth; I struggle with freedom." The lack of freedom that Marg expresses can be seen in her behavior where she confessed to the group, "I missed church on Sunday; I felt guilty, but I was sick." On the last day she reported a notable reduction in avoidance. In the second week with a score of 2.2 Marg shared, "I am certainly connecting to the Lord, I am very certain that my spirit is connecting to the Lord." She stated that "she was feeling calmer." This also was reflected in her behavior. Marg commented that "she was more aware of herself; she slept better and longer; when she focuses with her spirit, she felt stronger and didn't hit a wall." In the follow-up report, Marg's avoidance increased slightly which is reflected in the score of 2.9. Marg reported that she had been busy and was not able to spend the same amount of time in scripture reading and prayer which could support that slight increase. Of her behavior Marg shared, "I will definitely keep going and I realize I need to go slower. I have been on the same verse even to go into meditation. Meditation requires discipline and that's not part of my strengths."

Sheila started with a score of 2.9 in the first week and a score of 2.3 in the second week. Her initial score can be reflective in her comment, "Not sure how much I can trust God." Referencing experiencing "fearfulness and a lot of anxiety in her chest." Sheila reported the recent loss of her aunt and uncle in a car crash

and her 26-year-old son going to the hospital during this project. In week 2 with a score of 2.3, Sheila shared during spiritual direction, “there is a deeper connection and absolutely it has brought my anxiety level down, no literally. I was feeling a lot of anxiety in my chest and I could literally feel the anxiety there and I almost feel guilty for not having anxiety it’s a new feeling it’s kind of cool.” Sheila’s husband commented in the change of her behavior stating, “You are humming in your sleep now, at least, you’re not snoring anymore.” She was not available for the third follow up meeting as a family member was in the hospital. The absence of a score is noted with an x.

Natasha, initial readings show a rise in avoidance in the second week and a decrease at the follow-up four weeks later. Natasha’s initial reading of 2.1 is a healthy score reflective of low avoidance to God. Natasha recently retired as a saleswoman. She spent many hours on the road talking with God. The second reading of 2.8 is a moderate rise in avoidance. During this study Natasha was moving, the day after the 2.8 score she was leaving for a trip to the middle east. Natasha stated, “You know it was so busy, it likes to take over. I always repent. God I am so sorry I did not think of you today. Yeah sometimes I feel really guilty and am so sorry when I’m so busy I don’t take time for him.” The follow up score of 2.3 is almost a return of her base score of 2.1. She had returned from her trip and have settled into her new home.

Jane’s scores from the start of the project with a score of 2.1 until the end showed movement toward greater connection. Jane’s reflections were mindful of

keeping her focus on God and she reported being consistent with her devotions from the start of the project through to the follow up one month later. During the project Jane expressed concerns for her family. Jane shared,

I have such a hard time with family stuff. Monday night I cried and all of a sudden from one of my devotionals anything that makes me lose my joy is an idol. I was wanting to be God and I am a mother. I could feel a lifting right away and went to sleep. It was unbelievable I was sobbing and boom anything that steals your joy is an idol it was pretty cool.

Jane shared further, “The verse that struck me the most was to be an imitator of God.” Jane shared that when she read this verse the Lord brought to her mind “that anything she holds above her relationship with God she should lay down and release to God and trust him.” Jane noted that she did this, “Even though, I have anxiety.” Her score during that period was 2.1. In the second week continued connection can be seen as Jane shares, “she was feeling convicted by God”. Jane stated, “Our family gatherings generally include drinking wine. She reported feeling, “convicted with struggle of can I drink alcohol or no alcohol at all.” Jane shared, “I came to the place of moderation and rest. I need to teach my children discipline as well as not to judge others. I felt peace and remembered the picture I had last week of me resting on God’s arm.” Her score at this second interval was 1.7. In the follow up with a score of 1.6, Jane shared that she had continued with the devotions and was, “feeling a greater connection.” Her follow up reading though minute showed a further reduction.

Victor had an initial score of 3.0. Victor stated, “I went to a Holy Spirit conference and people would say, I heard God say, and I heard God say and I don’t hear God – so that has been a struggle for me and that’s okay.” “There are

very little times in my life where I have felt God or hear from God as others claim to do.” These statements reflect his ambivalence towards his ability to hear God. In the second week with a score of 3.2, Victor expresses his frustration, “Where was Jesus when I felt alone? When I felt like an orphan?” In the follow up with a score of 2.2, Victor appears to be settled. Perhaps the answer lies in his final entry of his journal on the last day of the project where he writes,

Thank you, Lord, that you speak to us. That you choose to speak to us. Give me ears to hear you. Thank you that you speak to me. I can look at the past and point to specific times that you have spoken to me; specific times that you have guided Jane and I in our lives; that we have seen your hand ‘upon us’. Lord lead me to look at those times more and not the times that I do not hear you. Forgive me for focusing on not hearing you verses on being able to hear you. Thank you, Lord.

According to the Likert scale the overall levels of anxiety expressed by the participants in this chart are low.

Marg’s initial reading of 1.5 shows that she is not anxious toward God. In this study we see an upward movement in increased anxiety. These readings are a bit perplexing as she expressed increase in peace and calm. Anxiety levels went up incrementally. Level of awareness: “Marg expressed she knew how to engage with her spirit man and her mind but not her body.” Growing in body awareness may result in a clearer attunement of one’s actual state. It is possible that Marg’s initial readings (1.5) were higher than what she reported. However, Marg stated, “an increase in feeling calm, peace, more connected leading to increased trust in God,” yet her anxiety levels increase. Another possible consideration for the increase in anxiousness was Marg’s learning style. She stated, “that the suggested

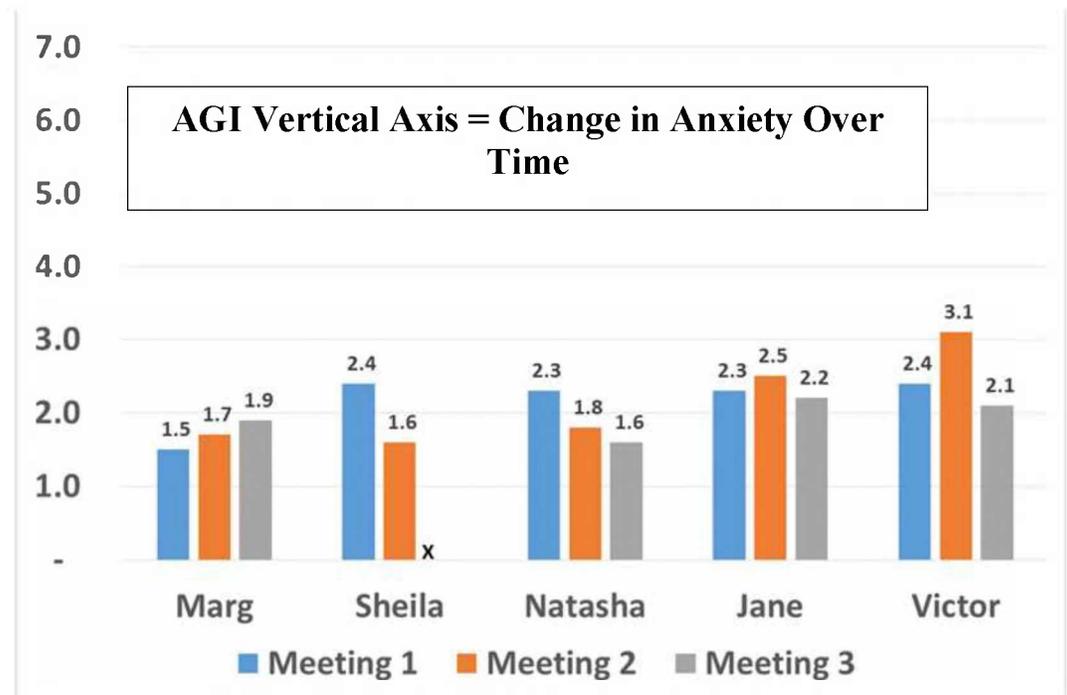


Figure 3. Attachment to God Inventory – Anxiety

time frame of 15 minutes to read scripture, 10-15 minutes to meditate, 10-15 minutes of prayer and then 15 minutes to journal felt too restrictive and made her anxious that she focused more on the time she was taking with the activities than to just do the activities.” However, this problem was shared and addressed during spiritual direction and it was explained that the times were suggestions and not requirements. However, this did not appear to have made a difference in her later scores. Further consideration is that Marg expressed feelings of “insecurity in her ability to carry out the instructions.” For example, she stated that “contemplation was something I have not done and would like more instruction.”

In week one Sheila reports a score of 2.4, commenting that, “It’s not a good time for me.” Sheila shared, “Her 26-year-old son is in hospital has had an

epileptic fit for first time. Recently her aunt and uncle died suddenly in a car crash.” In the second interval with a score of 1.6, Sheila shows a decrease in anxiety and movement toward a greater security with God. She reported, “This is not a new way but there is a deeper connection and absolutely it has brought my anxiety level down, no literally, I was feeling a lot of anxiety in my chest and I could literally feel the anxiety there and I almost feel guilty for not having anxiety it’s a new feeling it’s kind of cool.” Sheila was not available for the follow up questionnaire as she needed to attend to a family member. Her absence is denoted with an x.

Natasha’s scores show a decrease in anxiety and movement toward increased connection with God. Natasha shared a block for her in connecting with God was being too busy. Yet at a very busy time in her life (in the midst of a move, long distance trip, participation in a project) she grew in connection with God.

Jane shows little movement. Like Marg, she was an “unstructured learner and expressed feeling stress in following the guidelines and preferred following her own schedule. Jane shared a concern regarding the stress over following guidelines.” Jane stated, she “looked forward to continuing with the study however without the responsibility of being a participant.” This may be a response as to why her follow up reading went down. However, the range from 2.3 to 2.5 to 2.2 is very slight.

Victor's initial score is 2.4. Victor commented, "My routine in the morning is to do my devotions and sometimes I journal." He shares, "I can recognize when someone hears from God, I can recognize God's presence." As well as Victor expressed, "It is a struggle for me to hear God." In the second reading there is a jump from 2.4 to 3.1. Victor shared that he does not know why this reading was higher than the rest. It may be possible that subconsciously Victor may be feeling anxious about why he is not hearing Gods voice and others are. This questioning is heard in Victor's reflections with God as he 'repents for focusing on the fact that he does not hear his voice and begins to thank him that he can hear'. With a score of 2.1, Victor's follow up questionnaire reflects a reduction in anxiety as he appears to have received some resolution heard in his prayer, "Thank you that you speak to me. I can look at the past and point to specific times that you have spoken to me; specific times that you have guided Jane and I in our lives; that we have seen your hand 'upon us.' Lord lead me to look at those times more and not the times that I do not hear you. Forgive me for focusing on not hearing you versus on being able to hear you. Thank you, Lord."

Limitations to Results

Participants were asked to complete both assessments (ECR-R and AGI) at three intervals. One of the participants lived in the country and found completing the ECR-R online problematic. In one instance she had difficulty printing off the correct page. At another time she thought she had completed the survey but was told by the online program that she had not. The participant was

uncomfortable and unfamiliar with computers. This participant was able to complete one ECR-R. Another participant was unable to participate in the third focus group (follow up meeting) due to family medical concerns.

The x's on the charts represents missing information. One of the participant's family member was hospitalized, and the other participant lived in a remote area where computer access was not always reliable, and they had limited technological knowledge.

All were self-reported. Participants stated their uncertainty in answering the questions. Participants stated they did not know if they answered the questionnaire properly and felt unsure with the way they responded to some of the questions.

The ECR-R was completed online as a take home assignment. For future studies involving older participants it is suggested that this assessment be completed on site where guidance in navigating the process would be available.

Participants rated their relationship with their spouse on the ECR-R. The ECR-R allowed participants the option to rate their relationship with anyone with whom they had a close relationship, such as their spouse, their father, their mother, or a friend. Most of the participants rated their attachment style with their spouse. Some participants rated their relationship with their spouse and that of their parents. The attachment style with their parents reflected their response to their attachment style with God. Whereas the attachment style with their spouse was not so significant. All the couples were mature Christians married for 20+

years and had grown in relationship with their spouses over time. Had they taken this quiz when they were newly married it would have most likely produced different results. Any future study of this nature should request participants measure the attachment style with their parents and compare with their attachment style to God. As this project seeks to increase spiritual attachment to God it would have been better to reflect the relationship between participants and parents to further insight into the way they interact with God. I did not do this as during the initial set up of the project I had read research that suggested the attachment to the spouse is like the attachment to the parents. Bowlby supported this by stating similarly that a person's attachment style remains from "cradle to grave" (Bowlby 1979, 129) while Chopik et al., collecting data from longitudinal studies found that attachment styles changed in individuals as they aged. Anxiousness and avoidance reduced as couples aged due to the length of marriage, the bond of family, and improvement in interpersonal interactions over time creating a more secure attachment (Chopik, et al., 2013, 178). The changes observed in Figure 3 and Figure 4 are relatively small and maybe statistically insignificant. It is possible that they may not represent any change in avoidance or anxiety. However, participants reported felt sense changes in both categories.

In this study all couples have been married for over 30 years, were mature Christians desiring to grow closer to God and to others, and all in the senior years of life. Their marriage relationship no longer reflected the attachment style they had as a child.

Further limitations to this study was the short time span of the project being 10 days in length. This was enough time to provide participants with instruction, and guidance in lectio Divina with a taste of the experience. A better time frame to effect positive change would be about 3 months in length. As well, the time period between the first and last assessment was also relatively short, being 6 weeks. I did informally ask participants a year later if they had continued with lectio Divina as a form of study. 4 of the 5 participants stated they continue to meditate when studying scripture, they incorporate body awareness and one individual thanked me with tears stating they have attained the close relationship with God they had always longed for.

Coding of Participants' Comments and Interpretation

Data was collected from the focus groups, spiritual direction and journals. I was able to record the first meeting and the third meeting. Unfortunately, the second meeting was not recorded as the recording machine was not brought to the meeting. All five participants were present for the first and second focus group meeting. Four of the five participants attended the third focus group meeting. One of the participants was unable to attend due to illness in the family. Journals were transcribed. The facilitator made general notes from the conversations during spiritual direction from each of the participants in both week one and week two. All five of the participants attended the spiritual direction sessions. Of the five participants four wrote in their journals and one did not. That individual was bilingual and found it difficult to think and write in two languages. The

participants did not write in their journals every day. Some participants wrote more reflections than others. The assistants were in attendance for the first meeting and made field notes that were added to the data. The assistants were unable to attend the second and third meeting for various reasons. Participants comments were separated and divided into week one and week two.

Coding Method

Deduction begins from a generalized notion or hypothesis and branches into specific results or theories. This process is one that starts from the top down. A process of induction, in contrast, starts off from specific collected data and after analyzing the patterns a generalized understanding emerges. Induction proceeds from bottom up. The purpose of this project was to increase connection with God, self, and others. Originally following a deductive pattern, variances emerged of an inductive progression in some of the participants. In considering connection between God, self and others I carefully reviewed the participants transcripts and their reflections from the focus groups, journals and spiritual direction and the most “common phrases that arose out of the participants experiences are labelled as codes” (Bell 2010, 221). In reviewing the data (Table 2), 54 phrases or codes were accumulated. These were reduced to 38 as some of the phrases were repetitive, for example, “feeling drawn to a verse” and “felt a yes in my spirit to pause at a verse.” It is inductive in nature meaning the themes arise from the data. For example, while there were some similarities that stemmed from their own specific experience. The codes were: “I had a lot of trauma in life”, “I felt like an

orphan in life”, and another shared, “they left home at age 13.” In reflecting on these codes one can infer from these separate individual circumstances a generalized code of “a difficult life.”

It was my intention to target change by providing resources that focused their attention on their spirit, mind and body. I guided the participants in spiritual direction by providing psycho/somatic-education that helped them to grow in awareness of their spirit, mind and body. I asked questions such as “where in your body do you notice your response to God when you are reading that verse.” I then collected the participants responses that were shared in spiritual direction, what they wrote in their journals and through transcription of audio tapings of live discussion within the focus group. From this data I listened for what might not be noticed in reviewing the words, “was there something being said that was not directly spoken.” Eventually I came to see that the codes revealed these three categories: God’s Voice (Spirit), Beliefs about God (mind) and Body (felt sense). The term felt sense refers to a mind and body connection founded by Eugene Gendlin (Gendlin 1966, 45-62). To define hearing God’s voice, it is hearing and obeying the voice of God as heard through the reading of scripture John 10:27-28. To believe in God means that I want to enter into relationship with him joining in the kenotic flow as described in Chapter 3 and outlined in the bible (Hebrews 11:6). I am aware that the above process can be a limitation in the codes received or that it may appear that I was leading the participants. There was no intentional bias. However, this was what was poured into the participants in the resources, in

the focus of the study and this is what the participants expressed. Another 2 categories that emerged from the data are listed under benefits and blocks to connection (Table 3). This is discussed later in the chapter.

The codes reveal the participants attachment to God in the first week. Kirkpatrick's proposal and others, that God can be viewed as an attachment figure (Kirkpatrick 2005, 52-70; Beck 2006, 125-132; Heiler 1932, 362, 356) can be found. Friedrich Heiler noted that when an individual prays it is because they believe they are in relationship with God and that he is immediately present and personal (Heiler 1932, 362, 356). The responses of all participants are listed in Appendix G. The observations and comments of the research attendants can be found in Appendix H and I.

Connection of Self to God

In this next section I will be using the participants own words from week one and week two to provide the reader with a sense of their experience during this project. A lot of the quotations have been repeated as they are necessary to understand the assessments.

Week One and Week Two

We will now consider the participants findings in week one. I would like to highlight again that these participants are mature Christians who desired to grow deeper in God. For example, Natasha stated, "I want to go deeper with Christ, there is more. I don't want to miss out on anything God is offering." I recognize that becoming more aligned with God is an ongoing process of growth.

In observing these participants, the goal is to target and strengthen the areas that need to be reinforced or built up.

Week One: Marg

In week one participants shared their areas of struggles. Beginning with Marg, she states, “It is difficult for me to receive from God; My mind flips back and forth; I struggle with freedom.” I missed church on Sunday; I felt guilty, but I was sick.” This felt sense in Marg’s body contributed to her belief that she is, “not secure in God’s redemption, she had difficulty experiencing freedom in Christ.” Here we can hear a distance or a block for Marg to come closer to God. Marg’s orientation toward God in these examples appear to be more through her head than her heart. As the week progresses, Marg continues in lectio Divina and spiritual direction. We begin to observe a heart to heart interaction with God.

During spiritual direction Marg and I discussed how we can relate to God with where we are at and not feel guilty and restricted. In her study time she reflected on God’s willingness to pay the ransom for her total freedom. For the rest of the week Marg reported hearing God say to her, “You are my creation...your totally free.” Marg questioned God asking, “What does this look like for me?” God responds for her to “trust and listen for his voice.” Another scripture jumps out to her and she asks God, “What is grace that you lavished on me profusely?” In response, Marg receives an image from God, “I have a picture while experiencing a very full heart...of me dancing and skipping, just being with

Jesus. I could see I had a connection but not the deeper connection that I wanted with God.”

Week Two: Marg

Marg begins week two sharing, “I am feeling a greater sense of peace and calm. I felt more connected to God, and to myself.” In spiritual direction, Marg and I discussed how to locate emotion in the body. For example, I asked Marg, “When you think of God and the word trust, where do you notice a reaction in your body?” Marg and I discussed how to include the emotions in the body when reading scripture. Marg incorporated her physical responses in her lectio Divina practices during the week. Marg shared, “Being aware of my physical sensations and experiences that are happening within me and being in the moment is new and helpful to me.” Marg commented that, “This is the missing link I have been looking for to help me reach a deeper connection with God.” As Marg continued to incorporate her spirit, mind and body throughout the week we can see through her responses that her connection and interaction with God are deepening. Marg shared, “I am certainly connecting to the Lord, I am very certain that my spirit is connecting to the Lord.” She stated that “she was feeling calmer.” Marg commented that “she was more aware of herself; she slept better and longer; when she focuses with her spirit, she felt stronger and didn’t hit a wall.” Further Marg shared that, “feeling connection to God has brought greater capacity for her to trust.” Marg shared, “A lot of times I meditate I keep bumping against the wall. So far and no more.” We see that Marg desires with her mind and spirit to connect

to God, but the issue of trust, submission and obedience is an area that blocks greater depth that she desires. Marg exhibited insecure avoidant attachment to God in her AGI score (Figure 3). Through the lectio Divina and spiritual direction she was able to gravitate toward a more secure attachment in the way she connected with God. A research assistant noticed, “there is a very significant shift in her ability to hear God. She went from being stuck in her mind and doing, to being aware and able to encounter God in her spirit, soul, and body. This is very significant for such a short time frame” (Appendix H). To be able to acknowledge her fear of intimacy and lack of trust allowed her to address these core hindrances to hearing from God. Encountering God in new ways has given her the courage and enthusiasm to continue this journey as a way of life.” One year later, Marg reports while she does not follow the method as done in the project there are aspects that she still engages with today such as meditating on scripture and incorporation of body awareness.

Week One: Sheila

Her son was in the hospital and she had recently lost her aunt and uncle in a car crash. Sheila came to the focus groups saying she wanted to drop out due to family concerns. Sheila stated, “I tried, and I can’t do this. I can’t still myself,” noting “when things get hard, I quit. I am going to bow out.” Sheila shared she had met one of the other participants who encouraged her to stay. We can see that Sheila is able to connect with God as she hears the Holy Spirit say to her, “it’s going to be ok, along with the physical experience of, “grace came on me like a

coat and I felt as though I was being carried and supported.” Sheila then decided to stay and be part of the project. Though Sheila stated that she can connect to God through speaking in tongues, singing worship songs, and prayer, she still felt that she was, “not sure how much I can trust God” and that she, “was fearful with a lot of anxiety in her chest.” While it could be that her anxiousness and questioning whether she could trust God or not was due to her son going to the hospital. She had also shared that when she was, “overwhelmed in the past, she dissociated.” Which suggests that anxiety most likely has been part of her story for a while.

Week Two: Sheila

Sheila reports that a particular verse jumped out at her and she spent the rest of the week meditating on this verse, engaging with God through prayer and notes, “He gave me one word which has totally turned my way of going through this season upside down. The more I meditate the more God shows me what he has prepared for me beforehand.”

During spiritual direction Sheila shared that she had read scripture using lectio Divina before however she shared, “This is not a new way but there is a deeper connection and absolutely it has brought my anxiety level down, no literally, I was feeling a lot of anxiety in my chest and I could literally feel the anxiety there and I almost feel guilty for not having anxiety, it’s a new feeling it’s kind of cool.” Sheila stated that,

Her husband told her, You are humming in your sleep now, at least, you’re not snoring anymore. This was the missing link I was looking for. That

she was, feeling much calmer and more rested overall and I am now walking in a whole new way of connection. That, I have been apologizing to God that I did not trust him and that I didn't know how to trust him. I am learning to trust.

If we look at Sheila's movement in week one (anxiousness and not trusting) to week two (calm and connected) her experience mirrors the results in the AGI scale (Figure 4). This reflects a strengthening toward secure attachment with God. Observations made from the research assistant supports Sheila's shift in her ability to trust God. He comments, "There is a profound shift in her ability to rest in and hear God. Just having a qualified Spiritual Director accompany her for 1 month has made a dramatic difference in how she lives out her daily life amidst the pressures of present living circumstances. There is also a significant shift in her perception of the character and presence of God" (Appendix H).

Week One: Natasha

Natasha stated that her scripture reading was "tailor made for her." She shared that her life story was difficult, and she finds that, "life can be busy and likes to take over." Natasha shared her belief that God is jealous for our attention and that she felt convicted by God when she was too busy. Natasha felt that people are prisoners of their problems and are held captive. Natasha noted that God talks to her about people, she prays for them and some are healed. Natasha wanted to learn new ways of growing closer to God. "I don't want to miss out on anything God is offering." She joined the study with that in mind. From her comments she leaned toward a secure attachment to God.

Week Two: Natasha

Natasha reported she received a lot of peace out of the project. She shared,

Normally I would be all over the place and nervous to do this and hang this, what I want now, now I just said whatever, I wasn't worried. My husband said I cannot believe what kind of peace is all over you and I think that the peace came from every night of meditating. It was good it was just very good this two weeks.

A research assistant commented, "The shift from busyness to a more conscious relationship with God is so evident. When your spouse notices the difference, it is strong evidence of good fruit from receiving spiritual direction and doing some of these spiritual formation exercises" (Appendix H).

Week One: Jane

Jane shared in the first meeting that she was, "depressed and had lost her joy," due to family problems. Jane connected with God through reading scripture and had an image of "children clamoring into God's lap, trusting God, expecting God to love them. God showed me that I am one of those children, I go to my room and sit on his lap." In reading scripture, she notes, "It's not like things are jumping off the page, like I am drawn to certain things here and there, like I am still on the first verse. It is amazing when you make that switch, now that you know I know that God speaks those words to me I can bring them up again." Jane gives us a sense of her attachment style (Insecure anxious) during spiritual direction. She shares, "Anything she holds above her relationship with God she should lay down and release to God and trust him." Jane noted that she did this,

“Even though, I have anxiety.” Janes movement in surrendering control and leaning into God more can be seen in week two.

Week Two: Jane

In week two Jane was impacted by scripture that connected her to God’s love for her, the call to rest in God, “I had a picture of me in the hand of God resting, I should rest in God.” She shares that, “God rescued us from darkness and brought us into his life. I have the song playing in my mind, Jesus, Jesus precious Jesus...I became overwhelmed with such a sense of his presence and I cried and longed for his presence.” By the end of week two Jane shares that she is feeling a “greater connection” to God and this encouraged her to make some adjustments. A research assistant noted, “It is awesome to see how having a spiritual director for even a short time can make such a difference in the life of someone who truly seeks to know God more intimately. There is shift from a 'doing' to please God, to a more intimate connectional relationship. There is also a 'fine tuning' of awareness of sin” (Appendix H).

Jane is a godly woman who desires to glorify God in every area of her life. A year later Jane reports that she continues to meditate on scripture, this has been helpful to her.

Week One: Victor

Victor shared that “I was a bit of an orphaned kid; my father was emotionally distant, but I always knew that he loved me, and he provided for me.” He also shared that it was, “a bit of a struggle for me to hear God.” During

spiritual direction, Victor was able to identify a “felt sense” of when he identified a connection with God. Victor stated, “When you were speaking that there is something about it that made sense to me in the interaction with the logic and reasoning that I am processing. It is the settling in my mind.” Victor shared that he “felt peace, a calmness that came upon my mind” when he felt a connection to a verse. From Victor’s responses the attachment style he had with his earthly father reflects his relationship with God.

Week Two: Victor

Victor begins to question why he does not hear from God. Victor notes,

During spiritual direction Susanne asked me, “Victor, where was Jesus when you were a small child sitting alone watching other children play?” “Theologically, my answer is: Right beside me. When I prayed about it now, I felt Jesus saying that he was right beside me with his arm around my shoulder. I did not feel that at the time, as I felt lonely. But, looking back at my life I know that God has guided my footsteps and kept me from harm.”

This shows an increase awareness of self that if he looked to where God did respond to him in his life and focused on that he may notice more of God. Rather than focusing on where God did not respond.

While Victor was an active participant in this project and enjoyed trying something new, he preferred to continue with other forms of bible study. A research assistant commented, “More in his head, but with deep desire to be more relational. Perhaps not that much of a shift as result of this exercise. However, the desire for intimacy with God has been on going. I am personally continuing to

meet with Victor on a monthly basis. We continue to encourage each other.”
(Appendix H).

Additional Comments

In week two, one can see a gentle shift taking place in a positive direction for all the participants. There is an awareness of the self as separate from God. In the separation, the participant has a clearer understanding of themselves as finite and God as the greater one (Kirkpatrick 2002, 78). This shift is necessary so that correct alignment can occur between the self and God. One research assistant notes:

Shifts in the perception of God: Towards the latter stages of the project, participants reported feeling a greater sense of connection with God. Marg stated, “connection to God brought capacity to trust.” There were reports of changes in participants’ ability to hear God and encounter him within different components of their being. Victor described it as a, “calmness that came upon my mind” and Sheila felt, “grace came upon me like a coat.” There were also reports of shifts in the perception of God’s character. Sheila shared, “I have been apologizing to God that I did not trust him. I am learning to trust. There were also accounts that suggested that some participants started to see God at work in several aspects of their life, and not just the spiritual. Victor shared, “Looking back at my life I know God has guided my footsteps and kept me from harm.”

Kirkpatrick notes that secure attachment is the “antidote to fear and anxiety: when the individual is confident that an attachment figure will be available to them whenever he desires it, they are less prone to chronic fear” (Kirkpatrick 2002, 202). The movement for some of the participants from anxiousness to calm despite their current life story was also observed by a research assistant. They noted:

A shift from chaos and business to peace: A major theme that was evident

in some responses was the fact that participants started to feel detached from the chaos and messiness that often defines their day-to-day experiences. Specifically, some participants were open about going through challenges (e.g., family issues) during the period of the study. However, their accounts reflected that they were at peace despite all the chaos. These feelings of peace were attributed to intimate moments with God during the practice of Lectio Divina (Kirkpatrick 2002, 202).

We will now consider whether the study had any impact on the participants connection to others through their interactions within the focus group.

Connection of Self to Other

Four of the five participants have been small group leaders. All five have been active in small groups and expressed it was a positive experience in the past. In this project all the five participants stated a desire to deepen their connection with God. All participants stated that meeting in a small group played a role in feeling connected with one another. Jane stated, “small group sharing is from the heart.” Sheila commented, “small group people are closer and more personal.” Natasha noted, “Our life is such a journey. I am so thankful for this group because you can tell each other stuff and we need this because we can help each other, otherwise we are so alone.” Marg stated, “We all have different personalities and still connect.” Sheila shared she, had initially thought of quitting and after speaking to Marg felt encouraged that even, “if she was feeling distressed about her current life circumstance that she could join the group and do it imperfectly.” Sheila went on to say, “Through this method, we are connecting in the way God designed us to connect with him and with each other.” In the following Table 2, I am providing a table of the categories and codes that arose

through reviewing and reflection on the data collected from observations in the focus group, themes tracked during spiritual direction and participants journals. The numbers beside the codes reflects the number of participants that mentioned this phrase as part of their experience. For example, the number 5 beside a code represents that 5 participants made the same or a similar comment. The codes with no number represent a statement made by one participant. Some are direct quotes and some of the codes arose out of the statement itself. For example, “lack of anxiety in chest” can imply the individual felt calm. In such an instance the code, calm, was given.

Table 2. Connection of Self to God

God’s Voice (Spirit)	Beliefs about God (Mind)	Body (Felt Sense)
God answers my questions (4)	I am not alone. God is with me.	Settling of mind (5)
God asks me to pray for someone	God is available to me	Sense of centering (5)
God asks me to pray for a person to be healed and they were (2)	I know God loves me (5)	Sense of peace (5)
God gives me a message for someone (3)	God helps me (5)	Sense of being overwhelmed with the presence of God of (4)
Visions of God (3)	God answers my prayers (5)	Sense of being overwhelmed at the Holiness of God due to sin/unworthiness (2)
God gives me information about someone I did not know (2)	I talk to God	Settling of body

God's Voice (Spirit)	Beliefs about God (Mind)	Body (Felt Sense)
God tells me about myself	Mental pull to bible verse (5)	Yes! In my spirit. Joy (3)
Increased sensitivity to Holy Spirit's leading (4)	Increased capacity to trust God	Physical pull to bible verse (5)
Increased experience of spiritual self	Body, Mind, Spirit connection is the missing link (4)	Sense of inner rest, calm
Increased ability to feel God's presence (5)	Increased understanding of God's love to self	Basking in His love and light (1)
Increased spiritual insight	Increased belief of God's love for me	Increased capacity to focus
	Increase in faith	Increased internal feeling of freedom (3)
		Awe (3)
		Inner resistance, not submitting

In this chart the numbers represent the participants that responded similarly. The rest are individual statements, and most are direct quotes. Although not all the participants were known to each other, they willingly shared their fears, insecurities, stories, and were vulnerable toward one another from the start. I attributed this to the maturity of the group in their age and faith; to their desire to grow closer to God; and their commitment to the task of the project. As such I did not see a notable difference in the way the group interacted with each other over the course of the project. The participants were quick to laugh, quick to share and they continued in this way from the start to the end of the project.

Benefits and Blocks

Benefits that participants experienced in this project are congruent with studies of a similar nature. The positive effects of religion (Table 3), are fewer depressive symptoms (Smith, McCullough, and Poll, 2003, 614-636), and social engagement (Francis and Astley 2000). In this project depressive symptoms of depression, fear and anxiety that were present in week one were no longer present in week two.

Table 3. Benefits and Blocks

Benefits	Blocks
Being centered (3)	Family concerns (2)
Having Peace (3)	Lack of trust (5)
Being calm (3)	Indecisive mind
Deeper connection (5)	My own agenda
Sleeping better (2)	Can't hear God (1)
No anxiety	Difficult life (5)
Increase in faith (5)	Trauma
Greater trust (3)	Feeling like an orphan
Not hitting a wall	Busyness of life (2)
Hear God	Feeling alone
Feel more loved	Fear of intimacy (1)
	Demonic interference (5)
	Critical voice (2)
	Feeling of entitlement (3)

Benefits	Blocks
	Fear of God's presence (2)
	Shame/unworthiness
	Pride
	Anger

The blocks that prevent individuals from receiving God's care are also listed in Table 3. Although none of the participants had displayed insecure disorganized attachment research shows that they are "over represented in the New Age Movement" (Granqvist, 2002, 260-270). It is included here to give an example of insecure disorganized attachment. As where a spirituality is impersonal, it would not be able to offer a secure attachment as it is unclear to what or whom the person is attaching to.

While engaging in this project, the participants were excited and active with God and each other. In the follow up, four weeks later a slowing down of scripture reading was being reported. Participants stated that life had been busy, and they found it harder to maintain the time commitment. That is the challenge for the body of Christ.

Conclusion

This research project sought to discover whether studying a biblical book using lectio Divina as a directive tool in individual and group study, would have a positive impact on the participants' felt sense awareness and create in participants

a greater sense of attachment to God and to others. To encourage this connection participants were involved in:

1. Personal study, prayer and meditation on scriptures for one hour a day.
2. Personal debriefing and spiritual direction for one hour over a two-week period.
3. Met with focus group for two hours each week and shared insights, reflections and prayer.

The idea behind this project was to develop a methodology whereby participants could be trained individually. All three interventions encouraged transformational change as reported by the participants.

This project was useful in providing a baseline as to how connected a person is in their spirit, mind and body with themselves and God. It brought understanding of what is working and what needs to be strengthened. Baselines were measured using the attachment assessments, themes found in spiritual direction, journaling, and self-reporting. Through group reflection and prayer, a deeper encounter of God was embraced, and a greater appreciation of others was formed.

The idea behind using these different tools to foster a more secure attachment with God, self and others provided the framework for long standing Christians to challenge themselves with where they were at and where they see themselves going. I incorporated psycho-somatic awareness together with felt sense connection through the spirit to scripture and four out of five participants

said this was the missing link to going deeper. One participant said they would prefer another style of study. Whether the difference regarding the one participant has to do with gender or not is difficult to quantify, partly due to the small pool of this study and the other reason being that gender differences in attachment is a new area of research that is still under investigation.

On the other hand, a larger and more varied pool would have been helpful in providing more strength to the findings in this project.

This study revealed that an intense mentorship can be of value (Stanley and Clinton 1991, 47). The Christian God calls his children into relationship with himself and others through family and community. Transformation occurs at a physical, mental and spiritual level which is obtained through connection with God and others. The way people perceive themselves in the world is co-defined by those with whom they interact and share their lives. People need people to change and grow.

Recommendations to Improve Study

This study is beneficial if used over a longer period. This would grant the opportunity to become more proficient in the method of lectio Divina; increase guidance through spiritual direction in the smaller steps of spiritual growth and opportunity to get into the rhythm of the practice. Some participants wanted to learn more about meditative and contemplative prayer and deepen their understanding of the body's role in the development of self. Running this study

for a longer period would have allowed time to teach in greater depth in these areas.

This is an intense form of study that not everyone is interested in or suited for. Some people find a slow reading of scripture to be tedious and prefer a structured study guide with insights to support ongoing interest in the study. For example, one of the participants stated, “while they enjoyed learning lectio Divina they preferred other ways of studying scripture where they can read, and further delve into insights provided through a prepared study. To suit a wider audience, it may be helpful to decrease intensity of study by using simpler formats of lectio Divina that come in a packaged form for adults and older children. For example, for older children and teens there is an illustrated book by Gracewatch Media, *Lectio Divina for Teens* (Windley-Daoust 2017).

The attachment assessments were not easily completed. Most participants had some concerns with following the instructions. One participant struggled using the computer. For future studies it would be best to complete this in a group where assistance is readily available.

I would also recommend that should someone be interested in a study of a similar nature to use the ECR-R to measure participants attachment to their caregivers and not their spouse. Chopik et al., found that, “young married couples attachment styles was like that of their parents. Couples who have been married for a long time are more secure in their relationship for the simple fact that it created a more stable relationship” (Chopik et al., 2013, 178). The AGI measures

attachment to God which is more reflective of a person's attachment to their caregivers.

Implications for Ministry

This project will be used initially to form a three-month course using Lectio Divina as a biblical study tool to increase awareness of self and increase awareness of and attachment to God. My expectation will be to expand from this three-month course into a contemporary school of ministry that will offer an intensive mentorship model to address the spirit, mind, and body of the individual.

The purpose of this school is to help Christians identify their strengths and weakness to help guide them into greater self-awareness. To encourage them where they are strong, to nurture and strengthen those areas that are weak and stuck. God has a plan and purpose for each one of us yet there maybe areas of our lives where we are blocking God and are unable to surrender to him. This hinders our growth and ability to enter deeper places of intimacy with him, ourselves or others. By walking alongside the individual, we help identify blocks to growth, intimacy, hearing God's voice and being connected to him. Helping individuals connect to themselves at a body, soul, spirit level means greater mental, physical and spiritual growth, creating the ability to run in the call that God has called them to.

This model seeks to strengthen an individual in three areas generally.

- Objective 1: To grow in greater awareness of God

- Objective 2: To grow in greater awareness of Self
- Objective 3: To grow in greater awareness of Others

To help individuals grow in these areas individual assessments will be made of their strengths, along with identification of areas of growth. An individual learning plan will be agreed upon between the mentor and mentoree. The mentoree will be expected to attend classes in a school setting with instruction in biblical books and topics, psychotherapy classes to gain understanding of self and relating to others, and classes in spiritual formation to grow in intimacy with God and in spiritual disciplines. The hope is that as the mentorees grow in greater awareness as noted in the above objectives they will become more integrated spirit, mind, body and be spiritually transformed into a clearer image of Christ. To speak forth his Word to another.

The length of the school will be 3-6 months in length. The core group of mentoree's will be no larger than 15 during a term. The core program for mentoree's will offer instruction in biblical study using lectio Divina, counselling, and spiritual direction. The group of mentoree's will study individually and in a group setting. The mentors will interact closely with mentoree's during this time. There will be opportunity for ministry during the mentorship and possible internship placements following completion of the program. Mentorship, counselling and spiritual direction for mentoree's will be provided through a group of male and female Christian professions trained in pastoral care, psychotherapists and spiritual directors. The facilitator is one of a few that

mentoree's will have access to. Other courses in biblical studies, counselling topics and spiritual direction will also be available.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I reflect on what I have learned through engaging in the study of how people grow in the Christian life over the past three years, particularly through these three different modes of research into aspects of spiritual formation.

I heard the Lord say to me, “I am calling you to teach those I have called to run, how to run.” My desire has been to create a center where people can receive healing for their spirit, mind and body. What I have found missing in my life was how to find the bridge between loving God with all my heart soul and strength and being able to lay down my life for him through absolute surrender. This is a wide chasm in which I struggled to find the answer to my question, “How does my flesh die to God?” This is an ongoing reality. My knowledge of him was too limited and my church experience did not provide a useful answer.

In analyzing this dilemma, I found the missing pieces to bring the two together. This included a way to spiritually connect to God through scripture reading and meditation, which gave me a deeper encounter of his love to quiet my soul and feel securely attached to him. By encountering God as an actual loving being that interacts with me, I grew in awareness of myself and gained strength to

express myself more authentically. Finally, through receiving strong mentorship I gained the experience of how to walk and teach others about the things of God.

With this understanding, I began my journey of readying myself for the task of teaching others how to run. This path led me to Tyndale Seminary. To be more effective in helping people with life issues I completed the master's in divinity, specializing in clinical counselling. In entering the Doctor of Ministry program my aim was to grow in competence in my ability to lead others in their spiritual formation, it gave me spiritual language. The challenge for me personally and the one this portfolio sought to address was to help answer Jesus's question,

“Who do you say that I am?”

In the first year of the doctoral program I considered the ways of my own spiritual formation through the writing of my spiritual autobiography. I delved into what drew me to God, what events in life hindered my growth or understanding of him. What places, people or experiences shaped me spiritually and caused me to be where I am today and my expression of God. This was outlined in chapter two of this portfolio where I share an overview of my life story, my family life and some of the details in the ways I sought God, including some of my encounters with him. My spiritual autobiography attempts to show the flow of the Holy Spirit throughout my life. Though one is aware of God in one's life, the writing of the spiritual autobiography brings it to light in a new and fresh way.

In the second year, I created a model that could be used to spiritually form others. Drawing from my own life experience of what helped me or dissuaded me in my growth I was able to formulate what to me were the more salient points in helping someone connect spiritually with God. In Chapter three you will find a fuller explanation of the missing pieces that I found that allowed me to encounter the love of God in such a way that I was able to surrender the deeper parts of myself to him. God became my beloved and I know that I am his.

In year three, Chapter four, I tested this model by creating a research project whereby others could experience the same process on a smaller ten-day scale. This was done by supplying participants with resources such as understanding their attachment style; psycho-somatic awareness, spiritual direction and lectio Divina which involves, reading of scripture, meditation, prayer and contemplation. Participants reported that this model gave them their, “missing links” and they were able to connect with God in a more holistic way. The information gathered from this project (and indeed the entire doctoral program) will be used to create a course in a school of ministry that I will be opening. This school seeks to help individuals grow in secure attachment with God, self and others. Through biblical study, using lectio Divina, spiritual direction, and psycho-somatic awareness. An intensive mentorship model will be an active ingredient of the process.

In the past week, one of the participants came to me with tears in her eyes thanking me for helping her achieve the connection with God that she always

longed for. The participant shared that the project provided a way in which she was able to begin the process of transformation which she said, “It didn’t happen overnight. It took time but I am now where I have always wanted to be but did not know how to get there.” She is engaging with God, self and others in a peaceful and unhindered manner that is allowing for deeper connection.

I began this doctoral journey in the hopes of being better equipped to serve God and be united with him in ministering to his people. The course material and wise instruction of the professors were essential to that process. Going through this program repeated the themes and patterns found throughout my life. I had a longing for and deeper desire to know God more and to develop others to do the same. For quite a while I envisioned creating a school where individuals could come to learn about God and provide many courses to facilitate growth. While these ideas are good and will remain, my direction was not in full view. The information and ideas were more cerebral, not fully integrated. I had knowledge, ideas, some experience but the “knowing how” was not quite grasped. This doctoral program has brought clarity. Studying various aspects of spiritual formation, writing many papers about it and describing the process requires understanding, specificity and focus. It has given me tools on “how to” go about the process and language of leading one in spiritual formation. It has helped me to ground theological definitions about God into clear directives that are helpful in personal growth and transformation for myself and others. The understanding that as we pour out the love of God and the knowledge of him, we will never be empty

as he continually fills us has been true for me as I have grown in the knowledge of him and encountered him in greater ways. The knowledge of which has encouraged and strengthened my own belief and relationship with God, as well for others in their walk with God. This Doctorate has asked me to think of my calling and equipped me through the course work, wisdom of the professors and their own experiences, my academic advisor and her insights, as well as the accomplished individuals of pastors, counsellors, nurses and knowledgeable others also known as my fellow students and sojourners that have inspired me with their own lives, testimonies and vision sharing with each other as we have walked this journey together.

What a robust and rich resource of community inspiration. I can only say it has been an enriching and blessed journey. For such a time as this in my life, God has been faithful. With the closing of these four years, I feel at rest with my journey, as what I have received has become a part of me. I am amazed at the wondrous hand of God and the brilliance of his plan woven in the fabric of our life story, my life story. Within God's plans our purpose, our identity, our song can be found.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Adult Attachment Scale; Attachment to God Inventory

Instruments

Please complete the two attachment scales (*Adult Attachment Scale* and *Attachment to God Assessment*) and bring the completed forms to be handed in to the researcher on the first day of our group orientation session.

Adult Attachment Scale please go to your personality.net website and complete adult attachment scale. The attachment scales can be found at the following websites:

Adult Attachment Scale (ECR-R)

Fraley, R.C., Waller, N.G., & Brennan, K.A (2000).
<http://www.yourpersonality.net/>

Attachment to God Inventory

<http://www.wheaton.edu/~media/Files/Academics/Faculty/Davis-Ward/God%20Image%20Narrative%20Therapy%20%20Scoring%20Packet%20AGI%20GAC%20and%20LSQ.pdf>

Appendix B:
Letter to Prospective Participants

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Date

I would like to invite you to participate in a two-week research project that I will be conducting at our church, as part of my studies as a Doctor of Ministry student at Tyndale University and Seminary. I will be the facilitator of this project and those who participant will be given opportunity for their input in shaping this model for future use in course curriculum.

This research project is titled *Teaching Lectio Divina as a means for experiential encounter of God, self and others to foster love, growth and a greater sense of attachment*. Our attachment style to others is formed early in our life through the interactions with our caregivers and generally stays with us through to our adulthood relationships (Kirkpatrick, 2005). This impacts the way we relate to our loved ones, those with whom we are in community and in the way, we relate to God. The purpose of this project seeks to assist participants in encountering God through scripture reading and prayer. To encounter a greater awareness of self in this exchange as well as increasing connection with others through weekly group sharing and prayer with other participants.

If you consent to participate in this project, you will be asked to participate in One two-hour introduction session (October 17, 2017) two weekly group sessions two hours in length (October 21, 28, 2017). Two weekly, one-hour individual sessions (October 20, 24, 2017) with the facilitator to debrief and for personal spiritual direction with the scripture you are interacting with. One hour each day to engage in scripture reading, prayer and meditation. You will be asked to log your activity daily as well as journal your experience. You will be asked to work through one chapter of the biblical book of Ephesians using Lectio Divina as the format of study. You will be asked to share your spiritual insights and reflections during the group sharing as each participant will be studying a different chapter in Ephesians. The biblical sharing of each participants insights will offer a collective study of this book and further the bond of this group. You will be asked to pray with other participants either in smaller groups or with the larger group. You will be asked for a testimony of your experience as another method to record information. This project will begin on October 17, 2017 and will end October 28, 2017. There will be one final follow up session on November 28, 2017 where participants will be asked to complete the Attachment assessments for one final time. Review data collected from the project and provide any insight or feedback regarding the project and participants over all experience.

Please know that participation in this project is completely voluntary. Should you choose to be a participant you may decline sharing any information any time throughout this project. You may decline praying or sharing during the group meetings if you choose. You may decline sharing a testimony. You may withdraw

from this study at any time with no obligation what so ever. You may decline to have your data (journal, time log sheets, personal debriefing and personal discussion during spiritual direction) to be used in the research of this study.

Risks: For those participants whose attachment reports show that they have insecure attachment (insecure, distant, disorganized) may report difficulty discerning a felt sense of God or question any encounter with him which could cause distress.

Some participants may feel intimidated or that something is wrong with them should they be limited in their spiritual experiences as compared to others in the group which may trigger feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness.

Benefits: Learning a new way to study scripture – Lectio Divina is an ancient practice engaged by monks and found active in the Catholic tradition among the priests. In recent years this practice has been making inroads in the evangelical stream though it is still not widely known or used.

Self-awareness and personal insight – through daily logging of emotions, spiritual insights and scriptural inspirations.

Growing in the awareness of God – through reading scripture, listening and interacting with the Holy Spirit.

Growing in the felt presence (attachment) to God – through scripture reading, prayer, meditation and contemplation. This creates an attunement to the presence of God, to self and to others. That is intuition is increased through these spiritual practices.

Encountering the love of God deepens our experience of ourselves and increases our desire and capacity to love others more.

Growing in connection/attachment in community – through two- hour weekly interaction with a group where participants will share their spiritual insights and personal reflections as well as pray and interact with each other over a two- week period. A connective bond may be formed within the group deepening their knowledge and experience of one another with the love of Christ.

Gain focus in biblical study – through two, one-hour weekly interaction with a spiritual director. The participant will receive spiritual and emotional support in their journey.

Confidence – By growing in the ability to read scripture, prayer, self-awareness of God, self and other. Participants may become confident members of their congregation who can share their faith and knowledge with others.

Team Members

There are two team members associated with this project. Hans Oegema CSD is a trained spiritual director and Emmanuel Songsore PH.D. an adjunct Professor

with a background in qualitative research. Both are members involved in ministry at Forest City Destiny Church and will be assisting in this project. The Team members role is to offer general assistance, take notes on non-verbal communication as it relates to the presentation, interpersonal group interactions and in the evaluation of the project.

Team members have signed a confidentiality agreement and will have access to the following data: Researchers field notes, power point presentation, handouts, participants journals, audiotaping and team members field notes. Team members agree not to ask participants questions outside their duties and function. Team members agree not to ask participants questions or review any of their personal statements or documents.

Confidentiality: Each participant will be assigned a participant number or pseudonym under which all their information (questionnaires, daily logs, journals, personal discussions with facilitator, and group discussions) will be held. When writing this report any discussion of participants will be in general terms, and their participant number or a pseudonym may be given. All audiotaping of focus group sessions will be destroyed after transcription is complete.

In signing this agreement, you also agree to keep confidential any identification or information shared by other participants.

Results of this project: All the data gathered from this project will be written up in a report and submitted to my professor. This information will be shared with participants as a group for those interested in the results. This research project may be part of a future publication. All participants identities will be kept anonymous using pseudonyms or codification of identification.

Questions/Concerns:

Hans Oegema will be pleased to accept your letters of consent via email at hoegema@hotmail.com. You may also contact him at 519 851 7201.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and your involvement in it you may contact me, Susanne Baldeosingh either by phone (519 619 7328), email (susannebaldeosingh@hotmail.com) or in person. You are also welcomed to contact my research supervisor, Dr. Mark Chapman, Professor of Research Methods, Tyndale Seminary, via email (mchapman@tyndale.ca) or office phone (416 226 6620, ext. 2208). Should you have ethical concerns regarding the nature of this study, you may direct your questions to the Chair of the Tyndale Research Ethics Board at Tyndale Seminary at reb@tyndale.ca.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this project.

Warm regards,

Susanne Baldeosingh DMin (candidate), MDiv, SD, R.P (#005721)

**Appendix C:
Research Study Consent Form**

Teaching Lectio Divina as a means for experiential encounter of God, self and others to foster love, growth and attachment.

Name (please print): _____

1. I have read and understood the attached Letter for Participation.
2. I understand that I will be engaging in individual study, spiritual direction and focus group interaction on a weekly basis. I am aware that observation notes will be taken of the participants.
3. I give permission for my journal, daily log, and any other data that I interact with to be used for data in the written report.
4. I understand that my personal information will be coded, given a number or pseudonym for confidentiality purposes.
5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and can request that I take my data with me and/or request that my data not be included in the written report.
6. I understand the risks and benefits of the proposed study.
7. I understand that my participation in this research model is of my own will and that I am not waiving any of my legal rights. I have a right to view any notes taken by the researcher during our one-hour personal debrief and spiritual direction session.
8. I agree that I am offering my involvement in this project for free.
9. I understand that what I share during the debrief and spiritual direction sessions will not be shared with other group members. I give permission for my session notes to be used only for this research project and that my identity will not be disclosed.
10. In signing this agreement, I agree to keep confidential any identification or information shared by other participants.
11. I understand that when I sign this form, I will be agreeing to join this study and will receive a copy of this consent form.
12. I understand that audiotaping will occur during the focus group sessions and that these recording will be destroyed after transcription is complete.

Date: _____ Signature: _____ Participant

Date: _____ Signature: _____ Researcher

**Appendix D:
Confidentiality Agreement**

Title of Research Project:

Principal Researcher: Susanne Baldeosingh

- As a member of this research team I understand and acknowledge my responsibility in maintaining confidentiality in the following statements:
- I understand that the research site, names of all participants and any identifying markers of participants are held in strict confidence.
- I agree not to make known, divulge or publish any information to unauthorized persons regarding confidential documents that are accessed by me regarding this project unless authorized to do so by the principal researcher.
- I agree and understand that I am not to ask participants questions outside of the duties and functions I agreed to in joining this research team.
- I agree and understand that I will not ask participants questions or review any of their personal statements or documents for personal information or use. Should a potential breach or breach of confidentiality occur – whether by myself or by another team member or participant - I agree to notify the principal researcher immediately.
- I agree to keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., transcripts, journals, field notes, audiotaping, personal logs, power points, handouts).
- I agree to keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., transcripts, journals, field notes, audiotaping, personal logs, power points, handouts) secure while it is in my possession.
- I agree that after consulting with the principal researcher, I can erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the principal researcher (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

Research Team Member:

(Print Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Principal Researcher:

(Signature)

(Date)

**Appendix E:
Permission Use the “Attachment to God”
Inventory**

Received from Richard Beck Jr. @ beckr@acu.edu
on August 28, 2017 at 10:34 am

Hi Susanne,
Yes, please feel free to use the AGI for any and all of your research purposes.
Grace and peace,
Richard
Richard Beck, PHD
Chair, Department of Psychology
Abilene Christian University
ACU Box 28011 Abilene, TX 79699

Richard Beck, PHD
Chair, Department of Psychology
Abilene Christian University
ACU Box 28011 Abilene, TX 79699
beckr@acy.edu
Re: Permission to use Attachment to God Inventory

August 27, 2017

Dear Dr. Beck,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Susanne Baldeosingh and I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Tyndale University in Toronto, Canada. I am also a registered psychotherapist.

For my doctoral work, I will be testing a model of spiritual formation that hopes to increase an individual’s felt sense awareness of God and an increased felt sense connection with God, self and others. Using Lectio Divina, individual spiritual direction and focus group interaction to foster this connection. The testing of this model will be over a two-week period.

I would like to request your permission to use your Attachment to God Inventory for my research model. I would like participants to complete your Attachment to God Inventory along with the Close Relationship Questionnaire (ECR-R) Attachment quiz at the beginning and end of my project and then two months later for a final time.

Due to the limited nature of this study I am not anticipating a change in the participants attachment style. Though this might occur through consistent study and interaction over an extended period. My hope is that through this project and the use of the Attachment scales, participants will increase their felt sense awareness of God, self and others which could lead to a change in their attachment style.

Should you require any further information from me I can be contacted via email, or by phone at 519 619 7328. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Susanne Baldeosingh

**Appendix F:
Project Activity Outline**

Day 1	Focus Group meeting 2 hours in length.
	Group Introductions; PowerPoint introducing Lectio Divina; Attachment to God Inventory completed; ECR-R assessment handed in; date set for individual spiritual direction.
	Assessment scales - baseline (1): ECR- R, AGI
Day 2	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.
Day 3	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.
Day 4	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling. Spiritual Direction for 1 hour with Susanne
Day 5	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.
	Participant participation = 6/6
Day 6	Focus Group meeting 2 hours in length.
	Group discussion – participants share with each other their bible verses and experiences with God, personal stories and group prayer.
	All participants complete AGI together during group. All participants hand in ECR-R which they completed at home.

Day 7	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.	
Day 8	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.	
Day 9	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling. Spiritual Direction for 1 hour with Susanne	
Day 10	Each participant to complete 1 hour of personal biblical reading, prayer, meditation, journaling.	
	participation = 6/6	
Day 11	Focus Group meeting 2 hours in length.	
	Group discussion – Participants shared their experience of this project. What they thought was helpful to them, what they thought could be different.	
	Assessment scales (2): ECR-R, AGI	
	Participants agreed to meet on November 27, 2017, to see if they were still following the model.	
	participation = 6/6	
November 27, 2017	Project follow-up one month later	
	Group discussion	5/6 participants present. One participant absent due to health concerns of family member. 4/5 participants state they will continue with this form of bible study. 1/5 participant stated they return to other forms of bible study.
	Assessment scales (3): ECR-R, AGI	

Appendix G: Participant Chart

00121 Marg Ephesians 1: Theme: God chose us before the foundation of the earth

Week 1

Not secure in knowing God's redemption

Difficulty experiencing what it means to be free in Christ

Difficult for me to receive from God

Struggle with freedom (e.g. I missed church on Sunday; I felt guilty, *but I was sick*)

Issue of trust

Interaction with scripture:

God said to her, "You are my creation, created for my pleasure

Marg: What does that mean to me?

God replied, "You're totally free to be

God what does that look like in a personal way?

God replied, "Trust and listen

Marg: I did not realize that I needed to ponder this – contemplation is difficult for me.

Week 2

Feeling a greater sense of peace and calm

More connected to God, and to myself

Shocked that I can bring my body to the experience and not just my spirit (e.g., Being aware of my physical sensations and experiences that are happening within me and being in the moment is new and helpful to me, this is the missing link I have been looking for to help me reach a deeper connection with God)

More aware of herself; she slept better and longer; when she focuses with her spirit, she felt stronger and didn't hit a wall.

Feeling connection to God has brought greater capacity for trust

Meditation helps me tremendously he gives me peace even when life is happening around me

Notices she doesn't submit herself (she notices a resistance in her body – when she reads the word submit) but that she should, and she commented that that was part of the trust piece

Week 4

Marg shared, "I will definitely keep going. And I realize I need to go slower. I have been on the

same verse even to go into meditation. Meditation requires discipline and that's not part of my strengths. Allowing Scripture to speak to me is not new but stopping at a word is new to meditate on it is and I will continue with this."

00131 Sheila Ephesians 2: Theme: You are God's workmanship

26-year-old son is in hospital has had an epileptic fit for first time. Aunt and uncle died suddenly in a car crash

I tried, and I can't do this. I can't still myself, I am going to bow out

When things get hard, I quit

Holy Spirit said it's going to be ok

Grace came on me like a coat and I felt as though I was being carried and supported

I can connect to God – speaking in tongues, prayer, singing worship songs

Not sure how much I can trust God

Sheila stated she is fearful and anxious and has a lot of anxiety in her chest. Sheila shared that (in the past) she has dissociated when she feels overwhelmed

Week 2

God showed me Ephesians 2:10 and I'm still there. He gave me one word which has totally turned my way of going through this season upside down. The more I meditate the more God shows me what he has prepared for me beforehand

This is not a new way but there is a deeper connection and absolutely it has brought my anxiety level down no literally I was feeling a lot of anxiety in my chest and I could literally feel the anxiety there and I almost feel guilty for not having anxiety it's a new feeling it's kind of cool

It's a different way and there is this strong feeling of being drawn into him.”

Could become a method if you are not careful and methods can be good, but they can be sketchy

I love how we are all seeming to be different, we are all struggling with the method- but we all seem to be connected in the way that God designed us to connect if that's what you're going for you got it

I am feeling guilty because I have had no anxiety even though they (the doctors) had not yet discovered why my son had an epileptic fit, and he is still in and out of hospital

This was the missing link I was looking for

Feeling much calmer and more rested overall and I am now walking in a whole new way of connection

I felt a stillness – which I had not felt before and that it was very much a peace that I noticed and that the peace stayed with me for the week. No more anxiety in chest

Husband told her, “You are humming in your sleep now, at least, you're not snoring anymore

Week 4 Sheila was unable to attend due to illness in family

00141 Natasha Ephesians 4: Theme: Unity

Week 1

Relationships are important. I had no marketing skills, yet I sold \$1 million of product every year. I was able to do this because I had a relationship with people Connected to the word in scripture, ‘held captive

Most people in my Christian circles are held captive and I pray for them and people in my community. People are prisoners of their problems. I can feel God's presence come upon me and I weep for people. I pray for people and have seen people healed from cancer and their problems

My father kicked me out when I was 13 years old, I lived on the streets, I was married, divorced and am remarried

Life is busy, and it likes to take over

At night when I think you know it was so busy. I always repent. God I am so sorry I did not think of you today

I live at the lake I see a lot of God there that gives me the peace. I often see Jesus walking in the water and there is always a light with him

You (Susanne – suggested to breath with the rhythm of the waves) taught me that this week. I live by the water and it comes in and goes out and it is so awesome that I can breathe like that and then you told me and then oh yeah that's how you do these types of things

I read again those words of how I am to live and I read it over and over and I sit there at night when everyone's in bed and I thought well okay it really has to help me a lot this week even in the craziness of moving and I have been studying a lot and going to the Bible for the trip to the Middle East. I just had to read it and there was not even one word that kept coming to me to slow down he said you became old and everything fell into place and this too will fall into place

Week 2

I never have time, but I make the time and I love it – I will keep that time

Normally I would be all over the place and nervous to do this and hang this, what I want now, now I just said whatever, I wasn't worried

My husband said I cannot believe what kind of peace is all over you

I think that the peace came from every night of meditating

In our own ways we needed this. We want to go deeper and know more and whatever comes, it is so fulfilling. We all have different personalities, like you (Sheila) said, 'the method' and we still connect that is really really important.

The most that she got out of this project was peace

00151 Jane Ephesians 5: Theme: Be Imitators of God

Week 1

I am so depressed. I have had such a hard time with family stuff

Monday I was not so close to him (God) and it was really something. Monday night I cried and cried and cried and all of a sudden from one of my devotionals anything that makes me lose my joy is an idol. I could feel a lifting right away and went to sleep. I was wanting to be God and I am a mother

It's not like things are jumping off the page, like I am drawn to certain things here and there – like I am still on the first verse

I had this overwhelming picture of children clamoring into God's lap, trusting you, expecting you, expecting you to love them. God showed me that I am one of those children

The verse that struck me the most was to be an imitator of God. Anything she holds above her relationship with God she should lay down and release to God and trust him.” Leona noted that she did this, “Even though, I have anxiety. I can’t be an imitator of God until I have a revelation of how much he loves, and I want to be an imitator of you
There is a sense of when I walk in love or walk in his presence, I walk in his favor I feel a closeness and I’m able to be secure and withstand the hard things – that you have me in those places

Week 2

I stopped on verse 18, do not be filled with the wine. Our family gatherings generally include drinking wine which we enjoy liberally in our home. I feel I should be more careful, more disciplined and that I should be an example to my children and daughter in-laws and son-in-law

I do not feel that God is calling me to abstinence. I tried that before and it really didn’t sit right with me, but moderation is more important. I had a picture of me in the hand of God resting, I should rest in God. Christian life should have a standard

Verse: it must not even be mentioned among you.’ Leona stated, “That that was so powerful!

I noticed that I had a sense of unworthiness spring up in me and felt that I heard God say don’t listen to that, don’t give it power.” Leona stated that, “it’s true that God truly does love me more than I know. Jesus made me worthy in the eyes God’s love.” “I am going to meditate on the word fragrant aroma

Felt a oneness with God, I feel peaceful and happy

Leona noted, “As a child and follower of Christ this should be ingrained in me, I know the deeds of darkness and I should flee from them”. “As soon as I thought this, I felt a yes in my spirit and the joy bubbling up in my desire to stand.” Leona quoted 1 Colossians 1:13 “God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of light

00161 Victor Ephesians 3: Theme: The hidden mystery- a heavenly and earthly family

Week 1

I can recognize when someone hears from God. I can recognize God’s presence. Its finding more perspective. It is that sense of centering

I paused on the verse when Paul said for this reason – well what is the reason. I go to bible hub and look up the Greek – mentioned nine times. I look up the nine times it is mentioned in scripture. It brought me to a different path. I went deeper into the passage and think how the word reason is used for every action is a reaction Gods actions is so much bigger than ours

Real encounter with God is transformation

I was a bit of an orphaned kid. My father was emotionally distant, but I always knew that he loved me, and he provided for me.”

You use the words contemplation, I have not gone there

I went to a Holy Spirit conference and people would say, I heard God say, and I heard God say and I don't hear God – so that has been a struggle for me and that's okay.” “There are very little times in my life where I have felt God or hear from God as others claim to do.

Spiritual Direction: Victor was able to identify a “felt sense” of when he identified a connection with God. Victor stated, “When you were speaking that there is something about it that made sense to me in the interaction with the logic and reasoning that I am processing. It is the settling in my mind.” Victor shared that he “felt peace, a calmness that came upon my mind” when he felt a connection to a verse.

What blocks me from feeling God more deeply?

Week 2

Where was Jesus when I felt alone? When I felt like an orphan?

During spiritual direction Susanne asked me, “Victor, where was Jesus when you were a small child sitting alone watching other children play?” “Theologically, my answer is: Right beside me. When I prayed about it now, I felt Jesus saying that he was right beside me with his arm around my shoulder. I did not feel that at the time, as I felt lonely. But, looking back at my life I know that God has guided my footsteps and kept me from harm

Victor's last entry in his journal for this project, “Thank you Lord that you speak to us. That you choose to speak to us. Give me ears to hear you. Thank you that you speak to me. I can look at the past and point to specific times that you have spoken to me; specific times that you have guided Leona and I in our lives; that we have seen your hand ‘upon us’. Lord lead me to look at those times more and not the times that I do not hear you. Forgive me for focusing on not hearing you versus on being able to hear you. Thank you, Lord.”

Week 4 Enjoyed participating in the study however would most likely not be continuing after this project is done. Though he felt closer to God through the study, he missed different styles of Bible Study.

Appendix H: Correspondence With Hans Oegema

Hans Oegema <hoegema@hotmail.com>

Sat 2018-07-07, 3:23 PM

You

□

Hi Susanne,

Regarding the first meeting I felt you did well in getting the participants to be at ease and sharing what their hopes were for participating in this exercise. They were also given opportunity to articulate where they were at in how they were or were not hearing God speak to them, and what spiritual disciplines they were practicing at that time. It was a helpful way to help them see their own successes as well as present needs and desires for greater intimacy with God. The group setting helped them recognize a uniqueness as well as commonality in their journeys. This helped them nurture their hopes for the spiritual exercises being introduced

Marg

There is a very significant shift in her ability to hear God. She went from being stuck in her mind and 'doing' , to being aware and able to encounter God in her spirit, soul, and body. This is very significant for such a short time frame. To be able to acknowledge her fear of intimacy and lack of trust allowed her to address these core hindrances to hearing from God. Encountering God in new ways has given her the courage and enthusiasm to continue this journey as a way of life. I consider this a great success.

Sheila

There is a profound shift in her ability to rest in and hear God. Just having a qualified Spiritual Director accompany her for 1 month has made a dramatic difference in how she lives out her daily life amidst the pressures of present living circumstances. There is also a significant shift in her perception of the character and presence of God. The improvement in ability to rest in God will impact relationships and physical health as well. She is respected in her church community.

Natasha

The shift from busyness to a more conscious relationship with God is so evident. When your spouse notices the difference, it is strong evidence of good fruit from receiving spiritual direction and doing some of these spiritual formation exercises.

Jane

It is awesome to see how to see how having a spiritual director for even a short time can make such a difference in the life of someone who truly seeks to know God more

intimately. There is shift from a 'doing' to please God, to a more intimate connectional relationship.

There is also a 'fine tuning' of awareness of sin.

Victor

More in his head, but with deep desire to be more relational. Perhaps not that much of a shift as result of this exercise. However, the desire for intimacy with God has been on going. I am personally continuing to meet with Victor on a monthly basis. We continue to encourage each other.

I trust these observations are helpful. You are a blessing to our community!

blessings,

Hans

Appendix I:
Correspondence with Emmanuel Songsore
Observation of Research Progress

Observer Details:

Emmanuel Songsore, PhD
Geography with Environment and Sustainability
Educational Developer and Sessional Lecturer
Western University

Presentation on Lectio Divina and Project Introduction

In this section, I detail the first interactions between the study participants, principal investigator and the supporting personnel for the project (Emmanuel and Hans). Emphasis is placed on the nature of the interaction, the group dynamic and the presentation of Lectio Divina by the principal investigator.

The project commenced with an introductory session which was facilitated by Susanne, the principal investigator. In this session, participants and supporting personnel had the opportunity to meet, introduce themselves and get to know each other. Participants were then taken through the study and research ethics. The principal investigator allowed ample time for participants to interact and build a strong sense of community and belonging. Participants discussed their personal spiritual journeys and provided a brief overview of routines and practices that defined their personal walks with God. They also shared the extent to which they each felt God spoke to them and/or their desire to hear from God. I believe this activity enhanced bonding among participants, since there were common themes that emerged in participants' responses. It is noteworthy that all participants had a strong desire to experience God more intimately, hear God more clearly and/or connect more deeply with the word of God. Another shared value among all participants was the idea that they could go further in their relationship with God. Hence, they all expressed some level of excitement and/or curiosity about the prospect of participating in the research and how that might positively impact their individual walks with God. In terms of my personal observations, the group was vocal, open and very willing to be vulnerable from the start of the project. The principal investigator made it a priority to create an environment and use language that was also devoid of judgement. For example, during the time of sharing she validated, acknowledged and respected each participants' spiritual journey.

In addition to the introductions, the principal investigator presented the Lectio Divina and administered an Attachment to God survey. The presentation of the Lectio Divina was clear and very detailed. Among other things, the principal investigator provided an overview of its roots and evolution over time. The presentation touched on reading the word of God, meditating on the word of God, meditation-based prayer and other practices relating to Lectio Divina. Susanne did a good job of ensuring that the presentation was practical and not abstract. The stages/movements of Lectio Divina were also presented. Rather than welcoming

questions only after the presentation, the principal investigator often paused and checked in with participants to ensure they were on the same page. This made the presentation interactive. Participants seemed to grasp the concept Lectio Divina well. The principal investigator then provided guidance for practicing Lectio Divina in the context of the study. I did not participate in filling out the Attachment to God Inventory and one-on-one discussions around scheduling spiritual direction sessions. However, this constituted part of the first meeting. Finally, other study details were fleshed out with participants.

Group Discussion and General Observations

In this section, I discuss my general observations from group meetings during the actual research phase, i.e., when participants started practicing Lectio Divina, meeting with the principal investigator for spiritual direction and gathering for group meetings. Rather than teasing out each person's comments and insights, I tease out high-level themes that were shared among participants.

The first observation I made was the fact that it took participants time to get into a rhythm of practicing the Lectio Divina and feel comfortable with the practice. Thought this was the case, most participants started to report feeling calmer in the early stages of practicing Lectio Divina and engaging in spiritual direction. As the project progressed, it became apparent during group discussions that there were two clusters of participants based on their desire for structure. While some participants felt the structured nature of the Lectio Divina was helpful, others found it challenging. The latter often came up with creative ways to personalise their practice.

Within the mid-to latter stages of the project, participants started reporting more profound experiences which I detail as follows:

- A shift from chaos and business to peace: A major theme that was evident in some responses was the fact that participants started to feel detached from the chaos and messiness that often defines their day-to-day experiences. Specifically, some participants were open about going through challenges (e.g., family issues) during the period of the study. However, their accounts reflected that they were at peace despite all the chaos. These feelings of peace were attributed to intimate moments with God during the practice of Lectio Divina. For example, one participant reported that their spouse had observed some level of growth in their ability to be calm and more at peace.
- Shifts in the perception of God: Towards the latter stages of the project, participants reported feeling a greater sense of intimacy with God. For example, there were reports of changes in participants' ability to hear God and encounter him within different components of their being (e.g., soul, spirit and body). There were also reports of shifts in the perception of God's character. Specifically, various accounts reflected the fact that

participants who often experienced God as distant started to experience him as present and more tangible. There were also accounts that suggested that some participants started to see God at work in several aspects of their life, and not just the spiritual.

- Recognized value of God's word: Though this was not always stated explicitly, the Lectio Divina, journaling and spiritual direction resulted in some participants rethinking the value of God's word and the ability of God's word to make them experience greater connection and intimacy with him. Specifically, some participants reflected on the value of small clusters of scripture. In the words of one participant, reflecting and meditating on small chunks of scripture made them aware of how God was speaking to them about their life circumstances through his word.

Based on the progress that participants made within the short period of the study, I am confident that they would have made more significant gains if the project was longer. I therefore deem the project as successful in helping participants grow in intimacy with God. During the final stages of the project, some participants explicitly stated that they wish it was longer, while others expressed willingness and excitement to incorporate aspects of the Lectio Divina into their day-to-day spiritual journeys.

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